

The Creation of Tradition as an Exercise in Doctrinal Classification: Shinran's Forging of the Seven Shin Patriarchs

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The great beings, teachers of this school, and others who spread the sutras
Liberate countless beings of extreme defilement and evil.
All clerics and lay present here should, together in the same mind,
Just rely wholly on the teachings of these eminent monks.

Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), *Shōshinge* 正信偈

SHINRAN CLOSES his *Shōshin nenbutsu ge* 正信念仏偈 (Hymn on True Awakening through the *Nenbutsu*) with the above admonition to simply rely on the teachings of the seven Shin patriarchs that are summarized in its latter half. This encouragement to look to his predecessors could be seen as an expression of his humble attitude toward his teacher, Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), and the six other Pure Land thinkers of India, China, and Japan whom he introduces in that poem: Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250), Vasubandhu (c. 400–480), Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?), Daochuo 道綽 (562–645), Shandao 善導 (613–681), and Genshin 源信 (942–1017). That is indeed how much of the Shin tradition in Japan has viewed this passage and Shinran's general stance toward these patriarchs. This understanding of Shinran's view of the Pure Land tradition that preceded him is epitomized by a statement attributed to Shinran by Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–1499) in one of his letters: “When preaching the Dharma of the Tathāgata to sentient beings of the ten directions, one just becomes the representative of the Tathāgata. I, Shinran, do not spread any other unusual Dharma, but simply believe the teachings of the Tathāgata myself, and preach them to others.”¹

¹ *Ofumi* 御文, vol. 1, letter 1. *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書 (hereafter, SSZ), vol. 3, p. 402. See Rogers and Rogers 1996, p. 9.

While this statement may deeply impress us with the depth of Shinran's piety and the extent of his humble self-reflection, it in fact obscures the very real contributions that Shinran has made to Pure Land thought and religiosity. Perhaps the most important thing that gets lost when taking these two statements at face value is that this list of seven figures from Buddhist history was Shinran's original creation. While Hōnen, Daochuo, and Tanluan all acknowledged predecessors and drew heavily on their works, Shinran is the first Pure Land thinker to systematically shape a coherent tradition of authorities who clearly laid out the Pure Land message before him. As we will see below, that process was actually a very creative one which required an active reinterpretation of their Pure Land works. Both the *Shōshinge* and the *Kōsō wasan* 高僧和讃 (Hymns in Praise of Eminent Monks) present the seven patriarchs as seen through Shinran's eyes and the radical interpretive lens that he used to view them. Much of this paper is devoted to an examination of Shinran's creative reworking of the thought of these seven figures into a body of ideas that reflect his original grasp of the nature of salvation through the working of Amida Buddha. While Shinran calls the faithful to "just rely wholly on the teachings of these eminent monks," his reliance is not simple blind acceptance, but entails a sharper analytical edge rooted in the more foundational authority of the *Wuliangshoujing* 無量壽經 (Sutra on Immeasurable Life, hereafter, *Larger Sutra*).²

The retrospective creation of lineages has received much attention in Chan/Zen scholarship, especially since in that tradition lineage charts and transmission records have served as a major source of authority and were seen as proof of the authenticity of a given monk's awakening. In such research, then, "forging" was often taken in the negative sense, such that the emphasis lay in showing at what point the unbroken lineages tracing back to Śākyamuni could be seen as genuinely reflecting historical fact and where they diverged from it.³ Shinran's lineage instead focused on philosophical or doctrinal rather than temporal or historical continuity, so that "forging" here takes on the more positive meaning of reshaping disparate, less than coherent elements into a new whole. As such, Shinran's creation of tradition presents a different set of problems for scholarly investigation from Chan lineages: What are the criteria for inclusion? What are the binding elements that bring cohesion to the whole? What "impurities" does Shinran "smelt out" in the forging process?

² T no. 360, 12: 265c–279a.

³ See, for instance, Faure 1997.

When considering these problems, we should keep in mind that Shinran is not necessarily attempting to subsume the authority of these figures to himself or his own teachings. Our image of the early forgers of Chan lineage charts is generally a negative one of less than pious monks claiming transmission from a teacher with credentials reaching back to India and thereby staking out authority for themselves as representatives of that weighty tradition. Although we cannot deny that in some ways Shinran may have been borrowing the authority of these seven eminent monks, his lineage creation is better seen as being founded squarely in the Buddhist hermeneutical tradition and motivated more by the concerns of that tradition than a simple assumption of the authority of great figures of Buddhist antiquity such as Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. That is to say, Shinran's selection of the seven Shin patriarchs and his representation of their thought can be viewed as an outgrowth of his participation in the broader Buddhist tradition of "doctrinal classification" (*kyōsō hanjaku* 教相判釈, Ch. *jiaoxiang panshi*).⁴

In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran systematically sets forth an argument that the true essence of Buddhism (*shinshū* 真宗) lies in the Pure Land teachings of the *Larger Sutra*. In the *Shōshinge*, which is a pivotal part of that work, he writes that "[Śākyamuni] Tathāgata's reason for appearing in this world was just to preach the ocean of Amida's original vow"⁵ and "the treatise writers of India and the eminent monks of China and Japan have made apparent the true intent of the Great Sage's coming into the world,

⁴ The issue of Shinran's selection of the seven patriarchs and its difference from previous formulations of Pure Land lineages has been a major theme in Shin doctrinal studies since the inception of the Edo period academic institutions, if not earlier in the works of Zonkaku 存覚 (1290–1373) and Rennyō. Ekū 惠空 (1644–1721), one of the earliest leaders of Higashi Honganji's doctrinal studies, wrote a short tract discussing the issue at length (Ekū 1975). Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881–1976) and Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875–1971), representatives of the Ōtani-ha's modernist strand of doctrinal studies, also wrote book-length works on the issue early in their careers (Kaneko 1986 and Soga 1970, respectively). This article relies heavily on these earlier works in Japanese, which regard the need to lay out a system of patriarchs as a natural part of the process of doctrinal classification (given its prominent place in the *Senjaku shū*'s chapter on doctrinal classification) but do not explicitly discuss it in such terms. In this sense, this article aims to both introduce this pervasive stance in the sectarian academic tradition and also articulate it for an English-language audience, because it is in many ways left undiscussed as a basic, shared assumption within the realm of doctrinal studies. Several attempts have been made to address the issue of Shinran's selection of the patriarchs in English, but have not treated it in the detail that is found below (see, for instance, Pye 1986, Corless 1997, Mied 1999).

⁵ *Teihon Kyōgyōshinshō* 定本教行信証 (hereafter, TK), p. 86. See *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter, CWS), vol. 1, p. 70.

clarifying how the Tathāgata's original vow responds to human beings."⁶ These references to Śākyamuni's true intent in preaching the Dharma are clearly in the vein of the Chinese doctrinal classification systems that attempted to systematically organize the body of scripture attributed to the Buddha into something with a coherent thrust and message. Early Chinese Buddhist uses of the term *zong* 宗—which ultimately came to mean school or denomination, but can also be translated as essence—appear in these classification systems from the fifth and early sixth centuries,⁷ and the creation of schools of Buddhism was from that time intimately linked with this interpretive process of adducing Śākyamuni's genuine intent from a mass of voluminous and at times self-contradictory scripture. Shinran's reference to "*jōdo shinshū*" 浄土真宗 in the opening line of the body of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* is a clear expression of his intention to join in this tradition by laying out his understanding of Śākyamuni's essential message and thereby the foundations for a school of True Pure Land Buddhism.⁸

By the time that Shinran was writing, the term *zong*, or *shū* in Japanese, had taken on this meaning of school, while retaining the earlier sense of essence, and schools were inextricably connected with the issue of lineage and historical transmission. The retrospective creation of Dharma lineages in the course of creating a school had become commonplace in both China and Japan. The Tiantai 天台 and Tendai lineages trace themselves past Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) to Huisi 慧思 (515–577) and Huiwen 慧文 (n.d.), although their doctrinal classification systems and lineages were not completed until well after these figures passed away. Fazang 法藏 (643–712), the author of

⁶ TK, p. 87. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 70.

⁷ Zhiyi reports that three of the seven classification systems developed in northern China before him used the term *zong* to describe categories for classifying Śākyamuni's teachings. See his *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (T no. 1716, 33: 801b12–29). For a brief overview of these early classification systems, see Tsukamoto 1942, pp. 126–38.

⁸ TK, p. 9; CWS translates the passage as "Reverently contemplating the true essence of the Pure Land way" (vol. 1, p. 7). The discussion in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*'s chapter on teaching is centered around Shinran's proof that preaching the *Larger Sutra* is the "great matter for which Śākyamuni appeared in the world" (*shusse no daiji* 出世の大事), another critical element in doctrinal classification schemes (see TK, p. 9; CWS, vol. 1, p. 7).

In thinking about the hermeneutics of determining the "essence" of a religious tradition, this paper draws on Michael Pye's introduction to theologian Ernst Troeltsch's discussion of determining the "essence of Christianity." Pye quotes Troeltsch's statement "To define the essence is to shape it afresh" (1973, p. 16), which seems to apply to the process of determining Śākyamuni's true intention as undertaken by the various authors of doctrinal classification systems, and especially to Shinran's work in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.

the Huayan 華嚴 school's classification system, is, like Zhiyi, counted as the third patriarch of that school, although it is questionable whether either envisioned himself as such. In Shinran's day, lineage was so closely tied to the issue of the creation of a school⁹ that Hōnen felt the need to lay out his view of the Pure Land school's Chinese lineage in the chapter on doctrinal classification in his *Senjaku hongan nenbutsu shū* 選択本願念仏集 (Collection on the Nenbutsu Selected in the Original Vow, hereafter, *Senjaku shū*),¹⁰ and Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213) ridiculed him for attempting to create a school without a bona fide lineage in the “Kōfukuji sōjō” 興福寺奏状 (An Appeal to the Court by Kōfukuji).¹¹ In all of these cases, but especially with Hōnen, the designation as a patriarch had less to do with the physical encounter of one studying under another and more to do with philosophical or doctrinal continuity among patriarchs and, more importantly, with that school's view of the “essence of Buddhism” as laid out in the foundational scriptures.

Perhaps because of the criticisms by his contemporaries such as Jōkei, Shinran's formulation of the seven Shin patriarchs sets great weight on doctrinal continuity with the teaching of the original vows laid out in the *Larger Sutra*. He not only holds that Śākyamuni appeared in the world to preach this

⁹ This assumption that lineage is critical to the creation of a school has been incorporated into Western scholarship on Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. For instance, Gezt, referencing Stanley Weinstein's entry on the schools of Chinese Buddhism in Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion*, argues that the Chinese term *zong* when used in the sense of school connotes “the possession of one or more distinctive characteristics: a discrete self-contained doctrinal system, a continuous lineage, and/or some form of institutional autonomy” (1999, p. 477). When thinking about the relationship between patriarchal lineage and schools, we should note that none of the Pure Land lineages presented below made any claim to temporal continuity (something that was far more important in Chan/Zen lineages) and also that institutional autonomy for the Pure Land and True Pure Land schools in Japan was something that was negotiated for centuries after the passing of Hōnen and Shinran. In that sense, the schools that these two figures founded were primarily schools in the first sense in Getz's definition. That is to say, they were delineations of the true essence or centerpiece of Buddhism, instead of the creation of the distinct institutional entities we imagine today when thinking of Japanese Buddhist schools. The issue of exactly when lineage and school became so closely intertwined is an important one that falls outside the scope of this study. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that by the start of the Kamakura period in Japan, it was a widely held assumption that a school necessarily had some form of transmission lineage. The same can be said, I think, for China at this time, but that is the topic of another paper.

¹⁰ SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 933–34. See Augustine and Kondō 1997, p. 15.

¹¹ Kamata and Tanaka 1971, p. 312.

sutra, but describes its essence (*shūchi* 宗致) as the teachings regarding the vows and its substance (*tai* 体) as the name of Amida.¹² The patriarchs are presented as the people who truly understood that fundamental message in the sutra, clarified it, and lived it. The opening passage of the section on the patriarchs' teachings in the *Shōshinge* quoted above praises them not just because they made apparent Śākyamuni's true intention in coming into the world, but also because through their lives and practice they clarified how the original vow works within, or responds to the needs of, human beings ("ki ni ōzeru" 機に応ぜる¹³). The Shin patriarchs are presented as both clarifiers of Śākyamuni's teachings and as evidence of their efficacy. While Shinran highly values their exegetical contributions to the understanding of the *Larger Sutra*, he sets even more store by the fact that they attested to those teachings in both word and deed. As such, in his presentation of the seven patriarchs, Shinran is not writing an intellectual history of the development of Pure Land Buddhism but a history of how the original vow has worked within the world.

The patriarchs play a dual role in Shinran's thought: they are insightful expositors on the significance of the vows and the name and also living proof that the original vow works in this world. From the perspective of the former, they are teachers who clarified the essential message of Buddhism, while from the latter, they are expressions of Amida's salvific working. As the former, they are engaged in the work of systematizing Śākyamuni's teaching, and as the latter, in the work of praising Amida's name as the fulfillment of the seventeenth vow.¹⁴ As the former, there is naturally a progression and development of doctrinal concepts between patriarchs, such that Tanluan's thought is viewed as building on that of Vasubandhu and Nāgārjuna, just as Hōnen's is seen as building upon Shandao's and Genshin's. But as the latter, where all seven masters are viewed as myriad Buddhas of the ten directions praising the virtues of Amida's name, their essential message is exactly the same and is epitomized in the name itself, which Shinran sees as the "substance" of the *Larger Sutra*. It is in light of this latter significance

¹² TK, p. 9; CWS, vol. 1, p. 7. From Shinran's perspective, the name and the vow are the two ways in which Amida works in the world to liberate sentient beings. The name is the vehicle through which sentient beings are awakened to the working of the vow on a variety of levels, in particular as the *shinjin* 信心 of sentient beings themselves.

¹³ TK, p. 87. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 70.

¹⁴ The fulfillment of the seventeenth vow, which states that the myriad Buddhas in the ten directions will praise Amida's virtues by chanting his name, plays a critical role in Shinran's soteriology, as this chanting is what brings about *shinjin* in those who hear it. See T 12: 268a24–25; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 9; Inagaki 1995, p. 34 for the vow and T 12: 272b10–11; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 24; Inagaki 1995, p. 54 for the fulfillment passage.

which Shinran attributes to the patriarchs that we should read the closing passage of the *Shōshinge* quoted at the outset of this paper. That is, Shinran is neither brashly appropriating the authority of his predecessors, claiming that his ideas are really theirs, nor piously refusing to take credit for his original ideas. Instead, he is presenting their work (and his own as well) as concomitant with the name, which for him is the substance of the most essential teaching of Śākyamuni. In this sense, he is calling the faithful to simply rely on the message contained in the name as expressed in the words of the patriarchs.

This multi-layered significance that Shinran attributes to the patriarchs gives rise to the complex and sometimes conflicting way that he treats their ideas and their works. Shinran is famous for rewriting and reinterpreting passages from scripture, not just from the works of the patriarchs, but also from the sutras themselves. As we will see below, he attributes certain ideas to the patriarchs which are in fact his own, in a sense putting words into their mouths. He is not, however, running slipshod over their ideas, freely taking license, but instead reading their works as expressions or explications of the fundamental message of the foundational sutra, the *Larger Sutra*. The rewriting that he does is in light of its message. As such, Shinran's forging of the seven patriarchs is very much a part of the process of doctrinal classification, not so much in the sense of appropriating the authority of doctrinal antecedents for his original position, but more in the sense of showing how his predecessors grasped, clarified, and proved what he sees to be Śākyamuni's essential teaching.

In the following, I will consider Shinran's presentation of the seven Shin patriarchs in detail. First, I will discuss earlier formulations of transmission lineages within Pure Land thought, focusing on those by Daochuo and Hōnen. Then, I will briefly discuss the two primary criteria that Shinran employed in selecting these seven thinkers: their attention to the original vow and to Amida's name (which, as we have seen, are the core of Buddhism for Shinran). Third, I will introduce passages from the *Shōshinge* that show how Shinran molded the works of the patriarchs into his image of what the *Larger Sutra* is trying to say.¹⁵ Finally, I will briefly discuss how Shinran's view of the patriarchs has functioned within the Shin community when he was alive, after Rennyō, and down to the present.

¹⁵ The *Kōsō wasan* is also very much of interest in exploring how Shinran represents this tradition, but I will limit my discussion to the *Shōshinge* here because of space considerations.

Pure Land Lineages before Shinran

Appeals to patriarchal lineages as a source of religious authority have a long history in China. Even before Dao'an 道安 (312/314–385) suggested Śākyamuni's *shi* 稊 (Jp. *shaku*) be used as the monastic surname, monks took part of the names of their teachers as their own. Lineage charts, however, are a much later phenomenon. Among Pure Land figures, Daochuo, of the seventh century, is the first to set out a patriarchal lineage with Indian roots. Chinese Pure Land lineages, which count Dao'an's disciple Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–412) as their first patriarch, were not laid out until the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.¹⁶ In Japan, Hōnen formulated a lineage of five Chinese Pure Land patriarchs as part of his creation of the Jōdoshū 淨土宗, or Pure Land school. The lineages presented by Daochuo and Hōnen are, to an extent, precedents for Shinran's seven Shin patriarchs, but as we will see, they vary in some important ways.

In part 1 of chapter 4 of the *Anleji* 安樂集, Daochuo presents a list of six accomplished masters, who “all made detailed investigations of scripture and took refuge in the Pure Land.”¹⁷ Daochuo starts off this section in a humble way, saying, “I am covered over with the five obstructions,¹⁸ as though facing a wall, so how could I myself possibly achieve [such insight]? It is only because I have sought far and wide and looked deeply into the scriptures that I am able to respect this lineage of teachers.” He then provides a list of his six teachers, praising each of them in a few short phrases. The list begins with the prolific translator Bodhiruci (Ch. Putiliuzhi 菩提流支, n.d.–527), who translated the *Wuliangshoujing youpotishe yuanshengji* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈 (Hymn on the Aspiration for Birth as an Upadeśa on the Sutra on Immeasurable Life; hereafter, *Treatise on the Pure Land*)¹⁹ and is credited with leading Tanluan to become a Pure Land follower. Next comes Huichong 慧寵 (n.d.), who Daochuo says avoided fame and self-seeking. It is unclear who exactly Huichong was, although some scholars point to the possibility that Daochuo is referring to Daochong 道寵 (n.d.), a disciple of Bodhiruci's who appears in volume 7

¹⁶ Sakurabe 1993, pp. 283–84.

¹⁷ T no. 1958, 47: 14b6–7; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 413.

¹⁸ *Wuyi* 五翳. The *Daban niepanjing* 大般涅槃經 (T nos. 374 and 375) uses this term to describe five obstructions to sunlight and moonlight: smoke, dust, clouds, fog, and *rāhula* (barriers). See T 12: 516c27–517a2.

¹⁹ T no. 1524, 26: 230c14–233a29.

of the *Xugaosengzhuan* 續高僧傳 and is said to have been very influential in the first half of the sixth century.²⁰ The particulars of the life and teaching of the third individual on this list, Daochang 道場 (n.d.), are also unclear. Some scholars point to a reference to a Daochang of Dajisi 大集寺 in Ye 鄴 in the *Xugaosengzhuan*, but he appears only in passing in another person's biography.²¹ Daochuo praises him as a great preacher who always had large audiences of monastics at his lectures.

Tanluan appears fourth in the list.²² Daochuo was born twenty years after Tanluan's passing, but Jiakai 迦才 (n.d.) indicates that Tanluan's thought was instrumental in bringing Daochuo into the Pure Land tradition,²³ and the *Anleji* bears that out with over twenty direct and indirect quotations from Tanluan's works.²⁴ Daochuo also spent the latter half of his life at Xuanzhongsì 玄中寺, which Tanluan founded. Tanluan figures largely in the second half of the section we are considering here, as Daochuo relays a few incidents from his life and passing as proof that all six eminent predecessors he lists were reborn in the Pure Land. Since three of Tanluan's Pure Land works are extant today, there are detailed biographies for him in the *Xugaosengzhuan* and Jiakai's *Jingtulun*, and Shinran held him to be so important, he is the individual that we know the most about on Daochuo's list. He is also the one with the clearest Pure Land credentials. The previous two Chinese monks must have been Pure Land devotees, but there is no evidence of it other than their mention in the *Anleji*. Bodhiruci, since he suggested Tanluan take an interest in Pure Land Buddhism rather than Daoism and also translated Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*, surely was to some degree a Pure Land Buddhist. However, the majority of scriptures that he translated were only tangentially related to Pure Land Buddhism. In Daochuo's list, Tanluan is praised as one of unrivaled accomplishment who was revered by people of both northern and southern China, which is likely a reference to the respect that was held for Tanluan by the emperors of those two countries.

²⁰ T no. 2060, 50: 482b16–c23. The Edo-period Shin scholar Kōgatsuin Jinrei 香月院深励 (1749–1817) makes this suggestion in his lecture on the *Anleji* (Kōgatsuin Jinrei 1912, vol. 5, p. 31).

²¹ T 50: 632c5–6. See Kōgatsuin Jinrei 1912, vol. 5, p. 31.

²² Tanluan's biography appears in the *Xugaosengzhuan* at T 50: 470a13–c15 and the *Jingtulun* 淨土論 at T no. 1963, 47: 97c9–13.

²³ *Jingtulun*, T 47: 98b8–14.

²⁴ See Conway 2008 for a chart comparing Daochuo's quotations with Tanluan's originals.

The fifth entry in Daochuo's list is almost as obscure as the second and third. He gives the name Dahai 大海 (n.d.), who is thought to be the Huihai 慧海 (541–609) that Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) describes in volume 12 of the *Xugaosengzhuan*.²⁵ According to that record, after the court began allowing the construction of temples again in the aftermath of the Zhou 周 dynasty's persecution of Buddhism, Huihai worked strenuously to construct a temple in the likes of Amida Buddha's Pure Land in Jiangdu 江都 (present-day Yangzhou 揚州), and received for it a painting of Amida purportedly drawn by an Indian monk who had used his extraordinary powers to visit that land.²⁶ Huihai is said to have been a devout Pure Land practitioner who lived at this temple until his death in 609. His other biographies provide essentially the same information as Daoxuan's. If we accept that Dahai is indeed Huikai, then he can be counted second after Tanluan as clearly being a Pure Land devotee. Daoxuan describes how Huihai was a master of *pratyutpanna-samādhi* (*banzhou sanmei* 般舟三昧), which resonates with Daochuo's praise of Dahai ("this great master alone stands out in meditative practices"). Although separated by a considerable geographic distance, Daochuo and Huihai were countrymen, both living in the Northern Qi 齊 before it was invaded by the Zhou and then governed by the unifying Sui 隋. In fact, all five of the Chinese monks on Daochuo's list were active within the geographic borders of the Qi.

The final name on the list is thought to be a reference to one of the Qi court's administrators of the Buddhist community. Daochuo writes Shangtong 上統, but Hōnen rewrites this as "Fashang Fashi" 法上法師,²⁷ indicating that "tong" 統 refers to the post that Fashang 法上 (495–580) held as chief administrator (*datong* 大統) of the Buddhist clergy.²⁸ Daoxuan describes how Fashang served meritoriously as the head of the Buddhist institution for forty years after being appointed by the emperor and how his disciples became the intellectual leaders of Chinese Buddhism after his passing. The biography, however, makes no mention of Fashang's Pure Land devotion, and although it lists a plethora of his works that are no longer extant today, none of them are directly related to Pure Land topics. Fashang's disciple, Huiyuan 慧遠 (523–592) of Jingyingsi 淨影寺 did write commentaries on both the *Larger Sutra* and the *Guanwuliangshoujing* 觀無量壽經 (Sutra on the Contemplation

²⁵ T 50: 515c6–516a6.

²⁶ T 50: 515c11–c23.

²⁷ T 83: 2c10–11; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 934; Augustine and Kondō 1997, p. 15

²⁸ T 50: 485a1–486a6

of Immeasurable Life; T no. 365; hereafter, *Contemplation Sutra*), but that is only tangential evidence for Fashang's interest in Pure Land matters. In fact, Daoxuan explains that Fashang was a devotee of Maitreya and that he spent the last years of his life, which coincided with the Zhou persecution, in a secluded temple which was centered around an image of that future Buddha. Daoxuan writes that, wishing for the renewed flourishing of Buddhism and the opportunity to encounter Maitreya, Fashang passed away after chanting the *Vimalakīrti* and *Śrīmālā* sutras—not that he aspired for birth in the Pure Land and chanted Amida's name.²⁹ Although Fashang's Pure Land credentials are a bit suspect, he certainly had a significant influence on Daochuo in that he calculated the date of Śākyamuni's passing, arguing that approximately 1,465 years had passed between then and 576. Based on this calculation, the period of the latter Dharma—which figures largely in Daochuo's selection of the name as the most appropriate practice for the times—would have begun in 611.

Daochuo's list of virtuous Pure Land predecessors is, thus, deficient both in terms of the extant materials that we have to evaluate their thought and in the extent to which several of these predecessors really deserve to be counted as Pure Land patriarchs.³⁰ Daochuo does say that all six of them aspired to birth in the Pure Land and that their deaths were accompanied by auspicious signs that proved that they had fulfilled their goal, but the only one of the six that merited quoting in the *Anleji* was Tanluan, which indicates that Daochuo was not heavily influenced intellectually by the others. One thing that does stand out in the biographies of Huihai and Fashang is the references to the *Nirvana Sutra*,³¹ which may signal that Daochuo was influenced by their interpretations of that work, as he studied it extensively before becoming a Pure Land devotee. There is also a problem in trying to understand this list as a lineage as such in that Tanluan, who is very clearly a direct disciple of Bodhiruci, appears fourth in the list. Taken together with the fact that transmission lineages were not as important at this time as they would become later, it seems that we can say that Daochuo is not really laying out a lineage chart or system of patriarchs, but instead pointing out that many famous, influential monks of the preceding hundred years had

²⁹ T 50: 485c1–10.

³⁰ Robert Sharf briefly introduces this section from the *Anleji* and draws a similar conclusion, calling it a “proto-lineage” and arguing that “the relationship between some of these figures and Pure Land thought is far from clear” (2002, pp. 288–89).

³¹ These references appear at T 50: 516a1 and T 50: 485a23, respectively.

been Pure Land devotees. His formulation, then, is a far cry from Shinran's, where doctrinal continuity is paramount and all of the patriarchs have extant works that give us a clear idea of their thought.³²

Next, let us turn to Hōnen's formulation of what came to be known as the five Pure Land patriarchs. As I mentioned in the introduction, in his *Senjaku shū*, a sort of declaration of independence for the Pure Land school of Buddhism, Hōnen lays out a list of Pure Land patriarchs different from those presented by Daochuo or any other Chinese thinkers. This formulation comes relatively late in Hōnen's teaching career and is likely a response to pressures from his contemporaries to provide some backing for his ideas about the central role of the *nenbutsu* 念仏 in liberation. The list is made up of the five Chinese monks Tanluan, Daochuo, Shandao, Huaigan 懷感 (n.d.), and Shaokang 少康 (n.d.–805). The first three appear on Shinran's list, while the latter two are Chinese successors to Shandao's thought. We will look more carefully at them when we consider Hōnen's list in its context in the *Senjaku shū*. First, let us consider some of the circumstances that surrounded Hōnen's presentation.

In a lecture that Hōnen delivered at Tōdaiji 東大寺 in 1186, just ten years after leaving Mt. Hiei 比叡 to begin his ministry in the exclusive practice of the *nenbutsu*, he states: "There is no dharma transmission lineage, no face-to-face rite of approval. I have simply shallowly delved into the intent of the Buddha and squinted from a distance into the Sage's teachings. I discuss the significance of birth in the Pure Land reliant wholly on the one who has attained *samādhi* [i.e., Shandao]." ³³ Here, Hōnen makes no claim to a Pure Land lineage, but instead relies solely on the authority of Shandao, whom he respected as his only true teacher.³⁴ Early references to the five patriarchs appear in *Hōnen shōnin go-seppō no koto* 法然上人御說法事 and *Amidakyō shaku* 阿彌陀經釈. Hōnen also has a work entitled *Ruijū jōdo goso den* 類聚淨土五祖伝, where he brings together the biographies of these five monks from sources such as the *Xugaosengzhuàn*, the *Songgaosengzhuàn* 宋高僧伝 (Song Biographies of Eminent Monks; T no. 2061), the *Wangsheng*

³² Some Edo period scholars argue that one of the conditions for inclusion as a Shin patriarch was the existence of a work or works. See Dōon 1974, p. 29.

³³ *Kango tōroku* 漢語燈錄 in *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen shōnin zenshū* 昭和新修法然上人全集 (hereafter, SHZ), p. 145. For a slightly different version see T no. 2611, 83: 132a9–12; SSZ, vol. 4, p. 383.

³⁴ See his justification for his famous stance of "relying completely on the single master Shandao" (*henne Zendō isshi* 偏依善導一師) in the *Senjaku shū* at T 83: 19a5–c24; SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 990–93.

xifang jingtu ruiying zhuan 往生西方淨土瑞應傳 (Biographical Records of the Miraculous Events of Births in the Western Pure Land; T no. 2070), and the *Xinxiu wangsheng zhuan* 新修往生傳 (Newly Edited Biographical Records on Births; X no. 1546) by Wanggu 王古 (n.d.).

Determining the exact timing of his formulation of this list of patriarchs is complicated by stories that appear in his biographies about a single scroll containing the pictures of these five monks that was brought back by Chōgen 重源 (1121–1206) from China in 1168. According to one of these biographies, *Hōnen shōnin gyōjō ezu* 法然上人行狀繪図, Hōnen told Chōgen about the existence of such scrolls before his departure and instructed him to be certain to bring back a copy.³⁵ Another, the *Hōnen shōnin denki* 法然上人伝記 in nine volumes relays that Hōnen had already completed his *Ruijū jōdo goso den* by the time Chōgen returned and was gratified to find that his selection of the patriarchs matched perfectly with the ones selected by the Chinese artists for such scrolls.³⁶ *Hōnen shōnin gyōjō ezu* also relays that Hōnen gave a lecture on the three Pure Land sutras at Tōdaiji in 1191 in order to help Chōgen collect funds for the reconstruction of the Great Buddha statue, where services were performed in front of Chōgen's scroll.³⁷ All of these stories are rather dubious, but they do tell us two things: there was a strongly felt need for an authentic Chinese transmission lineage during and after Hōnen's lifetime, which Hōnen responded to (likely in the late 1180s) with the formulation of his five patriarchs. Scholars today agree that it is near certain that the five patriarchs were not designated by some unknown author in China.³⁸ It is also highly unlikely that Hōnen would have formulated this lineage prior to Chōgen's trip to China, since he only discovered the true significance of Shandao's teaching about the *nenbutsu* in 1176. In any case, these stories serve as excellent evidence that in Hōnen and Shinran's time the assumption that a lineage transmission from China was a necessary element for an authentic school was widely held.

The beginning of Hōnen's discussion of lineage and transmission in the *Senjaku shū* also bears this out. He opens this portion of the text by saying, "The various schools of the path of sages each have their own transmission lineage (*shishi sōjō* 師資相承)," then gives examples of the lineages in the

³⁵ *Hōnen shōnin gyōjō ezu*, vol. 6 (Ikawa 1967, p. 29).

³⁶ Ikawa 1967, p. 356. This biography is thought to have been completed some time between 1306 and 1310. See Kaneko 1994, p. 591, n. 3. The passage is very similar in form to the one in vol. 6 of *Hōnen shōnin gyōjō ezu* cited above.

³⁷ *Hōnen shōnin gyōjō ezu*, vol. 30 (Ikawa 1967, p. 197).

³⁸ See Ishii 2000, p. 85.

Tendai and Shingon 真言 schools before rhetorically asking, “Does the Pure Land school have a transmission lineage?” Hōnen poses this question in such a way as to put his Pure Land school on par with the Tendai and Shingon ones. We should note that this question comes at the end of the first chapter of the *Senjaku shū*, where Hōnen is very consciously engaged in the work of laying out his doctrinal classification system. He begins the chapter by quoting at length from Daochuo’s *Anleji*, where the path of sages and the Pure Land path are distinguished from each other. Then, he likens this division of Buddhism into two types to the distinctions made in the classification schemes of the Hossō 法相, Sanron 三論, Kegon 華嚴, Tendai, and Shingon schools. After that, he quotes works by Wonhyo 元曉 (617–686) and Kuiji 窺基 (632–682) to cite continental precedence for the use of the term “Pure Land school” (*Jōdoshū* 淨土宗). Hōnen goes on to distinguish this school from the eight established Japanese schools and then delineate the three foundational sutras of the Pure Land school, which he says “properly clarify birth in the Pure Land,” while also enumerating other scriptures that “additionally clarify birth in the Pure Land.” It is after laying out these basic principles of the school and quoting further evidence from Tanluan that he turns to the issue of lineage. From this context, we can see that for Hōnen, lineage was equally important in the process of doctrinal classification as defining his criteria for viewing Śākyamuni’s teachings and choosing the fundamental scriptures of his school. Shinran has a similar attitude, although his choice of scriptures is more narrow, focused just on the *Larger Sutra*, while his choice of patriarchs is broader, ranging from India through China and into Japan.

In response to the question about lineage in the Pure Land school, Hōnen writes that there are, generally speaking, three strands of Pure Land Buddhism in China: those that follow Huiyuan of Lushan 廬山, those that follow Cimin 慈愍 (680–748), and those in the line of Daochuo and Shandao. He says that he will discuss the issue of lineage transmission based on the latter, and writes that there are two different descriptions within that tradition as well: one based on Daochuo’s *Anleji* (discussed above) and another that appears in the biographies of eminent monks from the Tang 唐 and Song 宋 period. Although he just lists these two lineages together without any additional commentary on their appropriateness, the facts that the latter lineage is upheld as the patriarchs of the Pure Land school, that Hōnen refers to them elsewhere as such, and that he collected their biographies in a single work with the term “five patriarchs” in its title, all indicate that he prioritized this original formulation over Daochuo’s.

The first three patriarchs in Hōnen's list also appear in Shinran's and there is very clear doctrinal continuity between their works. By this point in the *Senjaku shū*, Hōnen has already quoted at length from Daochuo and Tanluan. Shandao, who is also quoted extensively in the *Senjaku shū*, was clearly influenced by the ideas of these two thinkers in his selection of the chanting of the name as the "rightly settled act because it accords with Amida's vow."³⁹ This selection, in turn, was critical in Hōnen's decision to devote himself entirely to the single-minded practice of the *nenbutsu*. These three have been treated extensively in other English works, so I will not consider them in detail here. Suffice it to say that although the first two never met in person, their works are all intimately related. Hōnen chose these three because their works lay the doctrinal foundations for viewing the Pure Land teachings as the center of Śākyamuni's message and the chanting of the name as the most effective Buddhist practice.

The last two patriarchs on the list followed after Shandao's teachings. Huaigan was his direct disciple and is said to have struggled to believe the teachings of the *nianfo* (Jp. *nenbutsu*) until he attained a vision of the tuft of hair on Amida Buddha's forehead in a meditative state. His biography in the *Songgaosengzhuan* relates that he despaired of attaining such a vision after practicing for three weeks and decided to commit suicide, but was stopped by Shandao and encouraged to continue his practices. After three years of meditative exercises, Huaigan finally attained *nianfo sanmei* 念仏三昧 and thus assurance that Shandao's teachings were correct.⁴⁰ Huaigan is the author of the compendium *Shijingtuqunyulun* 釈淨土群疑論 (Treatise Commenting on the Multitude of Doubts about the Pure Land), which addresses the many criticisms leveled at Pure Land Buddhism in Sui and Tang China. Huaigan was originally a student of the Faxiang 法相 school, and the work, which addresses 121 different issues ranging from the nature of Amida and his Pure Land to the proper practices necessary to attain *nianfo sanmei*, shows much evidence of that scholastic background. Hōnen's emphasis on Shandao as an authority because he had attained this state of meditative concentration and his inclusion of Huaigan (another person who solidified his faith in Amida through meditative practice) in his list of patriarchs is a bit confusing in light of his staunch stance that the only necessary condition for attaining birth in the Pure Land was single-minded calling of Amida's name. It is likely that

³⁹ From the final volume of Shandao's commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*. T no. 1753, 37: 272b08; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 538.

⁴⁰ T 50: 738c11–24.

Huaigan's interest in meditation and the Faxiang doctrinal categories that he brought to bear on his understanding of Amida served to disqualify him from Shinran's list. However, figures such as Daochuo and Genshin also encouraged meditative practices in their works, so this was not necessarily a hard and fast condition for Shinran. In any case, Hōnen clearly saw enough doctrinal consistency between Shandao's message of exclusive practice of the *nianfo* and Huaigan's Pure Land Buddhism to include him in the list of patriarchs. Although Hōnen only quotes Huaigan once as an authority in the *Senjaku shū*,⁴¹ he does so more in some of his other works.⁴²

The fifth and final patriarch listed by Hōnen is Shaokang, one of the two Chinese monks who, according to his biographies, was revered as a later incarnation of Shandao in China. Hōnen quotes three sources for Shaokang's biography in his *Ruiju jōdo goso den*: the *Songgaosengzhuan*, Wanggu's *Xinxiu wangsheng zhuan*, and the *Longshu zengguang jingtu wen* 龍舒增廣淨土文 (Longshu's Compendium of Passages on the Pure Land, T no. 1970) by Wang Rixiu 王日休 (n.d.–1173). Each relays four principle incidents in Shaokang's life. The first is his encounter with a scroll containing a passage from Shandao's works.⁴³ The characters on the scroll emitted light when he entered the hall where it was kept at Baimasi 白馬寺, and again when he asked for proof that he had a karmic connection with the Pure Land teachings. After that, the biographies tell us, Shaokang visited a hall in Chang'an 長安 where a statue of Shandao was enshrined. There, the statue came to life and told Shaokang that if he would propagate Shandao's teachings, he would be born together with Shandao in the Pure Land. Taking this message to heart, Shaokang took up the work of spreading the *nianfo* in an area where those teachings had not been transmitted. He started by gathering children and promising them a small coin for each time they chanted Amida Buddha's name. Over time, he began to give one coin to any person who chanted the name ten times. After a year of this practice, the people on the streets in that area would all chant the name whenever they saw his face. Toward the end of his life, Shaokang is said to have moved to Niaolongshan 烏龍山, where he held services on the days of the Buddhist fast that were attended by over three thousand people. When he would chant the name of the Buddha before the crowd, some would see incarnations of the Buddha leaving his mouth, much like in the famous statue of the Japanese monk

⁴¹ SSZ, vol. 1, p. 946.

⁴² See, for instance, *Kango tōroku*, T 83: 112b22–c7.

⁴³ The biographies call the passage “Shandao's passage on the teaching of the Western Land,” but it is unclear what passage this refers to.

Kūya 空也 (903–972). Although these incidents attest to Shaokang’s Pure Land devotion, there are few sources for us to evaluate the content of his Pure Land thought. He is listed as the co-author of the *Wangsheng xifang jingtu ruiying zhuan*, but at least one of the people who appears in that text was born after his passing, which makes this attribution suspect. In any case, as a biographical collection, it offers little information as to Shaokang’s understanding of Pure Land doctrine. Really, the only hint that we have about his grasp of the Pure Land teachings is the reference to the scroll with Shandao’s passage on it, and even that is rather cryptic.

Hōnen’s list is, then, far closer to a lineage containing patriarchs than the one proposed by Daochuo in the seventh century. We should note, however, that there are significant temporal gaps at two links in the patriarchal transmission. Tanluan and Daochuo never met, and Shaokang seems to have no discernable connection with Huaigan, only encountering Shandao through miracles and texts. Hōnen himself is separated by a gap of almost four centuries from Shaokang and can scarcely claim to have any clear doctrinal connection to him. Thus, we get the sense that, although there is definitely a stronger unifying thread compared to Daochuo’s list, Hōnen has laid out his lineage more as a response to his critics, who expected that any respectable Buddhist school have a Chinese lineage, than in an attempt to clarify the true essence of Buddhism. As we can see from his early refusal to lay out a lineage and his continued insistence throughout his preaching career that he relied solely on Shandao, for Hōnen himself, those teachings were sufficient. It is only as he tries to lay out a foundation for the Pure Land school through the creation of a doctrinal classification system that he formulates his list of five patriarchs. That is to say, although Hōnen includes his transmission lineage in the chapter on doctrinal classification in the *Senjaku shū*, that lineage was less an outgrowth of the process of determining the central message of the Buddha and more an appendage to his proof of the centrality of the Pure Land tradition to Buddhism as a whole, added to make that message more persuasive to his contemporaries. Shinran’s lineage, however, is forged in the fire of the process of determining Śākyamuni’s central message: the patriarchs are chosen entirely in light of their stance regarding Amida’s vows and the name that represents them.

Śākyamuni’s Fundamental Message and Shinran’s Criteria for the Seven Patriarchs

The early Chinese doctrinal classification systems were created in an attempt to order the mass of scripture that had been introduced into China over the

course of several hundred years by a large number of people who upheld a wide variety of Buddhisms. The Śākyamuni of the *Āgamas* preached a wildly different message from the Śākyamuni of the Mahayana *Nirvana Sutra*. The Śākyamuni of the *Lotus Sutra* even stated outright that his teachings in the *Āgamas* were expedients to be discarded. Thus, a critical element in doctrinal classification systems was determining which sutra, which teaching, represented Śākyamuni's fundamental message, in other words, his reason for coming into the world. In the chapter on teaching in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran makes the assertion that that sutra was the *Larger Sutra*. On the basis of this stance, he proceeds to select the seven patriarchs for the Shin school as the monks who truly "made apparent the true intent of the Great Sage's coming into the world." In this section, we will look briefly into Shinran's argument in the chapter on teaching, and then see how that essential message is present (but not always apparent) in the thought of the seven thinkers Shinran chose as patriarchs.

Compared to the other chapters in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, the chapter on teaching is very short. It covers less than a page in the Taishō canon, but it is here that Shinran makes the argument that Śākyamuni came into the world to preach the *Larger Sutra* and that all other sutras should be viewed in light of its message. His presentation is so simple that it is difficult to even call it an argument; it is better characterized as a declaration. He begins by writing, "The clear expression of the true teaching is none other than the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*."⁴⁴ He follows this statement with a short description of the general message of the sutra, saying that it describes how Amida gave rise to his vows, "opened up the storehouse of the Dharma, and out of pity for small, ordinary beings, selected and bestowed the treasure of virtues upon them"⁴⁵ and how "Śākyamuni appeared in the world to clarify the teaching of the way, and tried to liberate the multitude of sentient beings by bestowing the true and real benefit upon them."⁴⁶ Both of these statements are based on passages from within the *Larger Sutra* itself.⁴⁷ The Shin exegetical tradition interprets the "treasure of virtues" to refer to the name that Dharmākara Bodhisattva perfected through his practices and the "true and real benefit" to refer to Amida's original vow.⁴⁸ The passage

⁴⁴ T 83: 589b7; TK, p. 9. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 7.

⁴⁵ T 83: 589b8–9; TK, p. 9. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 7.

⁴⁶ T 83: 589b9–10; TK, p. 9. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 7.

⁴⁷ T 12: 269b23 and T 12: 266c12–13.

⁴⁸ In the *Ichinen tanen mon'i* 一念多念文意 (On the Meaning of the Passages regarding Once-calling and Many-calling), Shinran makes the association between the "benefit that is

I quoted in the introduction about the essence and the substance of the sutra⁴⁹ being the vow and the name appears next, followed by the question, “How do we know that [preaching this sutra] is the great matter for which Śākyamuni appeared in the world?”

Shinran answers this question with a quotation from the sutra itself where Śākyamuni states clearly that he came into the world to provide sentient beings with the “true and real benefit” in exactly the same words that Shinran used to describe the general message of the sutra. Shinran comments in detail on this passage in his *Ichinen tanen mon’i*, where he writes,

“The true and real benefit” refers to Amida’s original vow. This is referred to as the “true and real benefit” because the reason that the myriad Buddhas have come into their various worlds is that they take preaching the power of Amida’s vow and liberating all sentient beings as their most fundamental intention (*hongai* 本懷). Therefore, this [message] is called the direct preaching for which the myriad Buddhas appeared in the world. Generally speaking, the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates are all expedient good acts for [birth in] the Pure Land. They are called the “necessary gates,” or the “provisional gates.”⁵⁰

In this passage, the term *hongai* refers again to the true intention for which Buddhas appear in the world. Here, Shinran says that not only Śākyamuni but all Buddhas in all worlds appear for the very purpose of preaching Amida’s original vow and that it is this message that truly benefits sentient beings by bringing them to Buddhahood. He further states that all other teachings of the Buddhas—the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates—are none other than provisional, expedient means that are ultimately intended to lead sentient beings to the teaching of the vow and the message contained in the name.

true and real” and the original vow (*Teihon Shinran shōnin zenshū* 定本親鸞聖人全集, hereafter, TSZ, vol. 3, “Wabun hen” 和文篇, p. 144). He also intimates that the treasure of virtues is the name (TSZ, vol. 3, “Wabun hen,” pp. 145, 147).

⁴⁹ Delineating the “essence” (*zong* 宗, Jp. *shū*) and substance (*ti* 体, Jp. *tai*) of a sutra has deep roots in the Chinese Buddhist exegetical tradition. As a set of concepts for understanding the message of a sutra, they appear in Zhiyi’s *Miaofa lianhuajing xuanyi* (T 33: 779a6ff, 794b8ff.). Even early in the Pure Land tradition, Tanluan writes that the substance of the three Pure Land sutras is Amida’s name (T no. 1819 40: 826b12–14; SSZ, vol. 1, 279). Hōnen also writes that the essence of the three Pure Land sutras lies in their selection of the *nenbutsu* as the essential practice.

⁵⁰ TSZ, vol. 3, “Wabun hen,” p. 144.

The above should be sufficient to show that from Shinran's perspective, the fundamental teaching of Buddhism is laid out in the *Larger Sutra* and that the organizing principles that he employs to understand Buddhism as a whole are the vows and the name that are preached there. These are the central categories in his doctrinal classification system, and are present to varying degrees in the thought of all seven of the Shin patriarchs. Nāgārjuna suggests calling the name of various Buddhas and bodhisattvas as an easy path to achieving the stage of non-retrogression and takes particular note of Amida because of his original vow. Vasubandhu starts his verses in the *Treatise on the Pure Land* with a version of Amida's name and makes passing reference to Amida's vows. Tanluan draws on the thought of these two to lay out a path to birth in the Pure Land and ultimate Buddhahood based on the chanting of the name and the working of the vows. Daochuo rephrases the eighteenth vow to include a direct reference to Amida's name. Shandao goes further and designates the name as the proper Buddhist practice because it accords with the vow. Genshin designates the eighteenth vow as a special one, interpreting it to mean that just thinking of the name ten times will necessarily lead to birth. Hōnen presents the *nenbutsu* as the best possible Buddhist practice, because it is selected in the original vow, and because the name contains all the virtues of Amida.

Although all seven figures take both the name and the vow to be important, their role is not as clear as it is in Shinran's thought. Nāgārjuna talks of other Buddhas than Amida and his reference to the vow is passing. The bulk of Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land* is focused on meditative practice. Tanluan follows to a large extent Vasubandhu's emphasis on meditation. Daochuo not only talks of meditative concentration, he also lays out many different practices that he says lead to birth. Shandao, too, puts much emphasis on meditative exercises in his commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, in spite of his conclusion that chanting the name is the right practice. Genshin clearly sees attaining a vision of Amida and the Pure Land in a meditative state as the proper practice of the *nenbutsu*, and presents chanting as an expedient path for the "utterly evil."⁵¹ Hōnen's thought, although thorough about chanting the name, focuses primarily on the eighteenth vow, leaving issues such as self power and other power in the *nenbutsu* and faith unresolved. Shinran's forging of the system of the seven patriarchs involves a reworking of their thought that serves to resolve several of these issues.

But before embarking on our investigation of how Shinran employs the principles of the vows and the name in his re-presentation of the thought of

⁵¹ *Ōjō yōshū* 往生要集, T no. 2682, 84: 77a19; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 882.

the patriarchs, I need to clarify how the name and the vows are related in Shinran's soteriology. More than anything, we should keep in mind that the name is the tool by which Amida fulfills the eighteenth vow, the vow that all faithful will be born in the Pure Land. In order to understand this, let us look at the passage in the *Larger Sutra* which forms the basis of Shinran's soteriology. The passage, which is called the "fulfillment passage" of the seventeenth and eighteenth vows, reads as follows:

All Buddhas, Tathāgatas, in the ten directions, as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, together praise the inconceivable, supernal virtues of Amitāyus. All sentient beings who, having heard his name, rejoice in faith, remember him even once, have the sincere mind transferred to them from the Tathāgata, and aspire to be born in that land, will at that moment attain birth and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression.⁵²

The first sentence describes the fulfillment of Dharmākara's seventeenth vow, that all Buddhas in the ten directions will praise his name. The second describes the fulfillment of the eighteenth vow, which holds that all sentient beings who have faith in Amida and sincerely wish to be born in the Pure Land will be born there unflinchingly. Notice how the passage states that faith arises in those who hear the name. That is to say, hearing of the name chanted by the myriad Buddhas gives rise to faith in the hearers. The name serves as the vehicle by which faith is awakened in sentient beings.

Also notice that the name is not necessarily limited to the six syllables of *Namu Amida Butsu* 南無阿彌陀仏, but instead refers to any words that "praise the inconceivable, supernal virtues of Amitāyus." While the six syllables express those virtues in very stark terms,⁵³ this passage allows for a very broad interpretation of what qualifies as the name. In a sense, any praise of Amida that leads sentient beings to rejoice and have faith is sufficient to be called an expression of the name, and any individual who gives voice to such praise takes on the role of one of the myriad Buddhas. Shinran's chapter on practice is a discussion of the seventeenth vow and his quotations there from the seven Shin patriarchs and people of other schools that praise Amida can be read as expressions of that name, or praise by which Shinran attained a moment of faith.

⁵² T 12: 272b10–13; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 24; see Inagaki 1995, p. 54.

⁵³ The six characters can be translated into English as "Bow down before the Buddha of immeasurable light and life," such that all of Amida's virtues are represented in the terse three character phrase *amida* 阿彌陀, which refer to these two fundamental aspects of that Buddha.

As we saw in the introduction, the dual status that Shinran accords to the patriarchs (that of historical teacher who preaches doctrine in a given time and place, and that of one of the myriad Buddhas who sings the praises of Amida through the name) complicates the way that he represents their thought. In one sense, they belong to the category of doctrinal classification as Shinran's intellectual and doctrinal predecessors. But in another, they belong to the category of soteriology: it is their praise of Amida that brought about the salvific moment of faith in Shinran. This creates a delicate situation where Shinran can critically evaluate their thought in terms of his fundamental principles for understanding Buddhism, but also accords them absolute respect as the representatives and clarifiers of those principles. On the one hand, then, their thought is subject to molding by Shinran based on his understanding of the message contained in the name. On the other, however, they have an absolute position above Shinran, because they are the source of his faith and insight into the working of Amida. Thus, Shinran closes the preface to the *Kyōgyōshinshō* saying,

Rare is it to come upon the sacred scriptures from the westward land of India and the commentaries of the masters of China and Japan, but now I have been able to encounter them. Rare is it to hear them, but already I have been able to hear. Reverently entrusting myself to the teaching, practice, and realization that are the true essence of the Pure Land way, I am especially aware of the profundity of the Tathagata's benevolence. Here I rejoice in what I have heard and extol what I have attained.⁵⁴

Here, Shinran is saying that his work in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* is nothing more than rejoicing over the message that he has heard from his predecessors and extolling the benefits that he has gained from that message. In this passage, Shinran is very much looking up to his predecessors as Buddhas, as the source of his awakening and faith. That is, he is speaking of them on a soteriological level here. But in the body of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, which is Shinran's systematization of that awakening based on his discerned principles of doctrinal classification, Shinran actively reinterprets their ideas, rewriting their works through creative interpretive techniques. On this level of doctrinal classification, the patriarchs are subject to Shinran's forging, where he brings to bear the principles that he has adduced from the *Larger Sutra*. In our next section, we will consider that process in more detail.

⁵⁴ CWS, vol. 1, p. 4. See T 83: 589a19–21; TK, p. 7.

Shinran's Creative Rewriting of the Thought of the Patriarchs

The *Kyōgyōshinshō* abounds with instances of Shinran shaping the message of his predecessors to fit his argument. He does this using a variety of textual and interpretive devices, especially the creative addition of Japanese grammatical markers to classical Chinese texts, as well as redaction and interpolation within quotations. In the *Shōshinge* and the *Kōsō wasan*, where Shinran sings the praises of the seven patriarchs, however, he does not employ such subtle textual manipulations, but instead presents their thought in his own words. In the following, I will examine several cases where he makes creative leaps in his representations of their thought, looking at the gap between his presentation and the original texts in hopes of shedding some light on the essence of the tradition that he is trying to create. Due to space limitations I will only point out one example of a creative interpretation that Shinran makes for each patriarch. This is just a sampling, as his reworking is in fact more extensive.

Shinran begins his praise of Nāgārjuna in the *Shōshinge* with a reference to a passage in the *Rulenggajing* 入楞伽經 where Śākyamuni predicts that Nāgārjuna will be born in southern India, preach the Mahayana Dharma, attain the stage of unsurpassed joy (*kangiji* 歡喜地), and be born in Amida's Pure Land.⁵⁵ He then praises Nāgārjuna's division of Buddhist practice into two types (easy and difficult). These two statements both have clear scriptural precedence, but the last two verses involve Shinran's creative interpretation. In the first of them, Shinran writes that Nāgārjuna held that "when one holds Amida's original vow in mind steadfastly, one naturally, immediately enters into the state of the definitely settled."⁵⁶ Although Nāgārjuna does make reference to Amida's original vow, holding steadfastly in mind, and immediate entry into the state of the definitely settled, he does not link these three elements together. Shinran, however, based on his interpretation of the fulfillment passage of the eighteenth vow, takes these three disparate elements from the chapter on easy practice in the *Shizhupiposhalun* 十住毘婆沙論 and knits them together into a single sentence, adding the term "naturally" (*jinen* 自然), which does not appear in the original, but plays an important role in Shinran's view of the working of Amida's vows.

Nāgārjuna's chapter on easy practice presents the chanting of the names of a variety of Buddhas and bodhisattvas as an easy practice that will lead to the attainment of the stage of non-retrogression, or as he puts it, the "state

⁵⁵ T no. 671, 16: 569a24–21.

⁵⁶ TK, p. 88. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 71.

of the definitely settled” (*hitsujō* 必定). After providing a long list of names of the Buddhas of the present in the ten directions and encouraging people to chant their names and hold them steadfastly in mind, Nāgārjuna writes, “Amida Buddha’s original vow also states that when a person thinks of me, chants my name, and takes refuge, then they enter into the state of the definitely settled and attain unsurpassed enlightenment.”⁵⁷ He then once more encourages constantly holding the names of these various Buddhas in mind.⁵⁸ In that sense, Nāgārjuna is referring to Amida and the original vow virtually as an appendage to a list of other Buddhas, and is not necessarily calling his readers to particularly hold that vow (or name) in mind. Shinran, however, in his passage in the *Shōshinge*, interprets Nāgārjuna’s passing reference to mean that he is particularly focusing on Amida and calling his readers not just to keep the name of the Buddha in mind, but to hold steadfastly to the original vow. In Nāgārjuna’s verses following his reference to the vow, he also writes, “when a person can think of the virtues of this Buddha’s immeasurable power, they will immediately enter the state of the definitely settled.”⁵⁹ Although Nāgārjuna is clearly referring to Amida here, he does not talk about the vow, but instead writes about reflecting on Amida’s immeasurable power as the cause that leads to entry into the state of the definitely settled. Shinran not only says that Nāgārjuna encouraged considering the vow as the cause for attaining that state, but also adds a reference to how that occurs “naturally,” which is based on Shinran’s understanding of the working of Amida’s vow as other power.

As such, Shinran’s presentation in the *Shōshinge* is making some interpretive leaps and attributing ideas to Nāgārjuna that are not necessarily present in the *Shizhupiposhalun*. That does not mean, however, that Shinran is simply putting words into Nāgārjuna’s mouth. Shinran’s interpretation of Nāgārjuna’s understanding of the role of Amida’s vow in the process of attaining the stage of non-retrogression is firmly based in his view of the passage that describes the fulfillment of the eighteenth vow quoted in the previous section. That passage states, “All sentient beings who . . . have the sincere mind transferred to them from the Tathāgata, and aspire to be born in that land, will at that moment attain birth and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression.” From Shinran’s perspective, that “sincere mind” is none

⁵⁷ T no. 1521, 26: 43a9–11; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 259.

⁵⁸ Shinran’s quotation of this passage in the chapter on practice entails a drastic reworking, such that all these Buddhas are presented as steadfastly holding Amida Buddha’s vow in their minds, but a careful discussion of this quote falls outside the scope of this paper. See TK, p. 30–31; CWS, vol. 1, pp. 23.

⁵⁹ T 26: 43a19–20; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 260.

other than the mind of Amida's vow, which works within sentient beings as *shinjin*. So for Shinran, "holding Amida's vow steadfastly in mind" is synonymous with "naturally" having "the sincere mind transferred . . . from the Tathāgata," and this is what the *Larger Sutra* sets forth as the condition for entering the stage of non-retrogression. Shinran reads the *Shizhupiposhalun* from this interpretive stance, and therefore makes Nāgārjuna speak of "holding steadfastly in mind."

Shinran makes similar interpretive leaps in his presentation of Vasubandhu's thought in the *Shōshinge*. We should note that Vasubandhu only refers to Amida Buddha's original vows three times in the *Treatise on the Pure Land*, and he never uses the term to "transcend crosswise" (*ōchō* 横超), which plays a significant role in Shinran's thought and was first brought into the Pure Land tradition by Shandao. In spite of these two facts, Shinran praises Vasubandhu in the *Shōshinge* saying, "Based on the sutras, he made the true and real apparent and clarified the great vow of crosswise transcendence."⁶⁰ This verse represents Shinran's original reading of the *Treatise on the Pure Land* based on the *Larger Sutra*. In the *Treatise on the Pure Land*, Vasubandhu states in verse, "Contemplating the power of that Buddha's original vow, none of those who encounter it will pass in vain."⁶¹ Later, he comments on this verse, saying, "Upon seeing that Buddha, those bodhisattvas who have not attained a pure mind become ultimately able to attain a Dharma-body of equality, such that they ultimately attain the same insight into the equanimity of quiescence as the bodhisattvas who have attained the mind of purity and the other bodhisattvas of the higher stages."⁶² Although this passage is Vasubandhu's commentary on the verse referring to Amida's original vow, instead of discussing the vow, he simply says that those who see Amida will attain an insight equal to the enlightenment of those of high attainment on the bodhisattva path.

Shinran views this passage as an expression of the working of the "great vow of crosswise transcendence," taking it not as proof of the merits attained through seeing Amida in a meditative state (as Vasubandhu writes), but instead of the power of the vow to move the faithful abruptly out of the cycle of birth and death and into the stage of non-retrogression. Shinran again is doing so based on his reading of the fulfillment passage, where encountering the vow in the form of the "sincere mind" is described as the cause for entry into the stage of non-retrogression, that is, a stage in the upper reaches of the

⁶⁰ TK, p. 88. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 71.

⁶¹ T 26: 231a24; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 270.

⁶² T 26: 26.0231a24-b3; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 274.

bodhisattva path. Here, Shinran interprets away the verbs “contemplating” (*kan* 觀) and “seeing” (*ken* 見) in Vasubandhu’s original passage, and instead focuses in on the word “encounter,” moving this encounter from the realm of meditative practice and into the one of hearing the name as described in the fulfillment passage. This interpretive thrust is even more apparent in the *Kōsō wasan* passage where Shinran rephrases Vasubandhu’s verse to say quite simply, “When one encounters the vow, no person passes in vain.”⁶³ From this example, we can see that Shinran eliminates references to meditation and puts strong emphasis on the working of the vow.

The verse in the *Shōshinge* that perhaps best represents Shinran’s creative understanding of Tanluan’s thought is, “[He showed that] the outgoing and returning merit transference relies on other power.”⁶⁴ Tanluan, in his commentary on Vasubandhu’s *Treatise on the Pure Land* (*Wuliangshoujing youpotishe yuanshengji zhu* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈註 [Commentary on the Hymn on the Aspiration for Birth as an Upadeśa on the Sutra on Immeasurable Life]; hereafter, *Commentary on the Treatise*),⁶⁵ does discuss the concept of merit transference in terms of outgoing and returning and also presents a definition of the term “other power.” However, Tanluan makes no explicit connection between these two concepts. In fact, his presentation of the two aspects of merit transference appears at first glance to refer clearly to the merit transference undertaken by a practitioner in his quest for birth in the Pure Land and then his practice of merit transference after achieving that goal. Tanluan defines the two aspects as follows:

The outgoing aspect is when one takes one’s own merits, directs them toward and bequeaths them upon all sentient beings aspiring to be born together in Amida Buddha’s Pure Land of peace and bliss. The returning aspect is when one, having been born in that land, attains the fulfillment of the power of expedient means through completion of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* and enters into the dense forest of birth-and-death, teaching all sentient beings, together turning them toward the Buddhist path.⁶⁶

As we can see, there is no reference at all to other power or the working of Amida Buddha’s vows in this passage.

⁶³ TSZ, vol. 2, “Wasan hen” 和讃篇, p. 82.

⁶⁴ TK, p. 89. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 72.

⁶⁵ T 40: 826a24–844b3.

⁶⁶ T 40: 836a22–26; SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 316–17.

Shinran, however, reads the working of other power into this passage and when he quotes it in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* adds honorific endings to most of the verbs, such that he presents the subject of merit transference not as the practitioner who goes to the Pure Land and then returns to save suffering sentient beings, but instead as Dharmākara Bodhisattva, or Amida before becoming a buddha. This sort of an interpretation is only intimated in the closing passage of the *Commentary on the Treatise*, where Tanluan describes how sentient beings' birth in the Pure Land and their work to save other sentient beings after their birth there is based on the working of the eighteenth and twenty-second vows, respectively. Shinran extrapolates from Tanluan's argument about other power in his interpretation of Tanluan's presentation of merit transference, which leads him to the conclusion that merit transference is not a practice performed by sentient beings, but a description of the working of Amida Tathāgata. Although this stance is the most unique and revolutionary part of Shinran's thought, and also the core of the argument in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in the above passage from the *Shōshinge*, he claims that Tanluan is the person who first clarified it. The view that takes merit transference to be the working of the Tathāgata is also present in Shinran's understanding of the fulfillment passage of the eighteenth vow. The portion that I have translated as "have the sincere mind transferred to them from the Tathāgata" also contains the use of the term "merit transference" (*ekō* 回向) with an honorific verb ending. It is difficult to say whether Shinran read the *Commentary on the Treatise* based on his understanding of the fulfillment passage, or the fulfillment passage based on the *Commentary on the Treatise*. In either case, we should remember that although Shinran was clearly inspired by Tanluan's work in seeing the two aspects of merit transference to be the working of the Tathāgata, this view is in fact Shinran's original interpretation.

The section on Daochuo in the *Shōshinge* also shows some rather bold interpretations of the *Anleji* on Shinran's part. For our purposes, let us look at the verse "[Daochuo] disparaged practicing the myriad goods of self power, and encouraged the exclusive chanting of the fulfilled name of virtues."⁶⁷ In the *Anleji*, Daochuo does indeed disparage the practice of self power goods such as the six and ten *pāramitās*, saying that because they are ineffectual in bringing about enlightenment, they are in fact "false."⁶⁸ This distinction, however, is based more on the goal of the practice than on

⁶⁷ TK, p. 89. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 72.

⁶⁸ T 47: 18c25; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 429.

its content. That is to say, in chapters 5 and 7 of the *Anleji*, where Daochuo severely criticizes traditional Buddhist practices, he does so because those practices are aimed at the attainment of enlightenment in this world, not at birth in the Pure Land. In section 1 of chapter 5, he says that he aims to “clarify the relative speed of the paths of practice”⁶⁹ in this world and in the Pure Land, while in section 2 of chapter 7, he says he aims to clarify that “in the paths of practice here and toward the Pure Land, there are differences in the weightiness of the virtues employed, and the truth and falsehood of the results attained.”⁷⁰ In both cases, the distinguishing factor is not the practice undertaken, but whether that practice is aimed at birth in the Pure Land or the attainment of Buddhahood in this defiled world. In fact, the *Anleji* is filled with Daochuo’s encouragement to engage in a variety of Buddhist practices, provided one does so with the intent of being born in the Pure Land. The most apparent of these admonitions can be seen in chapter 12, where he quotes a sutra that lays out ten practices leading to birth in the Pure Land.⁷¹

Even Daochuo’s encouragement to chant the name is not as thorough as Shinran makes it out to be. In section 1 of chapter 1 of the *Anleji*, Daochuo argues that chanting the name is the appropriate practice for the people of the age of the Latter Dharma, saying: “If the passing of the Sage is near in time, then the former, the practice of meditation and the cultivation of transcendental wisdom, is the proper study and the latter is secondary. If the passing of the Sage is already far [in the past], then the latter, the calling of the name is proper and the former is secondary.”⁷² So for Daochuo, the practice of meditation and the cultivation of wisdom, while not the proper and most effective practices for the Latter Dharma, are in fact secondary or additional practices that also should be practiced. To provide just one of the many examples where Daochuo writes of other Pure Land practices, in section 2 of chapter 7, he says, “If those who want to give rise to the mind that seeks enlightenment and take refuge in the Pure Land simply make prostrations, contemplate, consider, etc., for a short period of time, depending on the length of their lives, a dais of light will come for them, and upon reaching that land, they will enter the stage of non-retrogression.”⁷³ While

⁶⁹ T 47: 16b23; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 421.

⁷⁰ T 47: 18c18; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 429.

⁷¹ T 47: 21b14–c4; SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 438–39.

⁷² T 47: 4b20–23; SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 378–79.

⁷³ T 47: 18c19–21; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 429.

Daochuo does disparage the six *pāramitās* in the following passage, here he surely does not promote the exclusive chanting of the name as Shinran says he does in the *Shōshinge*.

Here too, Shinran's interpretation is based on his view of Daochuo's work through the lens of the conclusions that subsequent thinkers such as Shandao and Hōnen arrived at about the centrality of chanting the name in Pure Land practice. This conclusion about chanting the name cannot necessarily be found in the fulfillment passage of the eighteenth vow, or anywhere else in the *Larger Sutra*, but Shinran is clearly reading the *Anleji* through the lens provided by Hōnen, which sees chanting the name as both the best and the easiest practice because it is selected in the original vow. That lens filters out all of the other, Pure Land oriented practices that Daochuo suggests such that his encouragement to chant Amida's name alone is brought into focus. Although that message certainly is present in Daochuo's work, Shinran amplifies it to the point that it becomes the only message, which is not actually the case.

The latter half of the verses about Shandao in the *Shōshinge* are Shinran's reinterpretation of several passages from Shandao's commentary on the *Contemplation Sutra*, particularly the hymn with which he begins that work. Shinran writes, "[Shandao said] when one enters into the great ocean of wisdom of the original vow, the practitioner truly receives the *vajra* mind and after corresponding in a moment of joy, attains the three insights equal to Vaidehī's."⁷⁴ The central verses in this passage, about the practitioner receiving the *vajra* mind and corresponding to the vow in a moment of joy, are based on a passage from the opening hymn of Shandao's commentary that actually has a very different meaning in its original context. Shandao's hymn contains a long list of the attributes of Buddhas and bodhisattvas of high attainment, as well as those who have not attained such lofty heights on the Buddhist path, toward whom he expresses his respect and in whom he takes refuge. That passage reads,

World-honored One, I, with single mind, take refuge in the ocean of suchness and Dharma nature that extends throughout the ten directions, the myriad Buddhas, recompense, transformed, and the like, the body of each and every bodhisattva, their immeasurable fellow practitioners, their adornments and transformed expressions, those of the ten stages, those of the ocean of the three sages, those

⁷⁴ TK, p. 90. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 73.

who have fulfilled the requisite *kalpas* and those who have yet to fulfill them, those who have completed the practices of wisdom and those who have yet to complete them, those who have exhausted their active blind passions and those who have yet to exhaust them, those who have lost the karmic impressions of their blind passions and those who have yet to lose them, those with and without virtuous working, those who have realized wisdom and those who have not realized wisdom, those of wondrous awakening and those with awakening equal to a Buddha, those who have received the *vajra* mind and after one moment of correspondence will be endowed with the virtues resultant of nirvana.⁷⁵

This passage is essentially Shandao's expression of his intent to take refuge in all Buddhas and bodhisattvas in all of their forms and at all stages along the path to enlightenment. The final entry in this list, about those who have received the *vajra* mind and will soon be endowed with the virtues of nirvana, when taken at face value, clearly refers to Maitreya and other bodhisattvas who are merely one step away from becoming a Buddha. Here, Shandao is simply saying that he truly bows down before all of his fellows on the Buddhist path, including but not limited to bodhisattvas of the highest attainment who will attain complete enlightenment in just an instant when the time is right.

Shinran, however, takes this passage out of its original context and drastically changes its significance. While Shandao is talking about Maitreya and other such Buddhas to be, Shinran rewrites this passage so it refers to the "practitioner" who has "entered into the ocean of wisdom of the original vow." In Shinran's passage in the *Shōshinge*, the object of correspondence becomes the wisdom of the vow, and the practitioner does not attain complete enlightenment, but instead is said to attain the three types of insight that Vaidehī attains through the teachings of the *Contemplation Sutra*: joyous insight (*kinin* 喜忍), insight of awakening (*gonin* 悟忍), and insight that the Dharma is unborn (*mushōbōnin* 無生法忍). We should note that it is not just the story of the *Contemplation Sutra* that lies in the background of Shinran's interpretation here. Amida's thirty-fourth vow in the *Larger Sutra* states that sentient beings who hear Amida's name will attain the "bodhisattva's insight that the Dharma is unborn," which again brings us back to the fulfillment passage's description of the role of hearing the name in effecting liberation. That is, Shinran reworks two disparate passages from

⁷⁵ T 37: 245c16–24; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 441.

Shandao's commentary⁷⁶ into a single sentence based on the vows and their fulfillment as described in the *Larger Sutra*.

Shinran's use of the term "vajra mind" is also worth noting. While it was traditionally used to refer primarily to the indestructible strength of the mind of Maitreya, Shinran, based on Shandao's use of the term as a metaphor for *shinjin*⁷⁷ and the mind that seeks enlightenment,⁷⁸ appropriates it to refer to *shinjin*, or the mind of faith that is called forth in the experience of hearing the name. Here again we see a major amplification on Shinran's part, since Shandao uses the term "vajra" only once in passing as a metaphor for the imperturbability of the person who has attained *shinjin*. Taking a hint from this metaphor of Shandao's, Shinran uses the word "vajra mind" as a synonym for *shinjin* repeatedly throughout the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.⁷⁹ Needless to say, this appropriation of the term serves as one prong in his argument that the person of *shinjin*, or "the practitioner of the vajra mind" is the equal of Maitreya, because such a person will assuredly attain nirvana at the moment of death. This position of Shinran's is again grounded in his interpretation of the fulfillment passage of the eighteenth vow, in that it says that the person who awakens faith in hearing the name "immediately" enters the stage of non-retrogression, and is thus assured of attaining complete nirvana through the working of the Amida's eleventh vow.⁸⁰ Here again, we see how Shinran superimposes one of his most original concepts onto the thought of one of the patriarchs, while basing that stance on the authority of the *Larger Sutra*.

Shinran's praise of Genshin is on the whole quite solidly grounded in the *Ōjōyōshū*. The statement in the *Shōshinge*, "Looking broadly into [Śākyamuni's] lifetime of teachings, he [Genshin] took refuge solely in the land of peaceful sustenance [i.e., Amida's Pure Land] and encouraged all beings to do so"⁸¹ presents Genshin as being exclusively reliant on Amida

⁷⁶ The hymn appears at the beginning of the commentary (T 37: 245c16–24; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 441) while the discussion of Vaidehī's insights comes at several different points in the commentary (T 37: 251b8–c2, 260c6–9, 277c13; SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 461–62, 494–95, 556).

⁷⁷ T 37: 272b19; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 538.

⁷⁸ T 37: 245c14, 258a13–14; SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 441, 485.

⁷⁹ Shinran uses the term, or iterations of it, over fifteen times in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. See, for instance, T 83: 594c25, 601a7, 608b5; TK, pp. 49, 96, 144.

⁸⁰ The eleventh vow reads, "If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and *devas* in my land should not dwell in the Definitely Assured State and unfailingly reach Nirvana, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment" (Inagaki 1995, p. 33; also see T 12: 268a11–12; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 9).

⁸¹ TK, p. 90. See CWS, vol. 1, p. 73.

and entirely devoted to the Pure Land path. The *Ōjōyōshū* is certainly filled with quotations from all parts of the Buddhist canon and when read carefully can be seen as encouragement for all sentient beings to take refuge in the Pure Land, but Genshin's other works and his biography show that he was not an exclusive *nenbutsu* devotee, but instead a highly committed Tendai monk with broad interests within that pluralistic tradition. While we can catch glimpses of Genshin's Pure Land devotion at some points in his many Tendai doctrinal works, on first appraisal, many of these appear to be passing comments that are not essential to the doctrinal issue at hand.⁸² Therefore, Shinran's statement seems to be stretching the facts about the extent of Genshin's Pure Land devotion. Further, Genshin's biography is full of evidence that he was not an exclusive *nenbutsu* practitioner, regardless of the strong emphasis that he placed on its meditative version in the *Ōjōyōshū*. For instance, after creating the *nijūgo sanmai e* 二十五三昧会, a monastic group devoted to a variety of Pure Land practices, he also formed a group devoted to Śākyamuni as the preacher of the *Lotus Sutra* and laid out a regimen of practice and study centered on that devotion.⁸³

Shinran's praise of Genshin rings of his own determination that the entire Buddhist canon, especially the sutras preached by Śākyamuni, should be viewed as containing the essential message that all sentient beings should take refuge in Amida's vow. That is to say, Shinran is reading the message that he hears in the *Larger Sutra* and the rest of the tradition into Genshin's works such that Genshin is represented as having exclusively called all people to aspire for birth in the Pure Land. From this perspective of Shinran's, Genshin's major contributions to Japanese Tendai doctrine, such as his *Ichijō yōketsu* 一乘要決, fall away into the background, while remarks in the *Ōjōyōshū* that at first glance do not appear to have great importance, such as Genshin's discussion of Amida's eighteenth vow as "particular" among the individual bodhisattva vows, are given great weight. As with Daochuo, Shinran ignores the varied Pure Land practices that appear in the *Ōjōyōshū* and instead emphasizes Genshin's general attitude expressed in the opening passage of that work, which reads "the teaching and practice of birth in the

⁸² For instance, Genshin's famous *Ichijō yōketsu*, where he is said to have resolved a long-standing doctrinal debate between the Tendai and Hossō 法相 schools, ends with a verse where Genshin vows to be born before Amida and expresses his hope that all other sentient beings will as well. Although this passage is taken as tangential to Genshin's argument in Tendai circles, Pure Land exegetes and scholars have used it as evidence of the Pure Land nature of that work.

⁸³ The group is called the Ryōsen Shakakō 靈山釈迦講. See Ishida 1992, pp. 237–40.

Land of Utmost Bliss is the most essential guide for this defiled world in the Latter Age, so who among monastic and lay, high and low, would not take refuge in them?”⁸⁴ In spite of the fact that Genshin wrote this work quite early in his career, Shinran sees it as the defining piece of Genshin’s thought and leaves all of Genshin’s other accomplishments untouched, without remark or praise. But for Shinran, the *Ōjōyōshū* is critical because it defines the Pure Land path as an essential one and parts of this definition dovetail with Shinran’s own view of Śākyamuni’s essential message.

Shinran’s praise of Hōnen shows the rather unusual way that he viewed his teacher’s contribution to Pure Land Buddhism. We are all familiar with Hōnen’s avid encouragement for all people to engage in the exclusive practice of the *nenbutsu*. Hōnen’s main point in the *Senjaku shū* is that oral recitation of the *nenbutsu* is the best practice for all sentient beings because it is the practice selected in Amida’s original vow. Hōnen’s contribution is not only understood in this way by contemporary scholars, but was also seen in this way by the vast majority of his disciples as well. In his praise of Hōnen in the *Shōshinge*, however, Shinran makes absolutely no reference to the practice of oral recitation of the *nenbutsu*, but instead praises Hōnen for “spreading the vow chosen [by Amida] within this evil world” and focuses on a passage about the importance of faith from Hōnen’s closing remarks in chapter 8 of the *Senjaku shū*. Shinran chose not to focus on Hōnen’s famous position on the role of the name in Pure Land soteriology, but instead on this little noticed passage that states, “We should recognize that doubt is what keeps us within the house of birth-and-death, while faith is what allows us to enter into the castle of nirvana.”⁸⁵ Shinran’s rephrasing of this passage in the *Shōshinge* is not as drastic as the rewriting that we have seen with the other patriarchs, but he does add the words “definitely” and “necessarily” to emphasize that the true problem that prevents one from leaving birth and death is doubt, while the only solution to that problem is faith.

While we might expect Shinran to evaluate Hōnen’s role in the history of Pure Land Buddhism by saying, “He clarified that chanting the *nenbutsu* is the cause for birth in the Pure Land,” Shinran instead highlights Hōnen’s clarification of the importance of faith for the realization of nirvana. Although Shinran clearly draws on the above passage of Hōnen’s when he asserts that *shinjin* is “the true cause for realizing great nirvana,”⁸⁶ this stance is

⁸⁴ T 84: 33a6–7; SSZ, vol. 1, p. 729.

⁸⁵ T 83: 12b16–17; SSZ, vol. 1, 967.

⁸⁶ T 83: 601a9–10; TK, p. 96.

best understood as one of Shinran's original insights. His *Kyōgyōshinshō* is the first to articulate it clearly and address it systematically. Here again, Shinran's choice of what to emphasize and what to downplay about Hōnen is informed by his view of the fulfillment passage of the seventeenth and eighteenth vows. Based on Shinran's reading, it is not the chanting of the name that is critical for salvation, but instead the hearing of the name as it is chanted by the myriad Buddhas, and the faith or insight that is called forth in that experience. Since that faith is seen as effecting immediate entry into the stage of non-retrogression, it thus becomes, from Shinran's perspective, the cause of nirvana. When Shinran read the *Senjaku shū* from this interpretive stance, the passage that stood out for him as most important was the one quoted above and rephrased in the *Shōshinge*, not the one that reads: "The *nenbutsu* as calling the name is the practice of that Buddha's original vow. Those who do this practice are taken up in that Buddha's vow and necessarily attain birth."⁸⁷ For Shinran, the categories of faith and nirvana are far more important than the issues of chanting and birth, and so he makes no reference to these latter topics when praising Hōnen, but instead focuses on the former ones as his teacher's most valuable contribution.

The above analysis of Shinran's praise of the seven Shin patriarchs in the *Shōshinge*, although only partial, gives us some idea as to how Shinran prioritized his view of certain foundational passages within the *Larger Sutra* to reshape, or forge, the thought of these seven disparate thinkers into a single lineage that clarifies the "essence of Buddhism as the Pure Land way," or *jōdo shinshū*. In doing so, he engages in retrospective attribution: Vasubandhu is given credit for Shandao's original insights about "crosswise transcendence," while Daochuo is credited with Hōnen's conclusion about exclusive practice of chanting the name. However, we can see the influence of the *Larger Sutra* and Shinran's understanding of the vows and their fulfillment that are described there in the background of most of the interpretive jumps that he makes in his representations of the thought of these figures. As such, Shinran employs the interpretive categories laid out in this foundational sutra as the standard by which he views the thought of his predecessors and in fact reshapes their thought based on these categories. In that sense, Shinran's representation of the Shin patriarchs can be viewed as an outgrowth of the process of doctrinal classification that begins with his selection of the *Larger Sutra* as the reason for Śākyamuni's appearance in the world and his declaration that its essential message lies in the vows and the name.

⁸⁷ T 83: 3a29–b1; SSZ, vol. 1, pp. 935–36.

In Closing: Patriarchs in Shin Religious Life

We have seen the basic stance from which Shinran formulated the lineage of the seven Shin patriarchs and how he shaped the message of these monks to appear as expressions of the fundamental message contained in the *Larger Sutra*. In closing, I would like to touch briefly on how this formulation has functioned within the Shin community, both while Shinran was alive and after his passing.

One text that gives us an idea of how Shinran's image of the Shin patriarchs was disseminated among his followers is the *Songō shinzō meimon* 尊号真像銘文 (Notes on Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls). As its name indicates, the text contains Shinran's Japanese-language interpretations of short quotations that were inscribed on scrolls containing the images of the Shin patriarchs and other authorities, such as Prince Shōtoku 聖德 (574–622) and Shinran himself. Although there are no extant scrolls that exactly match the content of that work, Nabata Takeshi has noted the existence of several scrolls which date to Shinran's time and contain iterations of Amida's name and images of the various patriarchs with quotations.⁸⁸ These scrolls and evidence from Shinran's letters suggest that he sent such images, along with his own commentary on the inscribed quotations, to his disciples to be hung at their meeting places.⁸⁹ Nabata argues that these scrolls were not only used as the central object of reverence during monthly meetings to commemorate the passing of Hōnen, but also served as proof of a legitimate lineage for the authorities who were suspicious of followers of this new form of devotion.⁹⁰ We can also imagine that the scrolls and Shinran's commentaries on the inscriptions were used in preaching and as part of the process of explaining the Shin teachings and the meaning of the name (the central object on the scroll) to followers who had come to participate in such services. In other words, it is likely that the images and teachings of these patriarchs, as framed by Shinran, loomed large in the ritual and devotional lives of early Shin followers.

Rennyō also contributed considerably to establishing the patriarchs and their teachings in the lives of the Shin faithful by encouraging the daily chanting of both the *Shōshinge* and a portion of Shinran's *wasan* 和讃 in Shin temples and by lay Shin followers. In this way, Shinran's view of the patriarchs became a part of the fabric of the lives of Shin followers, as that

⁸⁸ Nabata 2005, pp. 42–46.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7, 40–62.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

view was intoned morning and evening in front of the family altar. The *Kōsō wasan* would also come around in the chanting cycle regularly. Needless to say, these ritual texts also served as the basis for preaching at Shin temples.

These traditions instituted by Rennyo remain in effect today. Although the number of followers who actually do chant the *Shōshinge* each day has gone down dramatically over the past fifty years, the text still remains a vital part of the rituals held at Shin temples and of the lives of temple families. Ministerial candidates studying at Otani University are first introduced to the seven patriarchs through the *Shōshinge* and only move on to the direct study of their works later on. Many Shin temples also have a scroll of the seven patriarchs hung among other images to the left of the central altar. These scrolls do not contain inscribed quotations, but they are evidence that the tradition of hanging images of the patriarchs in the ritual space begun in Shinran's time continues on this day. The presentation of their thought also continues to be made through the *Shōshinge* and the *Kōsō wasan*, so they are still viewed today very much through the lens that Shinran used to view them.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CWS *The Collected Works of Shinran*. Trans. Dennis Hirota, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, and Ryushin Uryuzu. Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. 1997.
- SHZ *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen shōnin zenshū* 昭和新修法然上人全集. Ed. Ishii Kyōdō 石井教道. 4th ed. Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten. 1987.
- SSZ *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書. 5 vols. Ed. Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho Hensansho 真宗聖教全書編纂所. Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō. 1941.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–34.
- TK *Teihon kyōgyōshinshō* 定本教行信証. Ed. Shinran Shōnin Zenshū Kankōkai 親鸞聖人全集刊行会. Kyoto: Hōzōkan. 1989.
- TSZ *Teihon Shinran shōnin zenshū* 定本親鸞聖人全集. 9 vols. Ed. Shinran Shōnin Zenshū Kankōkai. Enlarged ed. Kyoto: Hōzōkan. 2008.
- X *Shinsan dai Nippon zokuzō kyō* 新纂大日本統藏經. 150 vols. Ed. Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan. 1975–89.

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