

Changes in the Conception of the Pure Land in Modern Japan

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1. Criticism of the Mt. Sumeru Cosmology during the Tokugawa Period

THE MODERN ERA was a period of momentous change in the history of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. During this period, it no longer became tenable to conceive of the Land of Supreme Bliss (Gokuraku 極樂) as a place that actually exists. It is impossible to deny the influence of modern European scientific thought in bringing about this change. However, this development was also the result of a bitter struggle concerning the reality of the Pure Land that engaged the attention of the scholar-monks of all the Pure Land schools ever since the early modern, or Tokugawa 徳川, period (1603–1867). It is through such a struggle that modern Buddhist scholars created the conception of the Pure Land that we possess today. The aim of this paper is to investigate the process whereby these scholars came to create the modern conception of the Pure Land. In order to do so, it is necessary to begin with the arguments concerning the existence of the Pure Land found in Tokugawa Japan. Since I have already dealt with this matter in several articles,¹ I will only provide a brief outline of my findings in the pages below.

During the early modern period, the notion of the Pure Land was closely related to the traditional Buddhist cosmology adopted from Indian mythology in which Mt. Sumeru (Shumisen 須弥山) was considered to stand at the center of the universe. In this cosmology, the Pure Land was believed to be situated far to the west of Mt. Sumeru and

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¹ See Kashiwahara 1951, 1967a, 1967b, and 1973.

that the hells were located under the mountain. However, such a view of the universe had already been attacked by Christian missionaries who came to Japan during the medieval period. On the basis of the Ptolemaic theory, which holds that the sun moves around the earth, the missionaries frequently attacked the notions of Mt. Sumeru, the six realms (*rokudō* 六道) of transmigration, and the Pure Land in the west in order to criticize Buddhism.

Arguments for denying the existence of the Pure Land based on the Ptolemaic theory disappeared with the banishment of Christianity from Japan at the beginning of the early modern period. However, theories denying the existence of Mt. Sumeru once again became widespread in the middle of the early modern period when works such as *Tianjing Wuowen* 天經或問 (Questions about Planetary Orbits) by Youyi 遊芸 (d.u.) were introduced to Japan from Ming 明 China. In response, Mon'yū 文雄 (1700–1763) of the Jōdo 浄土 school sought to defend the Mt. Sumeru cosmology in such works as the *Hi tenkei wakumon* 非天經或問 (Condemnation of the *Questions about Planetary Orbits*) and the *Kyūsen hakkai gechōron* 九山八海解嘲論 (Refutation of the Ridicule Heaped on the Nine Mountains and Eight Oceans around Mt. Sumeru). These works were followed by *Tenmon benwaku* 天文弁惑 (In Defense of Astronomy) by Fujaku 普寂 (1707–1781) who also belonged to the Jōdo school. However, the position denying the existence of Mt. Sumeru won the support of many non-Buddhist intellectuals, including the famous Kokugaku 国学 (nativist thought) scholar Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801), who wrote the *Shamon Mon'yū ga kyūsen hakkai gechōron no ben* 沙門文雄が九山八海解嘲論の弁 (Exposition on Śramaṇa Mon'yū's *Refutation of the Ridicule Heaped on the Nine Mountains and Eight Oceans Surrounding Mt. Sumeru*) to express his views.²

Furthermore, in the last decade of the 1700s, the Copernican heliocentric view of the cosmos came to be expounded by Dutch studies scholars like Motoki Yoshinaga 本木良永 (1735–1794) and Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢 (1747–1818). This new theory was adopted and popularized by such scholars as Yamagata Bantō 山片蟠桃 (1748–1821), the Bakumatsu 幕末 period Confucian scholar of the Kaitokudō 懷徳堂, an academy established in Osaka, and Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843), known for his thoroughgoing anti-Buddhist polemics. As a result, the Mt. Sumeru cosmology became discredited in the eyes of many people. To respond to this crisis, Fumon Entsū 普門円通 (1754–1834) of the Tendai 天台 school made a thorough study of the heliocentric theory in order to show scientifically that the view of the universe centered on Mt. Sumeru provided a viable alternative to it. Entsū published the results of his research in works like the *Bukkoku rekishōhen* 仏国曆象編 (Compilation of the Calendar and Astronomy in the Buddha's Country), *Jikken shumikai setsu* 実験須弥界説 (Mt. Sumeru

² Ōno and Ōkubo 1968–93, vol. 14, pp. 161–71.

Verified Experientially), and *Bonreki sakushin* 梵曆策進 (Plan for an Indian Calendar). However, Entsu's theory was attacked as not being in accord with reason in such works as the *Bukkoku rekishōhen sekimō* 仏国曆象編斥妄 (Repelling the Mistakes of the *Compilation of the Calendar and Astronomy in the Buddha's Country*) by Inō Tadataka 伊能忠敬 (1745–1818), *Bukkoku rekishōhen benmō* 仏国曆象編弁妄 (Exposition of the Mistakes of the *Compilation of the Calendar and Astronomy in the Buddha's Country*) by Kojima Kōken 小島好謙 (1761–1831), *Bukkoku rekishōhen byōkan itteki* 仏国曆象編病問一適 (A Fitting Response from the Sickbed on the *Compilation of the Calendar and Astronomy in the Buddha's Country*) by Ikai Keisho 猪飼敬所 (1761–1845), and *Shunparō hikki* 春波楼筆記 (Shunpa Pavilion Notes) by Shiba Kōkan.

However, Entsu's positivistic study of Indian astronomy was extremely influential and a number of Buddhist scholars developed his ideas in greater depth. They included Kanchū 環中 (1790–1859) of the Rinzaï 臨濟 school, Ryōyū 靈遊 (d.u.–1869) of the Ōtani 大谷 (Higashi Honganji 東本願寺) branch of Shin 真 Buddhism, and Shingyō 信曉 (1774–1858) of the Bukkōji 仏光寺 branch of Shin Buddhism, all of whom were Entsu's disciples. Also noteworthy were Kanchū's disciples like Kōgen 晃巖 (d.u.) and Sata Kaiseki 佐田介石 (1818–1882) of the Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 branch of Shin Buddhism, as well as other scholars like Kamuro Ankei 禿安慧 (1819–1901) of the Nishi Honganji branch, Enki 円熙 (d.u.) of the Bukkōji branch, and Renjun 蓮純 (1796–1881) of the Takada 高田 branch of Shin Buddhism. Their research was driven by their fear that, if the Mt. Sumeru theory was shown to be irrational, the existence of the Pure Land and the hells would also be subject to criticism, resulting in Pure Land Buddhism being overturned from its very foundation. Moreover, the fact that Protestant missionaries who had arrived after the seclusion policy was rescinded at the end of the Tokugawa era also attacked the notions of Mt. Sumeru and transmigration through the six realms of existence as false teachings, further added to the Buddhist scholars' sense of crisis. Sata's theory, which led to the creation of a three-dimensional model of the universe based on the Mt. Sumeru cosmology called *Shijitsutō shōgi* 視実等象儀 (Model of Visual Reality) was particularly famous. Sata remained active almost until the end of the first decade of the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912).³ As these examples show, it was only after a long and bitter history of attempts to establish a pseudo-scientific theory of Mt. Sumeru that Japanese Buddhism finally entered the modern era.

2. *The Position That Denies the Existence of the Pure Land through Science*

Until around the end of the first decade of the Meiji era, that is to say, until around 1877, the traditional Buddhist cosmology centered on Mt. Sumeru was still generally

³ Sata is also known for his distinctive economic theory and his proposal on how to increase the wealth of the nation based upon it. See Kashiwahara 1984.

accepted. As a matter of fact, in view of the persecution that befell Buddhism in the early Meiji period, it seems that the old cosmology was promoted even more strongly than before by many Buddhists. Representative examples of such people include, in addition to Sata mentioned above, Fukuda Gyōkai 福田行誠 (1806–1888) of the Jōdo school and Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909) of the Shingon 真言 school.⁴ In addition, both Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji committed themselves to the study of the Mt. Sumeru cosmology at the beginning of the Meiji period. In September of 1868, Nishi Honganji decreed that, along with “antiheretical studies” (*hajagaku* 破邪学, or studies aimed at combatting Christianity), the study of astronomy should be pursued at its seminary.⁵ Similarly, in January of 1869, a directive was issued to the “Academy for the Protection of the Dharma” (Gohōjō 護法場) of Higashi Honganji⁶ ordering the study of astronomy and the calendar there, stating that Western astronomy and its view of the position of the earth in the solar system posed a grave threat to Buddhism.⁷

However, criticism of the Mt. Sumeru cosmology became increasingly widespread and was eventually taken up by the government. Around 1871, rumors spread in Kyushu that Shinto priests appointed by the Meiji government as “missionaries” (*senkyōshi* 宣教使)⁸ charged with instructing the population would be dispatched to Kyushu to examine Buddhist monks of all the schools on several points of doctrine and would defrock those who could not answer them. One of the questions dealt with the issue of whether Mt. Sumeru existed or not. Moreover, in 1876, the government abolished the system of missionaries, and in their place appointed “doctrinal instructors” (*kyōdōshoku* 教導職) consisting of Buddhist and Shinto priests in order to spread the Shinto-centered teachings that the state sought to propagate. The Ministry of Doctrine (Kyōbushō) directed them not to refer to Mt. Sumeru in their sermons since it conflicted with the solar calendar that was adopted in November of 1872.⁹ Under such pressure, Meiji Buddhists were forced to abandon their position concerning the exis-

⁴ See Kashiwahara 1964.

⁵ Ryūkoku Daigaku 1939, pp. 593–94.

⁶ This institution was established in 1868 by Higashi Honganji to study non-Buddhist subjects like Western thought and Christianity that were perceived to pose a threat to Buddhism.

⁷ Found in Ogurusu Kōchō 小栗栖香頂 (1831–1905), *Hasshū nichiroku* 八州日録, vol. 11, held by the Otani University Library; entry for the nineteenth day of the first month of 1869. (The diary is unpaginated.) Ogurusu was a major figure in the Higashi Honganji administration, and his diary, the *Hasshū nichiroku*, is an important source of information about this branch of Shin Buddhism during this period.

⁸ These were instructors appointed by the Ministry of Rites (Jingikan 神祇官) to spread the newly created system of national and local ceremonies in the early Meiji period. They were later replaced by the doctrinal instructors who were appointed by the Ministry of Doctrine (Kyōbushō 教部省), which replaced the Ministry of Rites.

⁹ See Tsuji 1949, and Tokiwa 1933, p. 88.

tence of Mt. Sumeru, and, by extension, the Pure Land. In other words, they were faced with the necessity of creating a new interpretation of the Pure Land that could counter the doubts raised against it by modern science and stand up to modern sensibilities.

By the late 1870s, most people had abandoned their belief in the existence of Mt. Sumeru and new interpretations of the hells and the Pure Land came to be proposed. A brief survey of the [Buddhist] writings on this topic during the Meiji and Taishō 大正 (1912–1926) periods shows that the new interpretations can be roughly classified into the following four types:

1. The position that attacked the existence of the Pure Land and Mt. Sumeru from the standpoint of modern science.
2. The position that sought to reinterpret the notions of the hells and the Pure Land as transcendent mystical realms.
3. The position that the hells and the Pure Land should be understood metaphorically as teachings preached by Śākyamuni as expedient devices.
4. The position that the hells and the Pure Land are inward subjective realities found in the individual believer.

In the pages below, I will discuss these four positions, providing representative examples of the arguments set forth by their proponents.

The first position denied the existence of the Pure Land and Mt. Sumeru altogether from the standpoint of modern science. For example, Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911) of the Nishi Honganji branch of Shin Buddhism stated:

People are arguing over useless topics that are of absolutely no benefit to the Buddhist teachings, such as whether the sun and moon are [positioned] horizontally or vertically, or whether Mt. Sumeru exists or not. Both those holding these positions and those attacking them are berating and slandering each other. This dishonors the name of the virtuous Buddhist community and increases the evil karma of both oneself and one's opponents. What kinds of philosophical positions and viewpoints make them do that? . . . Those who engage in these debates are surely convinced that they are urgent matters [that must be clarified in order] to protect the Buddhist teachings. . . . How sad! The [main point of the] Buddhist teachings is not to be found there, so it does not help the Buddhist teachings to fight over it. On the contrary, it appears that it only diminishes the majesty of the Buddhist teachings.¹⁰

¹⁰ From the essay “Shumisen setsu no sōron no mukai naru o ronzu” 須弥山説ノ争論ノ無益ナルヲ論ズ (The Debate over the Theory of Mt. Sumeru Is Devoid of Any Benefit) written in 1878. The quotation is found in Futaba and Fukushima 1973–78, vol. 3, p. 297.

He also declared:

Mt. Sumeru is something that followers of Brahmanism [developed and] frequently argued over even before Śākyamuni Buddha appeared in the world. It is a legend unique to India. . . . It is an imaginative theory from the past. How can it survive much longer in the present age when we can actually measure and calculate [the size of] the heavens and the earth and dissect [the mechanisms of] the sun and the moon?¹¹

Likewise, Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919), who was born into a Higashi Honganji temple, also argued that Mt. Sumeru does not actually exist and that it is just a story found in Buddhist sutras and treatises. Furthermore, he maintained that no logical person would take it to be an essential element of the Buddhist teachings since it was an old theory adopted from Brahmanism.¹²

The Higashi Honganji priest Akegarasu Haya 暁烏敏 (1877–1967) made a similar argument, which may be summarized as follows. Die-hard conservative scholars may try to prove the existence of the hells by citing the principle that good actions lead to good results and evil actions lead to evil results, and saying that the hells can be likened to prisons where people who have committed evils deeds are incarcerated. However, such arguments make no sense from the standpoint of science. Moreover, although some may say that we must believe in the existence of the hells because they were taught by Śākyamuni, this is just an arbitrary argument set forth by believers who are already convinced of their reality. It cannot be accepted as a universally valid argument for the existence of the hells.¹³ In these ways, he also rejected any attempt to understand the hells as actual places that truly exist.

In July of 1906, an article was published in *Shin bukkyō* 新仏教 (New Buddhism), the journal published by the Buddhist Puritan Fellowship (Bukkyō Seito Dōshikai 仏教清徒同志会), later renamed the New Buddhist Fellowship (Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai 新仏教徒同志会). This was an association of reform-minded lay Buddhists that was established in 1899. The article in question contained the results of a survey on the question “Is there a world in which we are reborn after we die?” posed to the members of the fellowship. Among the twelve members who responded, ten answered no, and only two accepted its existence.¹⁴ However, among those who denied its

¹¹ From the essay “Shumisen ni tsuite” 須弥山に就いて (On the Theory of Mt. Sumeru) written in 1881. The article is found in Futaba and Fukushima 1973–78, vol. 3, p. 299.

¹² Inoue 1896, pp. 58–59.

¹³ Akegarasu 1899, vol. 4, no. 8, p. 32.

¹⁴ The former included Sakaino Kōyō 境野黄海 (1871–1933), Tōru Dōgen 融道玄 (1872–1918), Itō Sachio 伊藤左千夫 (1864–1913), Takashima Beihō 高嶋米峰 (1875–1949), Nakamura Tanzan 中村但山 (d.u.), Katō Totsudō 加藤咄堂 (1870–1949), Wada Kakuji 和田覚二 (d.u.), Furukawa

existence, Itō Sachio added that such worlds exist for people who believe in them; Takashima Beihō answered that eternal life exists but it is unrelated to the question of whether postmortem worlds exist; Katō Totsudō rejected the notion of a world after death but stated that the effects of one's actions in the present life disappear at death;¹⁵ and Sugimura Jūō said that this is not a question that is worth taking up in the first place.¹⁶ Rather than seeing this as a novel tendency found only among reform-minded Buddhists like those belonging to the Buddhist Puritan Fellowship, we should see it as the general attitude of Buddhist intellectuals of this age. In 1910, at the very end of the Meiji era, Sakaino Kōyō, the leader of the fellowship, could reminisce:

It must be said that the study of Buddhism has truly made remarkable progress. When I look back on the issues that were the topics of so much debate in earlier years, I feel that they belong to the distant past. They include such questions as whether Śākyamuni Buddha is human or super-human and whether Mt. Sumeru exists or not. . . . There is probably no longer anyone foolish enough to say that the Buddha is not human. And if some idiot were to pick a fight with modern astronomy by promoting the Mt. Sumeru cosmology, everyone will laugh at him. Today, the issues surrounding the thesis that Mahayana Buddhism was not preached by the Buddha have been almost wholly resolved as well.¹⁷

In this way, it became commonplace to deny the existence of Mt. Sumeru on the basis of science and rational thought after the first decade of the Meiji period. At the same time, the notion that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss are places that actually exist was similarly rejected, and various theories were proposed to understand them in ways compatible with science and human reason.

3. The Pure Land as a Transcendent Mystical Realm

The second position was one that tried to defend the notions of Mt. Sumeru, the hells, and the Pure Land by arguing that they are transcendent mystical realms manifested by a great awakened person (i.e., Śākyamuni Buddha) that lie beyond the understanding of ordinary humans. A typical example of this position is found in Akegarasu Haya's article cited above. There he states that the teachings concerning the hells arose from

Ryūsen 古川流泉 (d.u.), and Sugimura Jūō 杉村縦横 (1872–1945), while the two who accepted its existence were Tachibana Eshō 橘恵勝 (1875–1923) and Mōri Shian 毛利紫庵 (d.u.).

¹⁵ Although this is what Katō's original article says, perhaps this is a mistake for "the effects of one's actions do *not* disappear at death."

¹⁶ Yoshida 1959, p. 362.

¹⁷ Sakaino 1910, pp. 665–66.

the Buddha's spiritual experience and that it is impossible to say whether they exist or not in an objective way. Therefore, "the idea of the hells and the Pure Land does not refer to an objective entity. It is a fact that is found in the inner subjectivity (*shukan no hōmen* 主観の方面) of the morally upright saint, the Buddha."¹⁸

Hirai Kinza 平井金三 (1859–1917), who took part in the reformist new Buddhist movement while being associated with Japanese Unitarianism, suggested that Mt. Sumeru can be understood as belonging to the "fourth dimension" (*daishi no hirogari* 第四の広がり). Even though it cannot be seen by the eyes of an ordinary person like myself, he continued, there is no reason to deny the existence of a cosmological system centered on Mt. Sumeru pervading the earth and solar system that can be seen through the power of a perfect heavenly eye (*tengen* 天眼).¹⁹ Although Hirai speaks of the fourth dimension above, he is included here because he is essentially arguing that Mt. Sumeru is a transcendental world.

In the same way, Itō Kokan 伊藤古鑑 (1890–1972) of the Myōshinji 妙心寺 branch of the Rinzai Zen school also sought to defend the Mt. Sumeru cosmology. His arguments can be summarized as follows. Mt. Sumeru cannot be seen by the fleshy eyes (*nikugen* 肉眼) that ordinary people possess. To understand it, it is necessary to delve into the realm described by the Buddha that appears only to the heavenly eye by knocking on the doors of our spirit; it requires us to think about its profound meaning and to engage in detailed research into it.²⁰

Such a way of thinking affirmed the existence of Mt. Sumeru, the hells, and the Pure Land as transcendent mystical realms. However, the existence of such realms was conditioned by our need to believe that such worlds are visible to the extraordinary vision of the Buddha. On first sight, this may appear virtually identical to the pseudo-scientific explanations given by Entsū and his followers in the Tokugawa period. Entsū's theory was also founded on the thesis that the existence of Mt. Sumeru must be accepted unconditionally since it is something that appeared to the Buddha's supernormal vision (*tengentsū* 天眼通). However, since the new Meiji theory that Mt. Sumeru must be believed because it derives from the Buddha's vision was developed after the existence of Mt. Sumeru had already been refuted by rational scientific methods, it tended to be more introspective in its orientation. In other words, unlike the Tokugawa position that saw Mt. Sumeru as an actual place, this new approach is closer in character to the position that understood the Pure Land as a subjective reality, which will be considered below. Hence, Mt. Sumeru is here treated as something that manifests itself in the religious consciousness instead of as something belonging to the objective world.

¹⁸ Akegarasu 1899, vol. 4, no. 8, p. 39.

¹⁹ Hirai 1910, pp. 757–59.

²⁰ Itō 1912, p. 8.

4. *The Pure Land as an Expedient Device*

Next, let us consider the third position, which held that the hells and the Pure Land should be interpreted metaphorically, that is to say, as expedient devices (*hōben* 方便). This position can be found in the writings of Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1901). In a section entitled “Saihō mondō” 西方問答 (Questions and Answers Concerning the Western Direction) in his essay “Kantoku” 感得 (My Intuition), Kiyozawa noted down the insight concerning the Pure Land that he “intuited on the afternoon of August 15 of Meiji 23 (1890).”²¹ In this passage, he asks rhetorically, “The Buddha lands in all of the ten directions are all Pure Lands. Why is it said to exist in the west?” Then he replies:

However, there will surely come a time when I die. At that moment, my spirit (*seishin* 精神), or soul (*shinrei* 心靈), will separate from my body. This is what everyone firmly believes, in the past and in the present, as well as in the Orient and in the Occident. . . . If this is so, at that time, the World of Supreme Bliss (Gokuraku Sekai 極樂世界) will manifest itself. However, in order for a result to appear, there must surely be a cause. . . . If we want the World of Peace and Bliss [Anraku Sekai 安樂世界, i.e., the Pure Land] to appear at the moment of death, we must concentrate on contemplating it during the course of our everyday lives. If we strive to have the Pure Land manifest itself by focusing our thoughts, and contemplating the physical space and the beings of the Pure Land, our efforts will surely be rewarded. Is this not the truth disclosed by our school of Buddhism? The reason why this world [i.e., the Pure Land] is said to reside in the west is to indicate the place to which we will return when we die. This is because [our death] may be likened to the sun setting in the west. Unless the Pure Land is said to exist in a certain direction, ignorant people will find it difficult to concentrate their thoughts on it. Only then can we determine the place to which we will return [when we die].²²

In other words, the reason why the Pure Land of Supreme Bliss is said to exist in the west is because it points to the place where one’s spirit returns after one dies as a result of one’s practice and because it serves to focus one’s thoughts and create the cause for gaining birth in the Pure Land. More importantly, Kiyozawa here says that the Pure Land was taught to exist in the west especially to help ignorant people concentrate their thoughts on it. This shows that Kiyozawa understood the World of Supreme Bliss to be nothing more than an expedient device taught for the benefit of ignorant people.

²¹ Akegarasu and Nishimura 1951, vol. 3, p. 399.

²² Akegarasu and Nishimura 1951, vol. 3, p. 398.

Likewise, Inoue Enryō expressed his understanding of the Pure Land in the following manner. It is unreasonable to claim that the description of the adornment of the Land of Supreme Bliss found in the *Amida Sutra* is something that Śākyamuni actually experienced (*jikken* 実験) and taught to us. In principle, we have to revise the explanations that Buddhists have previously given to these adornments. It must be said that the physical adornments of the Pure Land were taught as expedient devices. However, to say that they are expedient devices does not mean that they are complete fictions. Rather, they should be understood as skillful devices (*zengyō hōben* 善巧方便) for leading us to a specific goal, in this case, birth in the Pure Land.²³ Like Kiyozawa, Inoue denied that the Pure Land actually exists in an objective sense and argued that it is nothing more than an expedient device taught for a specific purpose: that of arousing faith in the believers' minds.

Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929), who, like Kiyozawa, belonged to the Higashi Honganji branch of Shin Buddhism, took up the Pure Land in a section entitled “Jōdokyō no Gokuraku sekai ron” 浄土教の極楽世界論 (The Land of Supreme Bliss in Pure Land Buddhism) in his famous *Bukkyō tōitsuron* 仏教統一論 (The Unification of Buddhism). In Pure Land Buddhism, he says, the Buddhist ideal of nirvana is expressed as the Land of Supreme Bliss endowed with physical characteristics. The Pure Land was described as having adornments such as lakes and trees decked out with jewels in order to respond to the emotions and desires of ignorant people and make them love and seek the truth.²⁴ Here again, the Pure Land is understood as a kind of expedient device.

The above are just a few examples of the view that the Pure Land is an expedient device preached for ignorant people to lead them to the truth. It goes without saying that such a view denies that the hells and the Pure Land are actual places. But it should be noted that anti-Buddhists of the Tokugawa period also argued that the Pure Land is only an expedient device for instructing and guiding the ignorant.²⁵ The fact that Meiji Buddhists persisted in saying that the Pure Land was taught as an expedient device for the ignorant commoners shows that the Buddhist institutions were still unable to overcome their hierarchical view of society that they had inherited from the feudalistic Tokugawa period. However, it should be noted that, unlike the situation in the Tokugawa period, it was the Buddhists themselves who argued here that the Pure Land is an expedient device. This shows that by this time even Buddhists could no longer accept the Pure Land as a realm that actually exists.

²³ Inoue 1897, pp. 8–9.

²⁴ Murakami 1903, p. 474.

²⁵ See the examples found in the chapter on “Haibutsuron” 排仏論 (Anti-Buddhist Theories) in Tsuji 1944–55, vol. 10, pp. 1–404.

5. *The Pure Land as a Subjective Reality*

The three positions described above did not necessarily appear in chronological order. All three views were widely held at the same time, with different people supporting different positions. But they all started from the same premise, that is to say, they all denied that the Pure Land was a place whose existence could be verified objectively and scientifically. The culmination of the arguments about the existence of the Pure Land is to be found in the fourth position noted above that understands the hells and the Pure Land to be subjective realities. Many Buddhists embraced this position. In the pages below, I will discuss their ideas at some length in order to clarify its significance for the history of modern Japanese Buddhist thought.

The earliest person to champion this position was Shimaji Mokurai. In an essay entitled “Jigoku Gokuraku no wakaremichi” 地獄極楽の分れ道 (The Parting of the Ways to the Hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss), he declared, “What kind of entities are the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss? If we consider this matter from the standpoint of Buddhist teachings, it must be said that they are none other than alternate names for the realms of suffering and bliss.” He then continued:

Therefore, the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss are retributions deriving from good and evil causes. Good and evil arise from an instant of thought in my mind. Hence the source from which the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss arise is also this instant of thought in my mind. The parting of the ways that leads to the hells or to the Land of Supreme Bliss resides in this instant of thought in my mind. That is to say, if I arouse an evil thought for even an instant, I will start walking on the path to the hells but if I arouse a good thought for even an instant, I will start walking on the path to the Land of Supreme Bliss. Although the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss are as far apart as the heavens above and the deep waters below, the point at which the path to them parts is to be found in just the instant of thought that arises in my heart.²⁶

Shimaji’s argument is based on the notion that good and evil actions result in good and evil results, respectively. Hence, it can be said that his argument is developed from the standpoint of morality and not from that of religion. However, the way in which he locates the origin of the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss in the “one instant of thought in my mind” is an attempt to give a subjective explanation to the Pure Land. Such an explanation clearly became necessary when the objective existence of the Pure Land became untenable.

²⁶ Futaba and Fukushima 1973–78, vol. 4, p. 240.

Next, turning to the second decade of the Meiji period, that is to say, from around 1877 to 1887, we find the following exchange in an article written by Maeda Eun 前田慧雲 (1855–1930) in 1889 entitled “Jōdo zaisaiben” 浄土在西弁 (Apology for the Idea that the Pure Land Exists in the West). Like Shimaji, Maeda was a priest and scholar of the Nishi Honganji branch of Shin Buddhism.

Question: If the basic principle of Buddhism is that all things are only creations of the mind (*banpō yuishin* 万法唯心), Amida must only be the creation of the mind and the Pure Land should exist in our minds. However, in Shin Buddhism, it is taught that the Pure Land of Supreme Bliss exists beyond a hundred thousand million lands to the west. This must be a teaching preached as an expedient device. Is this correct?

Maeda’s answer is as follows:

Answer: A great number of people, both in China and in our country, have misunderstood the idea [that Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss] are only the creations of the mind and exist in our minds. . . . If you just say, without being specific, that all things are creations of the mind and only the manifestation of the mind, then you become attached one-sidedly to the position that the mind is the origin of delusion and enlightenment and that it is the source of all things. . . .

However, although all things are said to be only the creations of the mind, this does not mean that one should seek for Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss in one’s mind apart from their existence in the west beyond a hundred thousand million lands. . . . The term “only” means “nothing else.” How can it refer only to a hundred thousand million lands? The hundred thousand million billion buddha lands are all none other than this one instant of thought. . . . Therefore, if sentient beings can intuit [Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss] in the depth of their minds, [Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss] will manifest themselves right there. If they truly seek [the Land of Supreme Bliss] they will gain birth there in the amount of time it takes to snap one’s fingers. This is why the sutra says, “[Amida Buddha] is not far from here.”²⁷ If we were to explain the idea that all things are only creations of the mind at greater length, we can say that all realms, from those of the hells up to those of the buddhas, are only creations of

²⁷ This phrase is found in the *Guan wuliangshou fo jing* 觀無量壽仏経 (Jp. *Kan muryōju butsu kyō*; Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life), also known simply as the *Guan jing* 觀経 (Jp. *Kan kyō*; Contemplation Sutra), one of the three central texts of Pure Land Buddhism. See T no. 365, 12: 341c.

the mind. India, China, the Orient, the Occident, . . . old and young, men and women—there is nothing among them that is not the manifestation of one’s own mind. . . . Although all things are without exception creations of the mind, they are distinct from one another, being located in the east, west, south, and north. We have Kyoto and we have Tokyo. . . . Nobles and commoners, men and women, the wise and ignorant, old and young—the fact that they all arise through dependent origination is manifestly apparent and they are not nonexistent. It is the same with Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss. Although they are only creations of the mind and exist in the mind, the Land of Supreme Bliss arises from its distinctive set of causes and conditions and is clearly present a hundred thousand million lands to the west. Although it arises from its distinctive set of causes and conditions, it is none other than the creation of the mind. . . . Now it can be known that the idea that the Land of Supreme Bliss exists a hundred thousand million lands to the west is the sublime gate to the genuine living truth.²⁸

Here Maeda argues that Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss arise from the mind. But, using the notion that all things arise through dependent origination, he holds that Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss are not simply illusions created by the mind but are realities that appear through faith. In one sense, Maeda is critical of those who hold one-sidedly to the position that Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss are creations of the mind.²⁹ At the same time, inasmuch as he accepts that Amida and the Land of Supreme Bliss actually arise from the mind through dependent origination, Maeda can be included among those who recognize the existence of life after death by understanding it as a subjective reality.

The person who most clearly stated that the hells and the Pure Land are spiritual realities was Kiyozawa Manshi. It is well known that Kiyozawa used the term “Seishinshugi” 精神主義, literally “spirit-ism,” to express the essence of religion. In 1901, in a lecture called “Seishinshugi: Sono 2” 精神主義：その二 (Seishinshugi: Part 2), he provided a synopsis of the history of the Meiji era and discussed how it led to his Seishinshugi teachings:

During the Meiji Restoration, religion was almost totally forgotten due to the great political confusion of the times. Subsequently, when it became calm again, people began to discuss matters related to religion in various

²⁸ Maeda Eun Zenshū Kankōkai 1931–32, vol. 4, pp. 434–37.

²⁹ This position that Amida Buddha is the creation of the mind and that the Pure Land exists in the mind had been criticized by Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), the founder of Shin Buddhism, in his *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証 (Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Realization). See Hirota et al. 1997, vol. 1, p. 77.

ways. At that time, the things that became the foremost topics of debate were the Mt. Sumeru cosmology and the creation of the world. It is well known that people like Sata Kaiseki and Kamuro Ankei worked extremely hard to further the debate concerning Mt. Sumeru and astronomy found in Buddhist sutras. . . . In other words, it was not clear that, although it is necessary to study theoretically by various means the structure of the world and the systematic relationship of the myriad things, it does not matter which theory is accepted as far as religion is concerned. Such was the situation in those days.

Later, however, this somehow began to change on its own accord and attempts to determine the value of Buddhism and Christianity on the basis of astronomy and the theory of creation disappeared. Instead, attempts to determine the value of a religion through the examination of so-called philosophical issues like the immortality of the soul, the existence of one God, or the true reality of dharmas, came to the fore.³⁰

Kiyozawa then refers to Inoue Enryō's *Bukkyō katsuron* 仏教活論 (Living Discourse on Buddhism), the *Soshiki bukkyōron* 組織仏教論 (Systematic Theory of Buddhism) by Nakanishi Ushio 中西牛郎 (1859–1930), and Murakami Senshō's *Bukkyō tōitsuron* as studies that treated Buddhism from a philosophical perspective. Then Kiyozawa continues:

Then there appeared the tendency [to judge religions] by the standards of their contributions to society and their moral value and to say that religions that make no contributions to society are worthless or that religions that do not lead to virtuous conduct in the ethical sense are worthless. . . . To begin with, this is based on a misunderstanding of religion. The reason is because, once one realizes that religion concerns a realm quite different from [the ordinary world that places value on] contributions to society or ethical conduct . . . there is no longer any need to criticize religion from outside. This is the perfectly firm ground upon which Seishinshugi takes its stand. Therefore, Seishinshugi must not be measured by nonreligious standards. It must be measured by religious standards. It does not focus on objective structures but holds that subjective feeling is of utmost importance. Depending on the circumstances, it can be called "introspectionism" or "subjectivism."

However, in no way does introspectionism or subjectivism ignore the outside world or dismiss the objective world. How much less does it uphold idealism as its theoretical position and deny the reality of the objec-

³⁰ Akegarasu and Nishimura 1951, vol. 6, p. 62.

tive world. . . . We do not obstruct those who accept the heliocentric view of the universe from holding on to their views. Nor do we obstruct people who accept the Ptolemaic theory of the universe from holding on to their views.³¹

In this way, Kiyozawa understands the discourse concerning religion since the Meiji Restoration as passing through three stages. Starting from the view that accepted the existence of entities like Mt. Sumeru as objective facts, there next appeared an age in which religions were interpreted philosophically, and finally it reached an age in which religions were judged for their social and ethical utilities.³² Kiyozawa maintains that these three stages are all based on a mistaken understanding of religion and states that religion is unrelated to the objective existence of Mt. Sumeru, to philosophy, and to social utility and morality. He makes it clear that religion is based on the position of Seishinshugi, which belongs to a dimension quite different from the ordinary world, and states that Seishinshugi is none other than subjectivity and introspectionism. It is especially important to note here that Kiyozawa asserts that the objective, scientific interpretation of Mt. Sumeru has no religious meaning.

In this way, Kiyozawa first clarifies that religion is based on Seishinshugi and introspectionism. From this standpoint, he discusses the existence of the hells and the Pure Land in the following way:

Religion is a subjective fact. “Subjective fact” means that each one of us searches for and determines the veracity of such facts within our own minds. It is not like some objective fact that we can determine is true or false from our relationship with something outside of us or through other people’s opinions. . . .

The same can be said concerning the question of whether the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss exist or not. Some people may fly over a hundred thousand million lands to investigate whether the Land of Supreme Bliss exists or not, or dig a thousand *yojanas* into the earth to see if the hells exist

³¹ Akegarasu and Nishimura 1951, vol. 6, pp. 63–64.

³² In the background of Kiyozawa’s characterization of the third stage as the age that emphasized the social and moral utility of religion, there probably lies the controversy known as “the clash between education and religion” (*kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* 教育と宗教の衝突), which became a major issue in the field of religion. This controversy has its beginnings in the refusal of Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861–1930), a Christian teacher at the Daiichi Kōtō Chūgakkō 第一高等学校 (First Higher Middle School), to bow before a copy of the Imperial Rescript on Education in January of 1891. Uchimura was subject to widespread criticism and, at the end of the following year, Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1856–1944) wrote *Kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* 教育と宗教の衝突 (The Clash between Education and Religion) attacking Christianity as being anti-nationalistic and lacking in loyalty and filial piety.

or not. But they are both attempts to investigate whether the hells exist or not in an objective sense. Moreover, some people may argue as follows. The hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss are taught in all religions. They are found in Christianity and they are found in Buddhism. Therefore, the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss must exist. But this is also an attempt to determine the existence of the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss in an objective sense. However, we understand both attempts as academic matters and not something related to religion. The reason for this is because people who take such approaches do not know that religion is a subjective fact and try to study and determine religion objectively.

If so, how can we explain the existence of the gods and Buddhas or discuss the existence or nonexistence of the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss as a subjective fact? It is extremely difficult to do so. . . . But if I am forced to explain it, we do not believe in the gods and Buddhas because they exist. The gods and Buddhas exist for us because we believe in them. Moreover, we do not believe in the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss because they exist. When we believe in the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss, the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss exist for us. . . .

If religion is indeed a subjective fact, it is wrong to ask whether or not the contents of our religious beliefs are objectively correct. That is to say, when it comes to the contents of our religious faith, we should ask whether each of us believes them or not. There is no need to argue over whether or not such content is true apart from our inner minds.³³

Seishinshugi understands all religious facts to be subjective facts, and that the reality of such a subjective fact depends on whether one believes it or not. In Kiyozawa's view, the existence of the hells and the Pure Land is limited solely to the subjective realm. They can only be recognized as something opened up through religious faith.³⁴

Next, I would like to take up works by Kiyozawa's contemporaries who followed his lead in arguing that the hells and the Pure Land are subjective realities. One such person is Ishikawa Shuntai 石川舜台 (1842–1931) who served as chief administrator of

³³ From the essay "Shūkyō wa shukanteki jijitsu nari" 宗教は主観的事実なり (Religion is a Subjective Fact). The quotation is from Akegarasu and Nishimura 1951, vol. 6, pp. 102–4.

³⁴ It may be mentioned here that Nakanishi Ushio had already criticized Kiyozawa's view of the afterlife in his *Gongo hōjō* 嚴護法場 (Protecting the Dharma Hall) published in 1897. In this work, Nakanishi states that Kiyozawa's understanding corresponds to the position traditionally condemned in Shin Buddhism as a "self-nature and mind only" view of the Pure Land that denies the existence of the Pure Land by arguing that it exists in the human mind. However, since Kiyozawa's position that the Pure Land is a subjective reality presupposes the history of the debate that culminated in the denial of the objective existence of the hells and the Pure Land, Nakanishi's objection misses the mark.

the Higashi Honganji branch of Shin Buddhism. His view is expressed in a newspaper article found in the *Seikyō shinbun* 政教新聞 (Newspaper on Politics and Religion) dated May 5, 1901. In this piece, he declares, “Questions as to whether or not the hells exist, or whether or not the Land of Supreme Bliss is real, have no effect at all on our attainment of faith. I do not believe in Amida because the hells exist. Nor do I take refuge in Amida because his Land of Supreme Bliss exists. I believe in Amida only because I intuit Amida’s compassion.” The nuance of Ishikawa’s statement here is slightly different from that of Kiyozawa above. However, Ishikawa, like Kiyozawa, states that the objective existence of the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss has nothing to do with the attainment of one’s faith and that the only important thing is the subjective fact that one believes in Amida.³⁵ From this, we can naturally assume that Ishikawa saw that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss are also subjective realities. In January of 1901, the same year that Ishikawa published the newspaper article discussed above, Kiyozawa began to publish the journal *Seishinkai* 精神界 (Spiritual World) to spread his Seishinshugi ideas. Hence, although Kiyozawa and Ishikawa did not necessarily hold the same position when it came to the administrative policies of the Higashi Honganji, it is interesting to note that they were simultaneously making the same arguments concerning the hells and the Pure Land, almost as if they were acting in concert with one another.

Next, Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875–1926), one of Kiyozawa’s closest disciples, also expressed similar views concerning the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss. In a chapter entitled “Jigoku Gokuraku no igi” 地獄極楽の意義 (The Significance of the Hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss) from his book *Jikken no shūkyō* 実験の宗教 (The Religion of Actual Experience) published in 1903, he argued:

If so, are the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss investigated only for moral edification? Are they nothing more than metaphorical expressions for preventing people from engaging in evil actions and encouraging them to cultivate good deeds? Or are they poetic fantasies spun by poets? Or are they provisional teachings preached by clerics to instruct ignorant people? . . .

³⁵ Based on chapter 5, “Buddhism and Religion” 仏教と宗教, written by Ōkuwa Hitoshi 大桑齊 (1937–2020) and found in *Kanazawa shishi gendaihen* 金沢市史現代篇 (History of Kanazawa City: The Modern Period). See Kanazawa Shishi Hensan Shingū linkai 1969, vol. 2, p. 600. It may also be added that in 1923, Ishikawa published a small book entitled *Jigoku to Gokuraku* 地獄と極楽 (The Hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss; later reprinted in Ishikawa 1943, pp. 307–76) in which he argues in the following manner. The hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss arise from the mind. Limitless ignorance, false views, and attachment to, and arrogance concerning, the self, become the karmic causes of melancholy, delight, suffering, and happiness, and give birth to the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss. Therefore, rather than delving into the question of whether the Land of Bliss or realms of suffering exist, one should strive to maintain a mind that does not produce the Land of Bliss or realms of suffering (Ishikawa 1943, pp. 374–76). As this shows, Ishikawa denied the objective reality of the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss.

If the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss are metaphors, fantasies, or provisional teachings, and if they are nothing more than expedient devices preached for moral edification, they are not very important as far as religion is concerned. . . . I believe that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss taken up in religion possess great religious significance. I think that the hells and the Pure Land discussed by Bishop Genshin [Genshin sōzu 源信僧都; 942–1017] is not just something that is moralistic, metaphorical, or bizarre but is something spiritual, something necessary, and something that can be truly experienced. In other words, I intuit in all certainty that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss actually exist. . . .

In order to intuit that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss actually exist, there is a certain method that we can use. . . . There is no need to look far away for proof that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss actually exist. We should look for them nearby. There is no need to look for them outside ourselves. They should be sought within ourselves. . . . Proof of the existence of the hells that are said to be found several tens of thousands of *yojanas* under the ground and the Land of Supreme Bliss that is said to be found beyond a hundred thousand million lands in the distance can be discovered within our breasts and in our hearts. In other words, we should not seek objective proof that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss actually exist. By all means, we should look for them in a subjective way. We should abandon [our search for] their objective existence, which is ambiguous and uncertain, and seek the proof for their existence in our own minds, which [we can apprehend] most clearly and most reliably. . . . This is truly self-awakening (*jikaku* 自覚) based on spiritual experience. . . . It is the ultimate self-realization; it is something we ourselves attain (*jitoku* 自得).

...

It is the actually existing hells that the self explains to the self and that the self actually experiences. It is the actually existing Land of Supreme Bliss. Yes, the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss in the realm of religion are hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss that actually exist. This is religious faith.³⁶

Here Sasaki rejects the objective existence of the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss as being “ambiguous and uncertain” and holds that their subjective existence is certain. Moreover, he asserts that they are “something spiritual, something necessary, and something that can be truly experienced.” This is identical to Kiyozawa’s position that the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss exist when we believe in them. Thus, it can be said that Sasaki faithfully inherited Kiyozawa’s Seishinshugi teachings.

³⁶ Sasaki Gesshō Zenshū Kankōkai 1929, vol. 6, pp. 53–57.

Next, Ishitani Dokurakuonshu 石谷独楽園主, a pen name for a person most probably belonging to the Tendai school, also set forth a similar position in his essay “Shumikan” 須弥觀 (My View of Mt. Sumeru), which can be paraphrased as follows: “I do not know if the land of Japan is round or square. Nor do I know if the sun and moon revolve around the earth or if the earth revolves around the sun. But Mt. Sumeru certainly exists. All things in the universe must have a center. Therefore Mt. Sumeru is at the center of the world. The nature of the minds of us humans is also one such center and is identical to Mt. Sumeru in this regard; thus, Mt. Sumeru exists in our hearts.”³⁷ Such is Ishitani’s argument but it is probably based on the Tendai school’s teaching that the Pure Land is to be found within one’s mind. However, the fact that he refers to the existence of Mt. Sumeru within the heart after referring to the Ptolemaic and Copernican views of the universe, suggests that he understood Mt. Sumeru not as an entity that exists in an objective sense, but as a subjective reality.

The views of Sakai Shūgaku 坂井習学 (1882–1944; later known as Yamabe Shūgaku 山辺習学) of the Ōtani branch of Shin Buddhism concerning the existence of the Pure Land as found in his essay “Bukkyō Gokurakuron” 仏教極樂論 (On the Buddhist Land of Supreme Bliss) can be summarized in the following manner. After one becomes aware of one’s powerlessness and karmic evil, the Land of Supreme Bliss in the west becomes one’s ultimate goal and refuge. This is not something one discovers through reason but something that one actually realizes. When one harbors doubts concerning the Pure Land, the flower in which one is born in the Pure Land does not open but if one’s faith is pure, the flower will open and one will see the Buddha. Yamabe also stated that people believe in the objective existence of the Land of Supreme Bliss when young, reject it as a subjective creation in middle age, but finally come to believe firmly in the objective reality of a blissful land, even though people of common sense reject it as superstition.³⁸ Although Yamabe speaks here of the “objective reality of a blissful land,” he is referring to a realm that is perceived after the naive understanding of the Pure Land as an objective place is negated. Hence it is clear that he is speaking here of the Pure Land that is apprehended as a subjective reality.

Akanuma Chizen 赤沼智善 (1884–1937), who entered university in the same year as Sakai and who, like the latter, belonged to the Ōtani branch of Shin Buddhism, also wrote in an essay called “Bukkyō jigokuron” 仏教地獄論 (On the Buddhist Hells) that the hells are something that one intuitively feels as the karmic retributions of one’s evil actions in the past. Hence, he holds that the hells are not a matter of our future but are

³⁷ Ishitani 1904, p. 10.

³⁸ Sakai 1906–7, vol. 12, no. 5, p. 35.

a problem that concerns our present moment. Moreover, he argued that they are not objective problems but subjective problems.³⁹

In this way, after the first decade of the Meiji period, Japanese Buddhists were compelled to abandon the traditional Buddhist cosmology centered on Mt. Sumeru (and even in cases where it was still accepted, it was accepted not as an objectively real entity, but as a subjective reality). In addition, they were compelled to abandon their belief in the existence of the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss and instead to understand them as subjective realities that are opened up in faith. This brings us to the Taishō period. Here I would like to take up the theory of Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881–1976), which is a representative example of the interpretation of the Pure Land found in the Taishō period.

Kaneko's interpretation of the Pure Land is found in such works as *Jōdo no kannen* 浄土の観念 (The Idea of the Pure Land, 1925), *Higan no sekai* 彼岸の世界 (The World of the Other Shore, 1925), and *Shinshū ni okeru nyorai oyobi Jōdo no kannen* 真宗における如来及浄土の観念 (The Idea of the Tathāgata and the Pure Land in Shin Buddhism, 1926). Let me summarize Kaneko's arguments as found in *Jōdo no kannen* below. By now, says Kaneko, it is clear that Śākyamuni did not teach that the Pure Land actually exists. This is now common knowledge. Hence, it is no longer possible to believe that the Pure Land is an actual place.⁴⁰ However, when people awaken to the fact that it is no longer possible for them to attain birth in the Pure Land and fall into despair over their lives, the true world of the other shore beyond birth and death (*higan no sekai* 彼岸の世界), in which there is no distinction between an ideal realm (*kannen kai* 観念界) and the actually existing world, reveals itself.⁴¹ The Pure Land is a realm of the spirit (*shinrei* 心霊) in the true sense of the term; it is a world that is found within ourselves.⁴² Seen from the standpoint of the ideal realm, this world is a dream and it is the ideal realm that is real. It is the foundational world that we cannot see in our lives. It is to this realm that all things return. This is what is meant by the Pure Land.⁴³ The Pure Land that actually exists is a world that is envisioned to have been created through practices based on the desire to construct an ideal world. Amida's Pure Land is also envisioned to be one such world.⁴⁴

This is a brief summary of Kaneko's arguments in *Jōdo no kannen*. To recapitulate, Kaneko first rejects the notion that the Pure Land is a place that actually exists. Thus, he holds that the Pure Land is a subjective reality and from such a position identifies

³⁹ Akanuma 1907, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 24.

⁴⁰ Kaneko 1925, p. 111.

⁴¹ Kaneko 1925, pp. 114–16.

⁴² Kaneko 1925, p. 133.

⁴³ Kaneko 1925, p. 59.

⁴⁴ Kaneko 1925, pp. 91–92.

it with an ideal realm. Furthermore, he maintains that the Pure Land as a real world is established from the Pure Land as an ideal realm. Kaneko's interpretation of the Pure Land is one of the clearest expressions of the notion that the Pure Land is a subjective reality and, for this reason, can be considered the culmination of the history of the Japanese Buddhist attempt to reinterpret the Pure Land that began in the Meiji period.

In this context, I may mention Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971), who along with Kaneko, was one of Kiyozawa's most renowned students. Soga authored a number of innovative studies on Pure Land Buddhism, but in one of his last works, “Ware nyorai o shinzuru ga yue ni nyorai owashimasu nari” 我如来を信ずるが故に如来在ます也 (Because I Believe in the Tathāgata, the Tathāgata Exists), a transcription of a lecture that Soga gave on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday published in 1966, he expounded on Shinran's teachings by further developing Kiyozawa's ideas as follows: “In other words, the Tathāgata exists because I have faith in him. Where there is no faith, the Tathāgata does not exist. . . . This means that, according to Kiyozawa, the Tathāgata is determined through faith.”⁴⁵ Following Kiyozawa, Soga here declares that Amida is a subjective reality that one apprehends in faith, but it may be assumed that he understood the Pure Land in the same way.

6. Conclusion

In the pages above, I have outlined the process whereby the Pure Land came to be seen as a subjective reality in the modern period. The first thing to note is that in its background lies a long and bitter history of Buddhists struggling to come to terms with the traditional Mt. Sumeru cosmology and the descriptions of the hells and the Pure Land found in Buddhist texts. Even though we cannot deny the importance of the new currents of Buddhist thought that came to the fore during the Meiji period, such as Seishinshugi and the other new Buddhist movements of the period, in fostering this new interpretation of the Pure Land, we must remember that, historically speaking, the subjective approach to the Pure Land appeared as a result of the realization that it was no longer tenable to maintain the objective existence of the Pure Land. Next, in the course of developing the subjective approach to the Pure Land, Pure Land Buddhists found a way both for confronting the scientific mode of thought and escaping from the bondage of the state and ethical thought. This allowed Pure Land Buddhists to take a stand on the position of faith, create its own subjective view of the Pure Land, and attain autonomy. The creation of such subjectivity and autonomy is among the epochal achievements of modern Buddhism. It may even be said to be one of the greatest developments of Japanese Buddhism since the Kamakura 鎌倉 period (1185–1333).

⁴⁵ Soga Ryōjin *Senshū Kankōkai* 1970–72, vol. 12, p. 181.

Of course, it goes without saying that such a subjective understanding of the Pure Land was not accepted by all Buddhists in the modern period. It is well known that Kaneko's interpretation of the Pure Land discussed above led to him being expelled from the priesthood of the Ōtani branch of Shin Buddhism. A similar fate befell Nonomura Naotarō 野々村直太郎 (1871–1946) of Nishi Honganji. Although I did not discuss him in this paper since he was not directly related to the movement to reinterpret the Pure Land as a subjective reality, Nonomura was also expelled from his university post for writing his controversial *Jōdokyō hihan* 浄土教批判 (A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism).⁴⁶ And even now, long after the Mt. Sumeru cosmology has been forgotten, the problem of how to interpret the hells and the Land of Supreme Bliss remains a pressing issue for modern Japanese Buddhists. Indeed, it is still an important topic in Shin Buddhism and is the focus of much discussion today. Under such circumstances, it is worth reviewing once again the debate over the nature of the Pure Land, which culminated in the position that the Pure Land is a subjective reality.

(Translated by Robert F. Rhodes)

ABBREVIATION

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–35.

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⁴⁶ Editor's note: see Kigoshi Yasushi's article on Nonomura in this issue of *The Eastern Buddhist*, pp. 31–47.

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