Nonomura Naotarō: The Man Who Would Destroy the Pure Land

Kigoshi Yasushi

The Encounter of Pure Land Thought and Modernity

In January of 1923, when all the branches of Shin 真 Buddhism were preparing for the seven-hundredth anniversary of the founding of their denomination which was to take place that year, the first installment of a series of twenty-one articles entitled "Jōdokyō kaishinron" 浄土教改新論 (hereafter, "Renewal of Pure Land Buddhism") was published in the religious newspaper *Chūgai nippō* 中外日報. Later, in May of that year, these articles were published together in a book with the title *Jōdokyō hihan* 浄土教批判 (hereafter, *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism*). The provocative opinions set forth in these works were to shake Pure Land thought to its very core and deliver a seismic shock not only to Shin Buddhism but to the Buddhist world as a whole. The gist of the argument developed in these works can be found in the passage below, which is taken from the preface to *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism*:

> Seven hundred years after its founding, our Pure Land Buddhism is facing an unavoidable dilemma, or a fork in the road. On the one hand, we can accept as objective facts notions like karmic retribution and the six realms of transmigration—both of which were used by the secular authorities to maintain the class system—that existed before the time of the venerable Śākyamuni, as well as religious myths like the attainment of buddhahood by Amida 阿弥陀 and the birth of sentient beings into the Pure Land that were added after the time of the venerable Śākyamuni, and use these ideas

This article is a translation based on Kigoshi 2010. An earlier version of this paper was read at the Twelfth European Association of Japanese Studies (EAJS) International Conference held at Università del Salento, Lecce, Italy, September 23, 2008.

The Eastern Buddhist 1/2: 31–47

> to express the spirit of Pure Land Buddhism. On the other hand, instead of accepting that these ideas are objective facts, we can recognize that these ideas are nothing but words and thereby use them to fully express the spirit of Pure Land Buddhism. . . . In other words, the thing that I want to argue in this work is that we should cast aside the former, and take the latter, position. If we hold on to the former position as before, Pure Land Buddhism will become a relic of the past that can still trick ignorant men and women but will perish as a genuine religion. . . . There is nothing more urgent now than, on the one hand, to proclaim Pure Land Buddhism as a genuine religion and, on the other, to vanquish the Pure Land Buddhism that has fallen into superstition.[1]

The person who wrote these words was Nonomura Naotarō 野々村直太郎 (1871–1946). Here he states that ideas like Amida Buddha and birth in the Pure Land are nothing more than myths and declares that Pure Land teachings based on such ideas are just superstitions. Hence, he proposed that such a superstitious understanding of the Pure Land be cast aside in favor of a true understanding of the sect's teachings. In the lines immediately following the quotation above, he adds that, while the first part of *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism* is devoted to destroying the wrong interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism (*hakairon* 破壊論), the second part is an attempt to construct a correct interpretation of it (*kensetsuron* 建設論). For Nonomura, the destruction of the current understanding of Pure Land Buddhism was a necessary step in the construction of its correct understanding.

Nonomura was born in 1870 in Shimane Prefecture to a temple family belonging to the Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 branch of Shin Buddhism. After attending the Daiichi Kōtō Gakkō 第一高等学校 (First Higher School), he entered Tokyo Imperial University and graduated with a degree in philosophy in 1897. From 1906, he belonged to the faculty of Bukkyō 仏教 University (which changed its name to Ryukoku University in 1922), where he taught religious studies (*shūkyōgaku* 宗教学). When Nonomura began serializing "Renewal of Pure Land Buddhism," he had been teaching at Bukkyō University for seventeen years.

As noted above, the first installment of "Renewal of Pure Land Buddhism" was published in January of 1923. The orthodoxy of the positions set forth in the article was immediately called into question. In February, the Nishi Honganji Legislature issued an open letter questioning Nonomura's ideas. At the same time, a heated debate erupted in the pages of the *Chūgai nippō* over the validity of Nonomura's position, and the publication of *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism* only exacerbated this controversy. The *Chūgai nippō* debate raged over a wide range of issues, with questions being

[1] Nonomura 1923, pp. 1–5.

posed concerning the legitimacy of the discipline of religious studies and Nonomura's understanding of Buddhist and Shin Buddhist teachings. Eventually, it developed into a debate on questions concerning faith versus reason and academic freedom. But in August, Nonomura was expelled from the priesthood and subsequently resigned from his teaching position in December. In this way, the affair came to an end less than a year after "Renewal of Pure Land Buddhism" first began publication.

As the quotation above reveals, Nonomura asserted that concepts such as birth in the Pure Land and Amida's actual existence, both of which are central to Shin Buddhism, were no longer appropriate to his age. He argued that it is imperative to reconstruct these notions to make them viable for people living in the modern world. It is not the purpose of this paper to pass judgement on the correctness of Nonomura's arguments. Nor will I focus solely on his *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism*, even though it is his most famous work. Instead, I will focus on Nonomura as a scholar of religious studies in order to situate his arguments in *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism* in the broader context of his thought. To do so, I will rely primarily on his magnum opus, *Shūkyōgaku yōron* 宗教学要論 (hereafter, *The Essentials of Religious Studies*) published in 1922, the year before he began to serialize "Renewal of Pure Land Buddhism."

The Background to Nonomura's Religious Studies

Shin Buddhism, the school that reveres Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) as its founder, expanded greatly under the eighth patriarch Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–1499). By the Edo 江戸 period (1603–1867), it had become one of the largest schools of Japanese Buddhism. Shinran maintained that birth in the Pure Land can be gained here and now in the midst of daily life through faith, by relying on the power of Amida's vows and reciting the *nenbutsu* 念仏. However, in contrast to Shinran's proclamation that salvation can be found in the midst of daily life, the teachings that appealed most to the average Shin believer concerned those that focused on being saved after death, found in texts like the *Guan wuliangshou fo jing* 観無量寿仏経 (Jp. *Kan muryōju butsu kyō*; Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life). This sutra promises that Amida will appear to a dying person who recites the *nenbutsu* and will lead them to the Pure Land when their life expires. Thus this sutra understands salvation, not primarily in terms of attaining faith in this lifetime, but in terms of being born in Amida's blissful Pure Land after death. The latter teaching appealed greatly to those people whose daily life was fraught with suffering. By hoping for birth in the Pure Land after death, they could look forward to being released from the difficulties of their everyday lives in the next life.

Many of the poems found in the *Jōdo shinshū gyokurin wakashū* 浄土真宗玉林和歌集 (Compendium of Jewel Forest Poems of Pure Land Shin Buddhism), a collection of

verses by Pure Land masters compiled in the Edo period, expressed the depth of the people's devotion to the idea of a postmortem salvation. Representative examples of such poems include the following:

> After I die,
> Among the treasures
> That I take with me,
> There is nothing comparable to
> "Namu Amida Butsu."[2]
>
> I come ever closer
> To birth in the Land of Supreme Bliss
> With each passing day.
> Ah, I am so happy
> To become older.[3]
>
> Is there not a fragility in the heart
> Of those who pray to live
> For a hundred years?
> For the life bestowed by
> "Namu Amida Butsu" is immeasurable.[4]

As a modern scholar of religion, Nonomura called for the reform of this sort of understanding of Shin Buddhism. In *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism*, he wrote:

> What does birth in the Pure Land really mean? No matter how you look at it, it must mean dying in this world and then being born in the Pure Land. In other words, it clearly presupposes the immortality of the soul, and that life continues after death. Could it be possible for such an idea to remain efficacious during the modern age and in the future?[5]

Here Nonomura criticizes the common Shin Buddhist view that humans go to a blissful Pure Land after they die. It must be said that such criticism emerged from the context of modern thought and was not unique to Nonomura. Ever since the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912), the established Buddhist schools found themselves confronted by many difficulties, such as the Japanese government's attempt to establish Shinto

[2] Ōtori 2001, p. 88. This and the following two poems are by Shinran's teacher Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212).

[3] Ōtori 2001, p. 88.

[4] Ōtori 2001, p. 90.

[5] Nonomura 1923, pp. 62–63.

as the state religion, the challenges posed by the missionary activities of Christianity and other religions, and the challenges posed by modern Western thought. In such an age, Nonomura embarked on the study of philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, the foremost center of academic studies in Japan at the time, focusing in particular on the study of religion. As a result, he must have become acutely aware of the need to investigate religion from a standpoint that was different from that of traditional sectarian scholarship. In other words, he tried to ascertain, in what he termed a "scientific" manner, that of significance in Buddhism which could stand up to the challenges of modern Western ways of thought.

An important characteristic of Nonomura's scholarship is that, although he was an ordained minister teaching at the university established by his denomination, he considered himself to be a scholar of "the scientific study of religion" (*shūkyōkagaku* 宗教科学). The years in which Nonomura taught religious studies at Bukkyō University coincided with the beginnings of religious studies in Japan. For example, it was just one year after Nonomura graduated from Tokyo Imperial University that Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), the founder of religious studies in Japan, graduated from the same university. Although there is no evidence that they knew each other, the fact that they were fellow students in the philosophy department make it likely that they were acquaintances, especially when we recall that Anesaki came from a devout Shin Buddhist family that was closely associated with the Bukkōji 仏光寺 branch of Shin Buddhism.[6]

In 1900, Tokyo Imperial University appointed Anesaki to its newly established chair of religious studies. Fukazawa Hidetaka has argued that, with the question of the proper role of religion in modern Japanese society still unresolved, it was considered necessary to create a post within the university to study religion in an academic and neutral manner.[7] The discipline of religious studies that Anesaki sought to establish was an "explanatory" (*setsumeigaku* 説明学) style of religious studies based on objective investigations of religious phenomena. Such an approach aimed to distance itself not only from sectarian doctrinal studies carried out by the various religious denominations but also from the normative stance taken in such disciplines as philosophy and ethics. In other words, it tried to remain aloof from all attempts to deal with the truth claims of religion. Such an approach derives from the modern Western notion of religious studies, which sought to investigate religion in an objective manner, unencumbered by the apologetic concerns of the established churches.

The ideal that the Japanese scholars set for themselves is clearly indicated in the entry on "Religious Studies" found in *Tetsugaku daijisho* 哲学大辞書 (hereafter, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Philosophy*) published in 1912. One of the authors of this entry

[6] Isomae and Fukazawa 2002, pp. 5–6.

[7] Isomae and Fukazawa 2002, p. 159.

was Katō Genchi 加藤玄智 (1873–1965), who, along with Anesaki, was a major figure in the early history of Japanese religious studies. The entry says:

> If we were to define our discipline in one word, it could be called the scientific study of religious facts. . . . The discipline of religious studies is not a study undertaken to protect or to create a new religion. It is content just to investigate religion as one social phenomenon, providing a proper explanation for each and every such phenomenon. Therefore, although it goes without saying that religious studies is a psychological science, it is not a normative science like ethics. It is an explanatory science. Religious studies never seeks to judge whether a religion is true or false. That role is to be played by the philosophy of religion because the latter deals with normative questions that are beyond the field of a scientific study of religion.[8]

The question as to whether religious studies in Japan actually succeeded in achieving its aim will not concern us here. What is important is that the discipline of religious studies was seen as a means to bring order to the confusion surrounding the status of religion in Meiji and post-Meiji Japan.

Nonomura's Approach to Religious Studies

Be that as it may, Nonomura understood religious studies as an objective science of religion. The emphasis he placed on the scientific study of religion was part of his attempt to investigate the significance of the role played by religion in an objective way.

In one section of *The Essentials of Religious Studies*, Nonomura discusses this point at great length by referring to a controversy then current among Japanese scholars: whether religious studies should be "explanatory" or "normative" (*kihanteki* 規範的). The former describes religions "as they are" (*kaku ari* かくあり) while the latter focuses on the question of how religions "should be" (*kaku arubeshi* かくあるべし). Nonomura emphatically states that religious studies, unlike other normative disciplines like ethics, should employ the former method.[9] Then, as a way of concluding this discussion, he makes the following assertion:

> Just like morality, religion clarifies the practical norms for living. Hence, it goes without saying that they are both methods for achieving a particular goal. However, the goals are expressed in different ways depending on the religion, and the methods used to attain it likewise vary. The differences in their goals and methods arose because the situation in which these religions

[8] Dainihon Hyakkajisho Hensansho 1912–26, vol. 2, p. 1008.

[9] Nonomura 1922, pp. 12–13.

> developed—whether they are Japanese or non-Japanese, or whether they belong to the past or present—were different. But are there universal laws that can unify and bring order to these differences? . . . Putting aside the question of whether or not we can find laws [that are invariable], the true duty of religious studies is to discover, and provide an explanation of, these [universal laws].[10]

Here Nonomura states that the goal of religious studies is to discover the laws underlying religions. He maintains that it is possible to discover the principles basic to religion as a whole by extracting and comparing the norms of behavior advocated by the various religions of the world. Moreover, he held that if these principles could be explained objectively, a pure science of religion could be formulated and the scientific understanding of religious phenomena would also become a possibility.

However, when we consider Nonomura's thought in greater detail, we discover that his approach to religion is actually quite normative. Throughout his writing, we can see places where he expresses his understanding of "how religion should be" and his entire work as a scholar was built upon this stance. In other words, his understanding of "how Pure Land Buddhism should be" provided him with the energy with which to pursue the renewal of Pure Land Buddhism.

Although Nonomura saw himself as a champion of the scientific study of religion, he actually had a very limited view of what kinds of religions should be taken up as the objects of investigation in the study of religions. In his *Shūkyōgaku nyūmon* 宗教学入門 (hereafter, *Introduction to Religious Studies*) published toward the end of his life in 1939, he says:

> In this way, since religious studies refers to a scientific understanding of religion, it has as its objects of investigation all religions. However, I must say a word here about what its primary object of investigation should be. On this point, I hold unequivocally that the primary object of investigation for religious studies must be the most advanced religions. . . . Advanced religions refer to those religions in which their religious character is fully and clearly manifested. Religions whose religious character is unclear cannot be called advanced religions. . . . It goes without saying that [advanced religions] refer to Buddhism and Christianity.[11]

Such a view is basic to Nonomura's approach to the study of religions as a whole and runs through all of his writings. For example, it is also found in *The Essentials of Religious Studies* where he states: "As much as possible, we should make advanced religions

[10] Nonomura 1922, pp. 19–20.

[11] Nonomura 1939, pp. 6–7.

the primary object of our research."[12] Such a stance is quite different from the one found in the entry on "Religious Studies" in *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Philosophy* cited above. A few lines after the passage quoted above, the entry continues:

> Anyone will agree that, inasmuch as [a religion] survives as a social phenomenon possessing a particular form, it must contain within it something of significance. Even if it is contrary to reason, or even if it is superstitious, it survives since there is something at its foundation that gives rise to these phenomena. Hence, a person who wishes to study a religion must first observe the psychological attitude of its believers with sufficient empathy and, on the basis of such observation, think about it. If someone should exclude [a religion from his field of investigation] for being irrational or superstitious, such a person is unqualified to study religion.[13]

Here, it is argued that, however "primitive" a religious phenomenon may appear, it should be taken up as an object worthy of investigation in religious studies. In contrast, Nonomura seeks to exclude "superstitious" religions from the study of religions, and, indeed, from the very category of religion itself. In other words, while professing to be engaged in an objective science of religion, his approach to the study of religion is highly subjective and normative.

Why did Nonomura assert that the object of religious studies should be the most advanced religions? This is because he believed that such religions have withstood the test of reason over the course of history so that they can hold up to the scrutiny of modern "scientific investigation." As this shows, Nonomura adopted the evolutionary approach to religions current in his age and maintained that only Christianity and Buddhism should be considered the object of religious studies. Hence, whether he intended it or not, the study of religion for Nonomura became the scientific study of the truth and legitimacy of Buddhism and Christianity.

Nonomura's Perspective on Religion

Why did Nonomura adopt such an approach to religious studies? The dissonance between his self-image as a scientific and objective scholar and his subjective attitude toward religion derived from convictions related to his own personal faith. To understand his personal convictions, we must see why Nonomura embarked on a study of religion in the first place. Clues can be found in a short book he wrote in 1901, before he gained his university position, entitled *Kyūshinkō ka shinshinkō ka* 旧信仰か新信仰か (An Old Faith or a New Faith?). There he says:

[12] Nonomura 1922, p. 49.

[13] Dainihon Hyakkajisho Hensansho 1912–26, vol. 2, p. 1009.

> Humans do not live on bread alone. Clarifying the true significance of human life is something far more important than clothing, food, and shelter. The statement that "If, in the morning, I can discover the Way, then I can die [without regret] in the evening," expresses this clearly. . . . Even though the quality of our clothing, food, and shelter differ depending on whether we belong to the rich or poor class, spiritual happiness is equally available to everyone. However, when we look at the world, we see that what is held to be important has been completely reversed. People have tossed away the thing that is most necessary but most easily attainable—spiritual happiness—and instead seek those things most unnecessary and most difficult to attain—clothing, food, and shelter.[14]

For Nonomura, religion was indispensable to human beings and he believed that it could bring spiritual happiness to all people without distinction. However, Nonomura lamented that society was facing in quite the opposite direction. In his view, the people of his day were solely concerned with acquiring material goods, such as clothing, food, and shelter—the things he thought inessential and most difficult to acquire—while disregarding the need to attain spiritual happiness—the thing he thought essential but easy to acquire. He elaborated:

> If you do not know who you are or how you should live, then you are wandering in complete darkness. If you end your life having never discovered the answers to these questions, you have been born in darkness and will have died in darkness. This darkness is our karmic evil. A self in darkness is a self that is immersed in karmic evil. I think that we can call this self a "self that has fallen into doubt." . . . The answer to my doubt is light, and the most essential aspect of religion is providing answers to one's doubt. In other words, it lies in changing a "self in darkness" into a "self in light." This is what religion is essentially about.[15]

According to Nonomura, the spiritual peace that human beings realize through religion provides answers to the doubts about the meaning of their existence, which manifests itself in a desperate search for answers to questions like "What am I?" and "How should I live?" He called this spiritual peace the light which shines through darkness. He argues that no matter how far civilization has progressed, if human beings do not ask "What am I?" and do not somehow find an answer to this question, their lives will be in darkness from birth to death.

[14] Nonomura 1901, pp. 3–5.
[15] Nonomura 1901, pp. 16–18.

The stance that Nonomura adopted toward religion, then, was one that, while claiming to be a science of religion, was in fact based on an extremely subjective attempt to discover the criteria for a true religion. Comparing his own criteria of a true religion to that of other religions, he denounces religions that seek for fulfillment of basic needs such as clothing, food, and shelter, and declares them to be "unreligious." We might say that such a stance is quite subjective. But, from another perspective, we can say that, for Nonomura, the study of religions was none other than a means to apprehend the essence of a true religion.

The Norms of Religion

Nonomura prescribed religion as something that should be the norm of, or model for, human experience and attempted to extract such norms by investigating various types of religions. How then did Nonomura understand the norms of religions? This is clearly expressed in his two complementary definitions of religion:

1. "Religion is a method of practice which has as its ideal the destruction of a heteronomous self."
2. "Religion is a method of practice which has as its ideal the creation of an autonomous self."[16]

These two definitions can be understood as the negative and positive definition of religion, respectively. When Nonomura uses the phrase "science of religion," what he frequently has in mind is a psychology of religion. The definitions of religions given above can also be understood as an analysis of religion from a psychological perspective.

Nonomura begins by noting that human life is a process of "adapting to the environment" (*kyōgū e no junnō* 境遇への順応)[17] and then explains that there are three stages in this process in order to clarify how people come to believe in a religion. According to Nonomura, the driving force behind the human attempt to adapt themselves to their environment is "desire" (*yokubō* 欲望). Nonomura considers that desire arises in consciousness when, as a result of some internal and external stimuli, humans feel some sort of anxiety and seek to escape from this feeling.[18] Humans have the desire to create and maintain a pleasant environment and escape from an unpleasant one. Since they have these desires, humans try to adapt themselves to a variety of environments in which they find themselves, making it possible for them to carry out the activities of their daily lives.[19]

[16] Nonomura 1922, p. 62.

[17] Nonomura 1922, p. 325.

[18] Nonomura 1922, p. 325.

[19] This and the following two paragraphs comprise a summary of a section entitled "The Heteronomous Self" found in Nonomura 1922, pp. 325–44.

However, humans are frequently subject to different, sometimes contradictory, desires. Nor are they able to fulfill their desires at all times. This then leads to the second stage that Nonomura envisions. As he notes, in many cases a particular human desire may conflict with other human desires, forcing humans to choose between them. At such times, "discrimination" (*funbetsu* 分別) arises. Following the dictates of the will, humans are constantly discriminating which object of desire to pursue and which to cast aside in order to adjust themselves to their environment.

In these ways, Nonomura sees human existence as the continual process of adapting oneself to the environment through desire and discrimination. However, another problem arises here. This is the fact that adaptation through discrimination invariably leads to an impasse. This is the final stage that Nonomura envisions, and it is here that religion becomes necessary. In its relationship with others, self-centered human discrimination is frequently thwarted from achieving its goals and comes to an impasse. Interaction with others often leads to situations that are disagreeable to oneself and contrary to one's wishes (*funyoi* 不如意). When confronted with such others, the discriminating self necessarily falls into despair. Nonomura calls such a self that has fallen into despair a "heteronomous self," since it is a self that is ensnared by others. In other words, the discriminating self always comes into conflict with things beyond its control, and experiences the despair that results from not being able to do as it pleases. Nonomura states that the core problem of religion is to be found at this point, where one finds oneself driven to despair when confronted by problems beyond one's control.

> Finally, we have to discuss the role of religion. First of all, the greatest problem is when, in the face of an irresistible situation, our will cannot adapt itself and the path of discrimination is lost. At this point, will one's life simply end in failure? To put it another way, is there no way out of such a situation? . . . From a scientific standpoint, there is only one principle. Let us take the example of Buddhism. Using simple words, Buddhism teaches us "not to abide in anything." In this case, the only way to save oneself from the impasse created by discrimination is simply not to abide in discrimination.[20]

When Nonomura defines religion as the destruction of a heteronomous self, he is referring to the destruction of the self-centered human discrimination that invites despair by setting oneself at the mercy of others. The final and highest stage of adaptation to the environment refers to a way of life that refuses to take such self-centered human discrimination as the absolute basis of one's existence. "Not to abide in anything" means to reject any way of life that construes self-centered human discrimination as the ground on which to construct one's life.

[20] Nonomura 1939, pp. 81–82.

Furthermore, the positive definition of religion as the method for bringing about the creation of an autonomous self, points to the importance of discovering the true living subject that transcends discrimination, that is to say, a true religious subjectivity (*shutai* 主体). He says:

> Inasmuch as it is free of discrimination, we can speak of a nondiscriminating self as opposed to a discriminating self. Buddhism speaks of both non-self and the Great Self but we can say that non-self refers to the situation wherein the heteronomous self has been destroyed while the Great Self refers to the autonomous self.[21]

For Nonomura, this is the essence of religion. Moreover, he avers that a religion that does not have such characteristics cannot be called a religion.

I will refrain from delving any further into Nonomura's theory of religion, but it must be pointed out that such an understanding deviates from that style of religious studies that seeks to explain the significance of religion through an exhaustive investigation of all types of religious expression.

The Essence of Religion and Its Expressions

Nonomura viewed Pure Land Buddhism from the standpoint of his theory of religion discussed above. For Nonomura, Pure Land Buddhism, including Shin Buddhism, represented the most highly evolved form of Buddhist thought, and thus is worthy of scientific investigation by a scholar of religion. However, he also argued that, during the course of its development, elements that were extraneous to its essence were incorporated into Pure Land Buddhism as a form of "expedient means" (*hōben* 方便) to make its teachings accessible to its believers. Moreover, he argued that such expedient elements were misunderstood as being essential to Pure Land Buddhism, with the result that the true essence of Pure Land Buddhism was lost.

Nonomura's argument is premised on his notion that a religion can be distinguished into two parts: its essence and its expression. He proposed that the essence of a religion, which he believed was common to all religions, could be extracted through the analyses of individual religions. In contrast, their expression refers to the various forms such as words or images through which the essence was revealed and transmitted. Even though he saw all such expressions of religious truth as deriving from a common essence, he also maintained that they are specific to their historical situations and cultural milieus.

Moreover, Nonomura divided the expressions of religions into three categories—philosophical, literary, and mythological. He defined philosophical expression as an attempt to transmit the essence of religion directly by using complex language. The philosophi-

[21] Nonomura 1922, pp. 90–91.

cal expression of Buddhism, for example, was to be found in the teachings of the Kegon 華厳 and Tendai 天台 schools. Literary expression was employed, for example, by Zen 禅, which used poetry and the *mondō* 問答 question-and-answer format to transmit its essence in a metaphorical way. The mythological expression which employed stories to describe the essence of religion was used by Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity. For Nonomura, the philosophical, literary, and mythological expressions of religion were not to be confused with the essence of religion. The appearances of such forms of expression were merely the product of a particular age and social context. They were not indispensable to the religions themselves but incidental, and could therefore be discarded.

As noted above, Nonomura's project of destroying Amida and the Pure Land was based on this premise. He describes the mythological forms of expression in Pure Land Buddhism, such as the Pure Land and Amida Buddha, as expedient means intended to guide people of medieval and premodern times to an understanding of the essence of its teachings, and held that they did not themselves constitute that essence.

In calling for a renewal of Pure Land Buddhism, Nonomura has a tendency to reject the notions of the Pure Land and Amida as being unscientific. In *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism*, he states that the goal of his project to renew Pure Land Buddhism is to proclaim Pure Land Buddhism as a religion and vanquish the Pure Land Buddhism which had become encrusted with superstition. In Nonomura's views, the Pure Land and Amida Buddha were included among the notions that should be deemed superstitions. He says:

> Can it be said that faith in Amida Tathāgata, the main character of a myth that developed in response to religious yearnings, is always an expression of true religious faith? Put differently, does Amida Tathāgata, in whatever form he takes, always qualify as the object of religious worship? . . . As long as Yakushi 薬師 Tathāgata is seen as being no more than an eye doctor or Jizō 地蔵 Bodhisattva as being no more than an obstetrician, they do not have the qualification for being called an object of faith. Once we realize this, we have to confirm that, depending on the nature of the faith of the person worshipping him, even Amida Tathāgata, just like Yakushi Tathāgata and Jizō Bodhisattva, definitely does not have the qualification to be an object of religious worship. . . . On the contrary, the thing that Pure Land Buddhists must acutely realize is that, because their faith is weak, they do not realize this and worship Amida Tathāgata in a totally misplaced way. Therefore, Amida Tathāgata completely loses his qualifications for being an object of religious worship and ends up being just a main character in a worldly mythology.[22]

[22] Nonomura 1922, pp. 120–23.

As we saw above, Nonomura recognizes religion as something which seeks to destroy the heteronomous self and leads to the attainment of a true subjectivity. As a result of such an understanding of religion, Nonomura held that a Yakushi Tathāgata who "is seen as being no more than an eye doctor," or a Jizō Bodhisattva who is seen "as being no more than an obstetrician"—this is to say, Buddhas and bodhisattvas to which one prayed for worldly benefits—could never have the "qualifications for being an object of religious worship" since they only increase one's heteronomous dependence on others. Prayers to such deities are attempts to resolve the despair brought on by the discriminative self by relying on the power of the discriminative self itself. The object of such faith is nothing more than the product of human delusion. Nonomura includes them under the category of "childish religions" (*yōchi na shūkyō* 幼稚な宗教) and even refuses to consider them within his theory of religion.

Objects of faith that are the product of human delusion are never directly linked to the essence of religion. For Nonomura, Pure Land Buddhism had lost sight of its true essence, and it was for this reason that he felt compelled to destroy it. However, it should be noted that while Nonomura considered the first half of *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism* to be focused on the destruction of Pure Land Buddhism (*hakairon*), he held that its second half is concerned with its construction (*kensetsuron*).[23] In the former, Nonomura sought to destroy the Pure Land faith that, he believed, had fallen into superstition. But in the second part, he sought to reconfirm the notion of Amida as an object of worship in a truly religious sense. It is to this point that I will now turn.

Nonomura's Understanding of Amida

How, then, does Nonomura understand Amida Buddha who is truly worthy of being an object of religious worship? He does not discuss this issue at length in either *A Critique of Pure Land Buddhism* or in *The Essentials of Religious Studies*. This is because the aim of the former work was to destroy Pure Land Buddhism that had fallen into superstition and that of the latter work was to discuss, not a specific religion like Shin Buddhism, but religion as a whole. However, in works like *Zen to nenbutsu* 禅と念仏 (Zen and Nenbutsu), a collection of essays published in 1926, and *Introduction to Religious Studies*, written toward the end of his life, Nonomura develops his understanding of the true object of worship in Pure Land Buddhism. I will not discuss his ideas in detail here but will focus only on two of his points: First, Amida Buddha is a Dharma body as compassionate means (*hōben hosshin* 方便法身) and sentient beings apprehend him by means of their faith; and second, since this Dharma body as compassionate means has its basis in the formless Dharma body as suchness (*hosshō hosshin* 法性法身), the former

[23] Nonomura 1923, pp. 5–6.

functions to lead a person who has attained faith to the Dharma body as suchness, or reality itself.[24]

The notions of "Dharma body as suchness" and "Dharma body as compassionate means" hold central places in Shin Buddhist discourse. The former refers to the Dharma body that is identified with suchness or reality itself. However, since this Dharma body is none other than suchness itself, it is said to be beyond all form and shape, making it impossible for it to be apprehended through human discrimination. As Shinran says in his *Yuishinshō mon'i* 唯信鈔文意 (Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone"), "Dharma-body as suchness has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it."[25] As a result, the Dharma body as suchness cannot, in and of itself, function to lead living beings to liberation. Hence, the Dharma body of suchness appeared in the world as Dharmākara Bodhisattva, who set forth—and eventually fulfilled—his forty-eight vows, thereby establishing his Pure Land and becoming Amida Buddha. In Shin Buddhist discourse, this Amida is called Dharma body as compassionate means and indicates the Buddha who manifested himself in tangible form to save all beings.

Nonomura avails himself of such notions in order to explain his understanding of Amida Buddha. In his view, Amida Buddha, the object of worship in Shin Buddhism, is the Dharma body of compassionate means. However, Nonomura emphasizes that Amida does not exist apart from faith. Amida is not an objectively existing transcendental savior buddha residing far away in the Pure Land but is a reality that can only be apprehended in faith. Yet, Nonomura also underscores the fact that the Dharma body as compassionate means has its basis in the formless Dharma body as suchness and that the former functions to lead a person of faith to the latter. In other words, Amida (or the Dharma body as compassionate means) is a dynamic activity that opens up the world that transcends all discrimination (the Dharma body of suchness) to a person through his or her faith. Since this is what brings about the destruction of the heteronomous self and the attainment of one's autonomous self, only such a buddha is worthy of being called a true object of worship in Shin Buddhism.

Conclusion

The first half of the 1920s was a momentous time for the Nishi Honganji and Bukkyō University. At this time, Bukkyō University had applied to be upgraded as a full-fledged university under the University Ordinance (Daigakurei 大学令) of 1918 and, in conjunction with this program, changed its name to Ryukoku University in 1922. Ōe Osamu has argued that this reflected the wish "to incorporate new trends

[24] For details, see Kigoshi 2010, pp. 70–72.

[25] Hirota et al. 1997, vol. 1, p. 461.

of thought then current in Japan and recreate Shin Buddhist studies through active exchange with other fields of scholarship, thereby responding to the demands of the times."[26] Furthermore, as noted above, the Nishi Honganji was in the midst of preparing for the seven-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Shin Buddhism, which was to take place the following year.

It was under such extraordinary circumstances that Nonomura decided to call for the renewal of Pure Land Buddhism to sweep away what he considered superstitious expressions and restore the original essence of the Pure Land teachings. We must not overlook the fact that Nonomura's convictions were based on a desire to restore the original essence of the Pure Land teachings as true Buddhism. The destruction of the Pure Land meant for him not only a transformation of Shin Buddhism for the modern period but a return to the roots of Shin Buddhism as a part of original Buddhism.

The stance adopted by Nonomura toward religion was first and foremost that of a Shin Buddhist minister. But he was also strongly conscious of the need for Shin Buddhism to conform to modernity. He categorized Shin Buddhism as a religion that employs mythological expression and argued that religions that do so needed to progress in response to the requirements of the twentieth century. However, for Nonomura, the modern age, infused by reason brought by the Enlightenment, was a period that, by stripping away the aspects of religious expression derived from cultural and historical limitations, would allow Shin Buddhism to directly express the essence of religion. According to him, the modern age for Shin Buddhism—which has mythological aspects such as Amida and the Pure Land—was not a period of crisis that meant the destruction of the sect, but rather a chance to revive its original essence.

(Translated by Elizabeth Tinsley and Robert F. Rhodes)

[26] Ōe 1974, pp. 41–42.

REFERENCES

Dainihon Hyakkajisho Hensansho 大日本百科辞書編纂所, ed. 1912–26. *Tetsugaku daijisho* 哲学大辞書. 5 vols. Tokyo: Dōbunkan.

Hirota, Dennis, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, and Ryushin Uryuzu, trans. 1997. *The Collected Works of Shinran*. 2 vols. Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha.

Isomae Jun'ichi 磯前順一 and Fukazawa Hidetaka 深澤秀隆, eds. 2002. *Kindai Nihon ni okeru chishikijin to shūkyō: Anesaki Masaharu no kiseki* 近代日本における知識人と宗教：姉崎正治の軌跡. Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan.

Kigoshi Yasushi 木越康. 2010. "Nonomura Naotaro to 'Jōdokyō kakushin' ron" 野々村直太郎と「浄土教革新」論. *Shinshū kenkyū* 真宗研究 54, pp. 55–74.

Nonomura Naotarō 野々村直太郎. 1901. *Kyūshinkō ka shinshinkō ka* 旧信仰か新信仰か. Kyoto: Kendō Shoin.

———. 1922. *Shūkyōgaku yōron* 宗教学要論. Tokyo: Naigai Shuppan.

———. 1923. *Jōdokyō hihan* 浄土教批判. Kyoto: Chūgai Shuppan.

———. 1926. *Zen to nenbutsu* 禅と念仏. Kyoto: Chūgai Shuppan.

———. 1939. *Shūkyōgaku nyūmon* 宗教学入門. Kyoto: Ritsumeikan Shuppanbu.

Ōe Osamu 大江修. 1974. "Nonomura Naotarō cho 'Jōdokyō hihan' no ichi kōsatsu" 野々村直太郎著『浄土教批判』の一考察. *Shinshū kenkyūkai kiyō* 真宗研究会紀要 6, pp. 41–58.

Ōtori Kazuma 大取一馬, ed. 2001. *Jōdo shinshū gyokurin wakashū* 浄土真宗玉林和歌集. Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten.