

The Latter-day View of History and the
Transition of Faith through the Three-fold
Stage of Spiritual Attainment

—With Regard to the Date of the First Year of Gennin—

It is unable for us to establish the date of authorship of Shinran's main work, the *Kyō-gyō-shin-shō*, since it is unrecorded in the post-script of this work alone of all his many other writings. According to the close examination of the Bandō MS, the only one extant of his own handwriting, it was ascertained that there had been an original MS preceding it that is no longer extant.

In the sixth volume of the *Kyō-gyō-shin-shō*, the date of "the first year of Gennin" is recorded as a point of departure for calculating the date of the Buddha's demise in view of the historical outlook of the Three Ages of Right Dharma, Semblance of Dharma, and the Latter-day. This date was once taken to be that of the authorship of this work, but at present various views are presented as to how this date should be interpreted. It may be possible, however, for us to surmise that this date, unable as it may for us to identify it with the actual date of authorship of this work, may point to some memorable occasion and serve as a clue to understanding the purport of its authorship.

In this thesis, I have taken up the Buddhist view of history of the three-fold phase: Right Dharma, Semblance of Dharma, and the Latter-day, with its rise and fall as the central theme, with which the doctrinal system of the *Kyō-gyō-shin-shō* was deeply permeated, by way of examining various views presented by contemporary historians as to how this date should be interpreted.

By the awakening to this view of history, the independence of Pure Land Buddhism by Honen and Shinran was achieved, thereby a religious reformation characteristically Japanese was accomplished; liberation of Buddhism for the benefit of common people, to which little attention had theretofore been paid by Japan's traditional Buddhist orders, was

realized ; and a laymen's school free from the shackle of precepts came to be developed.

In the light of such historical events, we find in the sixth volume of the *Kyō-gō-shin-shō* Shinran's corresponding inner process of faith, together with the historical view of the Three Ages. It is his confession of the transition, or the process of refinement, of his own faith through the three-fold stage of spiritual attainment corresponding to the three vows. Through the process of deepening his realization or faith in Amida's Will, he succeeded in revealing the real purport of a religious awareness, the essence of which consists in "faith only." What I have thus attempted in this thesis is to clarify the way in which the great Path of the Nembutsu of True Pure Land School has been revealed through the mutual permeation and interaction of the Latter-day view of history and the process of the refinement of faith through the three-fold stage of spiritual attainment corresponding to Dharmākara's nineteenth, twentieth, and eighteenth vows.

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