

## Shinran's *Shōzōmatsu* View of History

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Within the history of Pure Land Buddhism, the problem of time and human capacities has held a central place in determining its view of Buddhism. However this has led people to understand Pure Land Buddhism as a special form of Buddhism. It has been accused of switching the problem of “eradicating defilements and attaining Buddhahood” into that of “time and human capacities” and for this reason it has been considered a degenerate form of Buddhism. This criticism has invariably been directed towards Pure Land Buddhism in both China and Japan. Mahāyāna Buddhism which developed in China and Japan presupposed that all beings can attain Buddha, as represented in the One Buddha Vehicle doctrine of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra's* doctrine that “all beings without exception possess the Buddha nature.” In this sense, it is only natural that Buddhahood should be available to all beings without regard to “time” and “human capacities.”

However, the problem of time and capacities becomes important when it is realized that this Mahāyāna preposition cannot be actualized in practice and the need to reflect once again on one's existence and the actual state of Buddhism becomes acute. For individual beings who exist not on the level of universal principle but within the concrete limits of “time and human capacities”, the important problem is how to actualize concretely the Buddhist path. Moreover, it is what makes necessary the existence of Buddhism.

Based on such concern, I have taken up Shinran's *Shōzōmatsu* view of history as found in the Chapter on the *Hōbenkeshindo* (Transformed

Buddha and Land) of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. In this chapter, Shinran quotes almost in its entirety Saichō's *Mappō-tōmyōki*. Why did Shinran have to concern himself with the *Shōzōmatsu* view of history? In my paper I will treat this problem by first considering the main theme and the development of the Chapter on the *Hōbenkeshindo*, and next by seeing how Shinran read the *Mappō-tōmyōki*.

First, Shinran's understanding of the *Shōzōmatsu* view of history is related to the Path of the Sages/Pure Land tenet classification. Second Shinran attempts to determine the profound meaning of Śākyamuni's death in connection with the later development of Buddhism. In connection with the second point, the important problem is what Śākyamuni preached as his final teaching at the time of his decease. Basing himself on the *Ta chih tu lun*, Shinran develops the problems which the Buddha's disciples faced after Śākyamuni's decease. Third, Shinran understands the *Mappō-tōmyōki* not only as expounding the *Shōzōmatsu* view of history. Through it he treats the problem of whether or not we can assent to the reality of Buddhism as historically transmitted as being Śākyamuni's teaching.

The reason why Shinran takes up the *Shōzōmatsu* view of history is because he wanted to study the reason why Buddhism had to be preached in terms of the universal problem of relationship between Buddhism and humanity. For this reason, I have limited myself to the *Kyōgyōshinshō* in discussing this problem in this paper. In any discussion of the *Shōzōmatsu* view of history, and the Latter Dharma (*mappō*) in particular, actual phenomena become problematic. In Japan, from the Heian period to the Kamakura period, the notion of the Latter Dharma became accepted in society. Moreover, the spread of the belief in the Latter Dharma is said to have led to the growth of Pure Land Buddhism. However it cannot be said that the religious meaning of the doctrine expressed in the view of history based on the three periods of the True, Semblance and Latter Dharmas (*Shōzōmatsu*) has been fully elucidated. How should we understand the

*Shōzōmatsu* view of history as the Buddha's teaching that leads us to self-realization? I believe it is possible to see that this was Shinran's concern through a reading of the Chapter on the *Hōbenkeshindo* in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Basically, the point which I wanted to discuss in this paper was to see how Shinran understood the reason why the *Shōzōmatsu* view of history had to be preached as the Buddha's teaching, and what problems this teaching poses for us.