Shin Buddhism and Economic Ethics

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Introduction

BY the early 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's virtual acceptance of free-market economics, it seemed that, at a single stroke, liberalism and its associate, free-market economics, had conquered the world. Indeed, with the formation of a single global market, the notion of "globalization" has come to dominate the main current of contemporary neo-liberal economic thought. According to sociologist Ulrich Beck, however, while focusing considerable attention on economics and particularly the global marketplace, studies of globalization tend to disregard the expanding flow and exchange of both information and peoples across borders.[1]

The emergence of a kind of globalism among the colonies of the developed nations of Europe is one of the most significant events of the early twentieth century. However, the advanced capitalist system which was the driving force behind globalization gradually precipitated the following negative characteristics: a widening of the gap between rich and poor, wholesale destruction of the environment, and the devastation of local communities. It has come to such a pass that we can fairly conclude that globalization, in recent years, has invited a terrible crisis whereby the very survival of humanity—and the earth itself—now hangs in the balance. As a result, we are now faced with the following dilemma: Should we continue to adhere to the

[1] Beck 2000, p. 118.

system of "growth economics," or embrace the emerging paradigm of "sustainable economics"? This is now a momentous choice facing humankind.

An important aspect of this choice involves the place of economic ethics. Namely, can we hope to restore an ethics to economic activity? What sorts of problems must be addressed in tackling this issue? According to the school of classical economics, undergirding capitalism is the principle that, by seeking benefits for themselves, individuals will contribute to the benefit of society as a whole. This mechanism for guaranteeing the growth of markets was famously called by Adam Smith, the "invisible hand" of the marketplace. Its basic idea is the rather optimistic belief that, whenever discord begins to arise from the selfish pursuit of profit, the market will adjust itself accordingly, resolving the problems. In such an understanding, the role of ethics within economic activity is considerably diluted, if not eliminated altogether. With the global crises brought on by the insatiable pursuit of profit, it has become increasingly difficult to place trust in Smith's "invisible hand." In sum, the question now facing us is the following: Should we allow economic activity to be conducted without any sort of ethics, or attempt to establish ethical principles by which to regulate the economy in certain ways?

To put the matter simply, while contemporary economics is as unsupportive of wisdom as it could possibly be, we are faced with massive problems in overcoming the situation in which we now find ourselves—the potential destruction of all life, including human life. In response, conscientious religious figures from around the world have begun to take a deep and abiding interest in matters of contemporary economics, with a view to establishing an alternative system to replace that of growth economics.

Buddhists in present-day Japan also face the problem of constructing a new approach to economic ethics. However, I am sorry to say that, thus far, there has been little or no agreement as to the precise form such a new way of thinking might take. Having said that, however, among those involved in the NGO movement, we can find the first small steps towards the production of a new economic framework to replace the present economic system which places profit as its primary goal. In the growth and proliferation of such non-governmental organizations, we see an attempt, however preliminary, to heal some of the misery brought on by globalization.

At the same time, within the wider Buddhist world as well, we can witness signs of a trend towards a new way of thinking about economics. To cite just a few examples: Sri Lanka's Sarvodaya movement, which is dedicated to community development; the experiment by Thai monks to convert existing

methods of exploitative "development" into forms of true development which place the self-sufficiency of each person and each region as the highest priority; the advocacy of a "Buddhist socialism" by followers of Burmese Prime Minister U Nu; and the burgeoning movement spearheaded by Joanna Macy among some of America's leading Engaged Buddhists to promote environmentalist concerns. Regrettably, their actions have had scarce introduction in Japan, though their work contains a great many effective ideas to assist the project of economic reform and reconstruction. Japanese Buddhists, too, can and should learn much from such activists.

In terms of sheer number of temples and followers, the largest Buddhist denomination in Japan is Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 (hereafter called Shin Buddhism). Within Shin Buddhism, we may be able to discover new resources for economic theories which are critical of the kind of rampant globalism discussed above. More specifically, the Shin teachings of *hongan-nenbutsu* 本願念仏 (entrusting oneself to the Original Vow of Amida Buddha) may supply us with new resources towards the task of building a truly sustainable economic system. Once again, I am sorry to say that today concrete evidence of such an economic reform movement in Japanese Buddhism is hard to discern. However, I personally feel that the teachings of *hongan-nenbutsu* may provide us with some resources for a new economic ethics—one capable of opposing the hegemony of globalization. Thus, in what follows, I would like to voice my own personal opinions of some past efforts within the Japanese Buddhist tradition towards a theory of "Buddhist economics."

1. Buddhist Economics

Before entering into the details of my argument, however, let me draw attention to some well-known critiques of market economics from a Buddhist perspective. It is near-universally acknowledged that the crowning achievement of such approaches is E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*, first published in 1973. One of its chapters, entitled "Buddhist Economics," was written between January and March, 1955, while the author was an economic advisor to the Burmese government. Right at the beginning of this chapter, he notes that "'Right Livelihood' is one of the requirements of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. It is clear, therefore, that there must be such a thing as Buddhist economics."[2]

[2] Schumacher 1973, p. 53.

Although Schumacher fails to provide a detailed explanation of his conception of "Right Livelihood," from his more general statements regarding the basis of Buddhist economics, such as in the following paragraph, we are able to glimpse more precisely the image he holds.

Here he says: "While the materialist is mainly interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. But Buddhism is 'The Middle Way' and therefore in no way antagonistic to physical well-being. It is not wealth that stands in the way of liberation but the attachment to wealth; not the enjoyment of pleasurable things but the craving for them. The keynote of Buddhist economics, therefore, is simplicity and non-violence. From an economist's point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of its pattern—amazingly small means leading to extraordinary satisfactory results."[3]

According to Schumacher, Burmese Buddhists are able to find a foundation for a simple and non-violent lifestyle in the "Middle Way," which casts into doubt all claims that the universalization of the present advanced capitalist system of the western world is an inevitability. In fact, he emphasizes the possibility that a so-called "Buddhist economics" can heal the very wounds inflicted by advanced capitalism.

Schumacher's development of a deep sympathy for Buddhism during his time in Burma, has been explained in some detail by his daughter, Barbara Wood, in her book *Alias Papa: A Life of Fritz Schumacher*. According to Wood, her father felt that, in the Burmese context, the use of "GDP per person" as a measuring standard for poverty was meaningless. This was because for the Burmese, with their indifference to ostentation and superfluity, life's simple joys and pleasures, namely, elements of what for them made a truly substantial life, could not possibly be measured by the abstract parameters of something like "income level." Schumacher investigated the desires of the poor, and finished his essay entitled "Economics in a Buddhist Nation" while in Rangoon. His "Buddhist economics" is founded on two basic principles. The first is that within economics there are levels of "poverty, sufficiency, and surfeit," and that while "economic progress towards levels of satisfaction is good, where it overreaches these levels it becomes destructive and wasteful." The second principle is that there is a clear distinction between "renewable" and "non-renewable" resources. Indeed, the point to be stressed here is that while the former allows us to maintain a symbiotic rela-

[3] Ibid., p. 57.

tionship with nature, the latter, based on the plundering of the earth's limited resources, can lead only to a collapse of civilization.[4]

As testament to the world's recognition of Schumacher's work, fifteen years after the publication of "Buddhist Economics," the Club of Rome issued a report dedicated to his work. However, the true value of Schumacher's work finds confirmation in the fact that *Small is Beautiful* has succeeded in becoming a "bible" for people everywhere who wish to transform or replace the global capitalist economic system.

Another example of the effect of Schumacher's "Buddhist Economics" on Buddhists can be found in the work of the Thai Buddhist monk P. A. Payutto, who used Schumacher as a starting point for his own book entitled *Buddhist Economics*. Indeed, one could say that Payutto in this work helps to clarify the particular meaning of "Right Livelihood" from a monk's perspective.[5] He points out that, since the time of the historical Buddha, the conquest of hunger and poverty has been an issue of great import for Buddhists. If people are hungry and poor, they lack both the time and the energy to listen to the Dharma, while the wealthy and powerful, for different reasons, tend to disregard it. Thus, Payutto asserts that "Economics of the Middle Way" that negates both extremes, poverty as well as wealth, is indispensable for the realization of the true happiness of human beings.

He explains that the "basic condition" of Buddhist life is an understanding of "the Middle Way" in terms of the expression "just the right amount."[6] "Just the right amount" involves an understanding of moderation, and can also be expressed by terms such as balance and equilibrium. But what is "just the right amount"? It is the point at which a person's satisfaction and the contents of his feelings coincide with "true well-being." Therefore, while affirming that consumption may be able to contribute to true well-being, we should also consider that consumption which is directed solely towards the fulfilment of our feelings of satisfaction may be a harmful retrogression for

[4] Wood 1989, pp. 251–53.

[5] Payutto describes Schumacher's argument as follows: "Mr. Schumacher's point that the existence of Right Livelihood as one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path necessitates a Buddhist economics has a number of implications. Firstly, it indicates the importance given to Right Livelihood (or economics) in Buddhism. Secondly, and conversely, it means that economics is taken to be merely one amongst a number of factors (traditionally eight) that comprise a right way of life, that is, one capable of solving the problems of life" (Payutto 1994, p. 18).

[6] Payutto 1994, p. 37.

humanity. In short, as far as Buddhists are concerned, economic activity is supposed to serve as a means for the promotion and preservation of genuine well-being and the quality of life, not vice versa.

Incidentally, both Payutto and Schumacher mention Sri Lanka's Sarvodaya movement as a good example of a Buddhist theoretical and practical method of promoting rural development. From the perspective of "Buddhist economics," one can say that this movement is a truly magnificent experiment. I do not wish here to get into the details of Sarvodaya or the thought of Ahangamane Tudor Ariyaratne, its founder, as these have had considerable scholarly exposure (see, for example, Joanna Macy, *Dharma and Development: Religion as a Resource in the Sarvodaya Self-Help Movement in Sri Lanka*). However, for any attempt towards the construction of a "Buddhist economics," I believe that the work of this movement provides a great many hints and suggestions. Among those associated with Engaged Buddhism, the development of an economic theory from a Buddhist standpoint is a task that cannot be avoided. In particular, an emergent Buddhist economics has much to gain from acquaintance with the work of people like Macy and Sulak Sivaraksa.

2. The Ordinary Person's Perspective

What, then, are the possibilities for a Japanese Buddhist, and particularly Shin Buddhist, position on Buddhist economics?

At this point, I would like to offer a cautionary warning to the reader. Up to now, most arguments proposing a Buddhist economics have taken as a premise, a Buddhism whose basic dogma can be found in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. However, in the Shin school, such teachings are not considered so foundational. That is to say, for Shin Buddhism, it is rather from the perspective of the "ordinary person" (凡夫 *bonbu*)—the one for whom keeping the practices and observances is *impossible*—which forms the point of departure.

The Four Noble Truths describe the state of human existence: 1) Life in the world is suffering; 2) this condition of suffering is caused by human ignorance and thirst; 3) the causes of suffering can be eliminated; 4) in order to eliminate the causes and reach an ideal state of attainment, there is an Eightfold Path—giving eight general principles on how to live—that should be followed. This Buddhist method for deliverance from suffering has, since Śākyamuni's time, been inherited as the central aspect of devotion by both

the southern and northern schools of Buddhism. Indeed, it is generally said that the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path form the kernel of the Buddhist religion.

However, the *hongan-nenbutsu* teachings, first developed by Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and accepted by Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), recognize the difficulty of actually putting the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path into practice. To put the matter simply, according to the *hongan-nenbutsu* teachings, the main premise of Buddhism needs to be from the perspective of the so-called "ordinary person"—which implies that it is better to leave the practice of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to the sages or holy men. In this situation, what does it mean to speak of an "ordinary person"?

Human existence is bound by *bonnō* 煩悩 or what we might call troublesome anxieties. Though this term is generally thought to refer to desire or "the passions," for both Hōnen and Shinran *bonnō* contains a slightly deeper meaning, namely, the selfish or egoistic character of desire. The very essence of *bonnō* lies in the mobilization of desire for narcissistic purposes. Within the meaning of the original Sanskrit word for craving or thirst, *kleśa*, we find a nuance of "inner disruption." We could say that "ordinary people" who are bound by craving are "betrayed by their own selves." Why? Because we cannot know everything there is to know about the condition of our own selves. As humans, we have been granted various provisions by which to understand our existential condition, but we do not possess the wisdom enabling us to see our entire condition clearly. This being the case, it is hardly possible that ordinary persons could have the capacity for understanding the degree or extent of the vast relations of interdependence connecting all levels of existence—though this idea, *pratītya-samutpāda* (Jp. *engi* 縁起) lies at the core of Buddhist teachings.

Consequently, we can say that due to the narcissistic state of our lives, we are unaware of the simple operation of conditionality that renders our existence so perilous. It is in this way that we come to betray ourselves, or we might also say it is through ignorance of the mutually interdependent character of self and world, that the cycle of suffering is perpetuated. This is, in short, the condition of the "ordinary person." Is it possible for such a person to become a buddha? If we follow the basic Buddhist curriculum, it is impossible, because within oneself one does not have the power to rise to the level of a buddha. As such, the only way for an "ordinary person" to become a buddha is to rely on assistance from some power beyond the self, outside of one's own power and unrelated to *bonnō*. In recognition of this problem,

Hōnen formulated the Original Vow of Buddha Amitābha: "Whenever anyone calls upon my name, they will be delivered into my Pure Land." This Vow can be realized with a recitation of the Buddha's name, which came to be known as the *nenbutsu*. Thus, the only way for an "ordinary person" to reach buddhahood is by relying upon Amida Buddha—the Other Power.

Given this "ordinary person's Buddhism," we might begin to suspect that discussions like that of Payutto's, for example, are rather too optimistic. With respect to the distinction between the desires of *taṇhā* (craving) and *chanda* (the pursuit of true well-being or quality of life), Payutto argues that since we are gifted with intrinsic capacities for self-training and inner development, we should each proactively engage in converting the former into the latter.[7] One might even say that such confidence in human powers of self-purification and innate capabilities for inner development, is a feature that characterizes the work of Engaged Buddhists of all stripes. Personally, I have no objections to this way of thinking but still, I cannot shake the impression that the picture it gives of human beings is somewhat optimistic.

This point, that we cannot so easily extricate ourselves from the morass of evil and the appetites, this rather severe outlook on humanity, is in fact a central premise of Shin Buddhism. Strange as it may seem, it is possible that just such a perspective can be a source of strength in dealing with the serious crises of the present day. For one, the fight against the darkness of advanced capitalism and towards the establishment of an economic system, whose purpose is not profit but rather human livelihood, involves not only the hope of the individual to convert *taṇhā* into *chanda,* but also direct engagement with economic reform. Because of the above-mentioned recognition of the ease with which humans persistently succumb to evil and temptation, which is the perspective of the "ordinary person," great efforts are encouraged to make the sources of temptation to do wrong more restricted through legislative procedures. Thus Shin teachings do not end with the individual, but should be able to emphasize proactive work towards reform of social institutions and laws. Indeed, we might say that this is the heart of Shin Buddhist economic ethics.

Sadly enough, however, concrete manifestations of such ethics are practically non-existent. All of this remains, for the time being, within the realms of hope and expectation. This is largely due to the fact that there has yet to be

[7] Payutto 1994, p. 24.

formed a sufficient consensus on matters of the relation between faith and social engagement within traditional Shin Buddhist thought.

3. The Case of the Ōmi Merchants

For Hōnen, emphasis is placed on the "ordinary person" being saved by *shinjin* (信心, entrusting faith) in the Original Vow of Amida Buddha, which once realized, how the followers live their lives is left up to their own judgement. The reason for this is that each individual has to live their life, shouldering the specific karma that they have acquired in previous incarnations. Consequently, within the universe of *hongan-nenbutsu*, there is no attempt to coerce people to share an identical moral code or teaching. The way people live in the world should depend rather on their respective karma. Of course, in later periods, among religious leaders there were those who tried to compel their followers to espouse political ideologies or follow moral observances as proof of devotion. However, such behavior is in direct contradiction to the Shin understanding of *hongan-nenbutsu*.

We may come to understand this point more clearly by turning to Shinran's recognition of *shōjōju* 正定聚—those who are certain to attain *nirvana*. "*Shōjōju*" is one who, having realized *shinjin* by the saving power of Amida Buddha, is guaranteed to become a buddha in Amida's Pure Land. According to Shinran, while *shinjin* does not change one from being an "ordinary person," it does allow the follower to live with a distinctively new freedom of spirit. This foundation is nothing other than the power of Amida's Original Vow, which nothing in existence can forestall or inhibit. The "ordinary person" who is supported by this Vow is, as a matter of course, able to stand above the present age with great courage and freedom. The nineteenth-century Shin devotee and scholar Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) referred to the situation of realizing *shinjin* as the "perfectly settled ground" (完全なる立脚地 *kanzen-naru rikkyakuchi*), though one might also say that, at its heart, it is identical to Shinran's *shōjōju*.

The question here is what makes up the substance of this "freedom of spirit"? What actions fall within the area of "perfectly settled ground"? Although this is a matter which ultimately resists formulation, with respect to economics we may be able to seek patterns from the past which may help us come to a clearer understanding of its meaning.

One good example to consider is the economic conduct of the so-called *Ōmi shōnin* (近江商人, merchants from Ōmi province) in the early modern

period of Japan. From the middle to the late Tokugawa period, a group of merchants formed the core of trade among the three most important cities of Edo (Tokyo), Osaka, and Kyoto. By the closing days of the shogunate, these capitalist merchants had accumulated enormous wealth. They were also, incidentally, ardent devotees of Shin Buddhism. Taking this as a starting point, and encouraged by the Weberian hypothesis regarding the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism, there have been a number of studies investigating the correlation between the economic activity of the Ōmi merchants and their devotion to Shin Buddhism.

Naitō Kanji's 1941 work, *Religion and Economic Ethics: Shin Buddhism and the Ōmi Merchants,*[8] is a classic of such research. Naitō first advances the supposition that one part of the economic ethics of the Ōmi merchants found its source in the teachings of Shin Buddhism, and then proceeds to prove this thesis.

Within the Shin Buddhist tradition, it is taught that having *shinjin* means living one's life with a sense of gratitude and thanks to Amida Buddha. For the Ōmi merchants, repayment of debt to Amida included meritorious deeds—especially in one's working life. It was thought that diligence in business matters was one of the most important criterion for being a follower. Why would this be so? The realization of the ideal of benefitting self and others through commercial activity, is simply the integration into economic life of the twin ideals of benefitting self and others. Such involves both personal salvation (benefitting oneself) and showing others the Buddhist way (benefitting others), and indicates the ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism (the embodiment of which is the figure of the bodhisattva). Further, this is the very substance of the term *shōjōju* or "beings who are certain to attain enlightenment." Although we are still dealing with the "ordinary person," a life devoted to the Other Power is one in which a deep desire for the "integration of benefitting self and others" is already at work.

This point becomes clear in Naitō's citation of a verse from one of the Ōmi merchants' family precepts: "Better than to desire to make excess profit from business is to live long and share one's profits with others throughout one's life—such is faithfully following the Buddha-mind of benefitting self and others."[9] Thus, though you should not become absorbed in the pursuit of profit, if, through diligence, you are able to incur uniform gains, then your

[8] Naitō 1941, pp. 243–86.
[9] Ibid., p. 285.

life will incline towards Amida's practice of compassion. Naturally, the intention to "faithfully follow the Buddha-mind" involves the suppression of greed and injustice. In terms of the workplace, this objective is manifest in fair labour practices, while at the level of consumption, it translates into thrift and economy.

However, the economic activity of the Ōmi merchants, based on *shinjin*, fell into decline in the period following the Meiji Restoration. According to Kanno Watarō, this fall can be attributed to their characteristics of "isolation, suspiciousness, and intolerance," which stopped them from engaging in the establishment of requirements for economic modernization such as banks and large-scale enterprises which could have enabled them to participate in social exchange and cooperation with other developed nations. At the same time, they did not have the assertive quest for knowledge which is a further prerequisite for modernization.[10]

Therefore, why did the Buddhist commercial ideal of desiring the "integration of benefitting self and others" fall apart with the advent of modernization? Though I cannot attempt to fully answer this question here, one could say that the Ōmi merchants only developed their understanding to the level of the teachings of Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–1499).

One characteristic feature of Rennyo's understanding of *hongan-nenbutsu* was his emphasis on the village or local community as the foundation of the individual's *shinjin*. His teachings were widely accepted among the semi-autonomous villages during the 15th century, because it contributed to their solidarity, as through *shinjin*, the villagers could become one body. Of course, Rennyo emphasized that *shinjin* was ultimately a matter of subjective engagement, i.e., each individual's own "conversion" (or determination). However, in his teachings, the individual remained a member of the village to the end, and did not have the power to give the highest priority to *shinjin*, which ultimately transcended the interests of the village.

The Ōmi merchants were successful in the three main cities of Edo (Tokyo), Osaka, and Kyoto, without having to leave Ōmi, the headquarters of their economic activities. That is to say, although these activities were far-reaching, the basis of their principles lay within their respective communities. On the other hand, to speak of the desire to achieve an "integration of benefitting self and others," is not to suggest that this intention provided them with the energy and drive to dismantle the entrenched social systems of

[10] Kanno 1941.

the feudal society. According to Rennyo's teachings, the follower is strongly admonished not to shake or sway the politics of the world. In those times, engulfed by the pressures of the feudal system characteristic of the shogunate, the devotion of Shin Buddhists unavoidably led them into complete cooperation with the existing establishment.

To put it a little bluntly, one could say the fall of the Ōmi merchants also indicated the end of the role of Rennyo's teachings on which they relied. However, awareness of this fact was limited to only a small minority of Shin Buddhists such as Kiyozawa Manshi, and in the Shin religious denomination as a whole, these teachings were extended and prolonged such that they were combined with the emerging imperial system's ideas of the "loyal subject." This combination was set forth in the doctrine of the Two Truths (*shin-zoku nitai* 真俗二諦). In short, Shin Buddhism lost the opportunity for getting over the shortcomings of Rennyo's teachings as the religion of the traditional village community and hence, could not gain the ability to criticize the fundamental principles of capitalist modernization. Instead, it chose the path of complete cooperation with the imperial government's military and economic aggression on the Asian continent. As a result, after the defeat in 1945, and even with the transition to a global economics following the rapid economic growth in succeeding decades, the belief still persists that *shinjin* has no relation to a wide variety of social phenomena. Shin Buddhists should have considered what could be learned from the modern setbacks of the Ōmi merchants, whose economic conduct was founded on their traditional understanding of *shinjin*.

4. The Case of Takagi Kenmyō

While the modernization of Japan witnessed the decline of the hitherto powerful Ōmi merchants, it also gave birth to one exceptional figure who, from a Shin Buddhist standpoint, provided a fundamental critique of the capitalist society in imperial Japan—Higashi Honganji priest Takagi Kenmyō 高木顕明 (1864–1914).[11] Takagi relates that, upon realizing the great compassion of Amida Buddha, he was spurred by a strong emotion to practice such compassion towards his fellow men—an impulse which, in accord with prevailing currents, led him to associate with socialists. As a consequence, with the

[11] A more detailed introduction to Takagi and his work can be found in Ama 2001 and Takagi 2001.

nation in the grips of a conspiracy to eliminate socialists and anarchists, he was implicated in the Kōtoku Affair 幸徳事件, or the "High Treason Incident," and, after being condemned to death, had his sentence commuted to life imprisonment.

The following summary of a passage from Takagi's *My Socialism* helps explain the connection between his *shinjin* and his social activism. "Out of the peace and happiness of Amida's great compassion is generated a profound conversion, whereby the heart of Amida becomes one with our heart, and we reach the point of living where Amida's practice of compassion is fully practiced in the world."[12] In fact, Takagi devoted much of his short life to the liberation of the *hisabetsu buraku* 被差別部落 (socially discriminated communities, including his parish), abolition of sanctioned prostitution, and the support of anti-war activities.

Within the few works of Takagi, we can glean an important hint about economic ethics, namely, his assertion that both "progressive development (*kōjō shinpo* 向上進歩)" and "community life (*kyōdō seikatsu* 共同生活)" are supported by *shinjin*. Although Takagi does not go into details about this, we can understand his meaning from such points as the following.

First, "progressive development" must be grounded on the implementation of complete pacifism, coupled with a repudiation of social discrimination and actions demeaning to the oppressed. In "community life," people should be released from the daily struggle for existence, liberated from economic exploitation, and provided with adequate subsistence needs in order to pursue their own individual path to personal development.

It is precisely the intentions and practices of Takagi's "community life" that one might consider to be the principal point indicated in the previous discussion on Shin Buddhist economic ethics. For one, any "struggle for existence" or "survival of the fittest" is denied. Second, economic activity is not to be considered an end in itself, but is rather for the purpose of building a comfortable and pleasant environment in which one may pursue mental training—in this case, Shin devotion.

One noteworthy point is that for the implementation of such "community life," *shinjin* alone is insufficient—it seems that practice based in socialist belief is also required. Takagi seems to have tried to temper and strengthen *shinjin* by socialism, and defined his version of it as religious socialism, whose root remains the practice of compassion grounded in *shinjin*. At the

[12] Takagi 2001, pp. 58–59. Paraphrased by the author.

same time, regarding the process of actualizing this compassion, Takagi's analysis of the ill effects of modern society seems to have been entirely reliant upon socialist thought.

Shin Buddhism and socialist thought are here combined, indicating that the former can not give birth to a unique economic theory by itself. However, Shin Buddhism is not by any means a religion whose social ethics is totally unconcerned with economic ethics. As long as *shinjin* is supported by a strong feeling of compassion towards others, it encourages the investigation of the conditions of a particular epoch and society and develops various challenges to social ills. On such occasions, in order to come to know the essence of an epoch and society, *shinjin* will always utilize contemporary intellectual thought for analysis, and find the most effective means of realizing compassion. In Takagi's time, this translated into *shinjin* in the socialist movement and its thought.

Takagi Kenmyō's *shinjin*-based social experiment came to an end with his short life. Thereafter, Japan entered a period dominated by a "politics of fear," and it would be another eighty-three years after his life was severed in prison in Akita prefecture (northern Japan) that Takagi's spirit would be resurrected. However, I do not mean to suggest that simply by coming to understand the spirit of Takagi Kenmyō, his life, the sufferings of his time, and other aspects, we have begun to build an economic and social ethics able to respond to the distinctly serious sufferings of the present day.

Incidentally, in the work of another figure implicated and sentenced to death during the Kōtoku Affair, Sōtō Zen priest Uchiyama Gudō 内山愚童 (1874–1911), we also see a faint but significant seed of a modern Buddhist economic ethics. Uchiyama, who unlike Takagi was inclined towards the even more radical anarchist movement in Japan, took as his starting point the assumption that life in a Zen monastery could and should apply to life in society at large.[13] One can see in such a life the following features: private property is considered a trap; the manner of existence is rational and simple; everyone in the temple community is equal; all the things necessary for life are held in common and so on. Uchiyama believed that if these standards of

[13] Inagaki quotes from Uchiyama's minutes of the preliminary examination as follows: "At the monasteries of our denomination, we can see the lives of two or three hundred monks and novices, all sharing the same clothing and food and living beautifully in cooperation with each other. I have been dreaming that it should come out quite well if we could apply this system to each community throughout the nation." (Inagaki 1993, pp.112–13).

life in monasteries were accepted by the surrounding society, the suffering masses of the poor could be liberated.

In the twentieth century, among Buddhist activists and socialists in various Southeast Asian countries, Uchiyama's way of thinking has become a basic principle. For them, the *saṅgha* (僧伽) or Buddhist community needs to serve as a kind of model for society, particularly with respect to the repudiation of private property, the principle of equality, the rejection of greed, and the goal of fullness in spiritual life. Here, we see how the writings of figures like Takagi Kenmyō and Uchiyama Gudō anticipated the later work of Engaged Buddhism.

5. Foundations of Shin Buddhist Social Ethics

In order to construct a Shin Buddhist economic ethics, we must look back, once again, to the foundations of Shin social practice. In recent times, there has been a notable tendency for some Shin followers to remain flooded with the joy of having realized *shinjin*. Indeed, among those involved with the religious organization, one sometimes hears of a division between a "social faction" and a "devotional faction." In order to avoid sterile debates in the name of belief, while conforming to Shin teachings, we must clear up the matter of the foundations of a Shin social ethics.

To this end, we can learn from the literary remains of Kyōgoku Itsuzō 京極逸蔵, a long-time Shin Buddhist missionary in America. Born in 1887 in Shimane prefecture, Kyōgoku graduated from Tokyo Imperial University (present-day Tokyo University) with a degree in English literature, before becoming a Shin Buddhist priest. In 1919, he traveled as a Nishi Hongwanji missionary to America, where he worked in Los Angeles and Fresno, California. During the Second World War, he was interned in a "concentration camp" as an "enemy alien," yet he was still able during this time to manage the publication of two journals: *Jikishin* 直心 (Direct Mind, in Japanese) and *Triratna* (Three Jewels, in English), until his death in 1953.

If we read his works, the principle of Shin social practices, including economic ethics, becomes clearer. According to Kyōgoku, for lay-Buddhists, the principles which guide everyday life are the *rokudo* (六度, six *pāramitā*s, perfections)—and this is what they basically seek to put into practice: 1) charity; 2) morality; 3) patience; 4) diligence; 5) meditation; and 6) wisdom. The practice of the Six Perfections is a way to achieve *satori* (覚り) or enlightenment. Buddhist sūtras state that Amida was once a bodhisattva

called Hōzō (法蔵, Skt. Dharmākara), who practiced the Six Perfections countless times for innumerable *kalpa*s, in order to finally become a buddha.

Yet it is almost impossible for the "ordinary person" to practice any one of these *pāramitā*s. For example, regarding charity, while we may understand the principle clearly enough, when it comes down to giving even the most insignificant thing away, are we not often shocked and ashamed to find ourselves incapable?

Kyōgoku says the following: "For many Buddhists, it is easy to make this mistake; thinking they cannot perform these Perfections, they abide in the Great Mercy of the Buddha. As a result, such people begin to act carelessly, casting aside charity, temperance, and patience, while shamelessness and self-indulgence are awakened in their heart. The job of the Buddha . . . is to show mercy unconditionally. But this way of thinking expressed by such people is just an excuse."[14]

Regarding this kind of mistake, where the Other Power is interpreted to suit one's own convenience, Kyōgoku makes the following point. When we are faced with the Six Perfections, the difficulty in practicing them comes home to us, and a spirit of deep repentance awakens within us. Thus, we muster up our courage to contend with them again. But we get completely worn out. Through our "succession of repentance, resolution, and failure, we become flooded with the significance of the waters of joy, and thus, to the best of our ability while still alive, make progress on our road to repentance."[15]

What is important, according to him, is that, upon returning to the power of the Original Vow, a desire to enter into practicing the Six Perfections awakens within. Clearly, the actual practice is not easy; no, it is a course full of frustration. However, Kyōgoku concludes by asking whether the very fact of undergoing such trials is not, in itself, an honour for Shin followers.

Upon reading the lamentations and prayers of Kyōgoku, I am reminded of the following passage from the sixteenth chapter of the important Shin text *Tannishō* (Record in Lament of Divergences). "If *shinjin* has become settled, birth will be brought about by Amida's design, so there must be no calculating on our part. Even when we are evil, if we revere the power of the Vow all the more deeply, gentleheartedness and forbearance will surely arise in us through its spontaneous working." In other words, while each person's *shin-*

[14] Kyōgoku 1957, p. 129.
[15] Ibid., p. 247.

jin is a matter of personal choice, if our *shinjin* becomes strong, then birth in the Pure Land becomes the work of Amida Buddha. We do not need to worry about it. Even if our heart and actions are not good, we can still place ourselves in the power of Amida's Original Vow. If we do this, then, because of the promise of that Vow, our heart will ultimately become full of gentleness and forbearance.

The Shin Buddhist devotee, after realizing *shinjin*, can depend upon the power of the Original Vow of Amida Buddha. Since most of us are but "ordinary people," we continue to violate the teachings of Buddhism. However, through having realized *shinjin*, little by little we can come to practice the Buddhist virtues. Of course, there will always be those for whom a heart of mildness and endurance may be difficult to acquire, either through lapses or a failure to learn, as they were born with deep and abiding karma. However, after realizing birth in the Pure Land, it will become possible even for these people to practice the virtues. This is because, although it is through *shinjin* that we become one with Amida's heart, we cannot immediately gain entrance due to the disturbances within (*bonnō*). The fact is, only when we get rid of our bodies—the House of Passions—can we truly become one with Amida Buddha.

The reason that Kyōgoku asks people to practice the Six Perfections, is because of the reliance on Amida's Original Vow. However, to repeat myself again, the entrusting does not necessarily result in the practice of Buddhist virtues. This is the suffering of "ordinary people." On the other hand, if we disobey the Buddhist teachings either intentionally or through indifference, just because we are "ordinary people," can we still call ourselves Buddhists?

Elsewhere, Kyōgoku points out that Shin followers sometimes make the mistake of becoming bound by the ropes of the Other Power ("Ropes of the Other Power" is a term that comes from the haiku poet Kobayashi Issa 小林一茶 (1763–1827)). What Kyōgoku wants to say here, is that Shin followers are often too intent on rejecting Self Power to remember that the gate of the Other Power will open only at the end of the path of Self Power, and that once through that gate, one will live according to the Buddhist teachings. The mistake comes from believing that one has reached there through one's own efforts.

In order to become a buddha, the follower must rely on the Other Power. If we are able to realize *shinjin*, then in terms of what follows—the Buddhist practices themselves—Self Power and the Other Power are not an issue. For

this very reason, it is possible for Shin Buddhists to achieve solidarity with other Buddhists, beyond the boundary of the *hongan nenbutsu* teachings.

Kyōgoku's understanding of Shin Buddhism was forged during his experience as a missionary in American culture, a culture which normally demands a high standard of ethics. For example, around the same time Kyōgoku was in America, Imamura Yemyō 今村恵猛 (1867–1932), bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, was also working to build a social ethics from Shin Buddhist foundations.[16]

In present-day Japan, many Shin Buddhist followers still linger within the doctrine of the Two Truths (asserting the separate worlds of Buddhism and the so-called "real world"). However, those missionaries who have traveled to America are trying to say that, within the Shin Buddhist teachings, we can find answers to contemporary problems. Today, even beyond economic ethics, when we are searching to broaden the direction and contents of our social practices, we can look to their experiments for inspiration.

6. The Present Task

Now, what stance, then, can Shin Buddhism take towards economic problems? What kind of a movement can be developed? The key lies in "community life" already touched on by Takagi Kenmyō. The question is, how can we get rid of the current economic system which brings such misery and exploitation to regular working people and instead, begin to practice what Takagi calls "progressive development"? His conclusion was to prescribe the practices of the socialism then in vogue, but the question remains—what will help us today?

Myself, I would like to turn to the work of two people in particular as a starting point. One is Senō Girō 妹尾義郎 (1889–1961), who, in 1931, the year of the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident, formed the New Alliance of Young Buddhists (新興仏教青年同盟 *Shinkō bukkyō seinen dōmei*), and strove to make Japanese society follow Buddhist teachings. The other is the contemporary Chilean economist Manfred A. Max-Neef.

Senō was born in 1889 in Hiroshima prefecture, into a family affiliated with the Nishi Hongwanji branch of Shin Buddhism, and with a mother apparently filled with the spirit of charity. Soon after reaching his twentieth year, unable to attend university due to a serious illness, Senō entered the

[16] See Imamura 1930 and 1931.

Nichiren school of Buddhism, enthusiastically devoting himself to the *Lotus Sūtra* until his death. However, he was by no means simply a mouthpiece for that religious organization—he was never one to concern himself with the differences among Buddhist denominations. Rather, he continued to pursue a unified Buddhism for modern times, one that was yet thoroughly Buddhist in form and character. Inagaki Masami's admirable biography of Senō, *Budda wo seoite gaitō e* (*Carrying the Buddha into the Streets on My Back*), provides much in the way of detail, but in the context of this essay, regarding his motives for founding the New Alliance of Young Buddhists, I would like to direct our attention to the following passage:

"Participation in the reform movement directed at remodelling the capitalist system, a system which stands in contradiction to the teachings of the Buddha, involves a desire to implement a society based on the ideals of love and equality." Thus, according to the general plan of the New Alliance of Young Buddhists: "It is our task to recognize that the capitalist economic system is in contradiction to Buddha-mind, and hinders the welfare of the general public, and that we should work towards the realization of a reformed society."[17]

According to Senō, in order to resuscitate Buddhism in the modern age, it is necessary to return to the spirit of the Buddha. Thus, he personally investigated the so-called original Buddhist sūtras, only to discover that the Buddha by no means ignored economic life, but rather that economics is the foundation of all social life.[18] This means that in order for people to have the energy to search for the truth, they must first have adequate means of subsistence. This is how Senō puts it: "Praying to Śākyamuni Buddha will not allow your bins to overflow with rice. In times of poverty, it is taught that the Buddha himself worked hard for his subsistence. Because of the negative quality of modern economic systems, where working fails to produce effective results, we must begin by reforming the system to guarantee the welfare of the general public. It should be that one can no longer speak of things like poverty and the relentless pursuit of monotonous labor."[19]

To digress a little, today's Engaged Buddhists make a similar move in going back to the teachings of the historical Śākyamuni in order to find the Buddhist way of social practice. For scholars such as Payutto and Joanna

[17] Inagaki 1974, p. 11.

[18] For further particulars, see Senō 1975a.

[19] Inagaki 1974, p. 14.

Macy, in particular, the foundation of their claims can be found in the early Buddhist scriptures. I shall not repeat the case of Payutto. As for Macy, after acquiring knowledge of Pāli and investigating the original texts, she was able to confirm that the Buddhist teachings contain numerous proposals which can have profound effect on modern economics and politics.

An outline of Senō's theory of Buddhist economics can be found in *Shakai henkaku tojō no shinkō bukkyō* (Towards an Emergent Buddhism of Social Reform), included in his *Collected Writings on Religion*. Here, regarding the problems derived from capitalist economics, Senō says that "No matter how hard you try to change the system, if you fail to reform your spirit, you will fail." He vociferously opposes merely accepting the status quo. Furthermore, each person's happiness depends on the way their society is organized. This led Senō to insist that social reformation should be a deep concern of religious people. In short, while insisting that the remodelling of the social system is "the necessary founding condition for the production of a better livelihood and mental state," Senō strongly checks the notion that social reformation alone would be sufficient. Here, we see a strong convergence between the ideas of Senō and Takagi Kenmyō, who raised "cultivation of the mind" as the objective of "community life."[20]

I would like us now to consider the following point. Through his work with non-Buddhist political organizations, including socialists involved in movements for reform of the capitalist economic system, Senō found that the mission of Buddhism lay in the religious humanization of socio-political reform. His social reform movement was by no means simply a return to political agitation. Once again, this notion overlaps, in essence, the arguments presented by Vietnamese Engaged Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, whose Buddhist-based peace and social reform movement is unlike most other political ones, in the following ways: no simplistic dichotomy is made between victims and assailants; people must reach a level of self-consciousness regarding the meaning of sufficiency and the existence of conditions of interdependence; and secular reformers are strongly urged to put into practice the teachings of religion. Senō's own Buddhist-based experiment in social reform was destroyed by the ultranationalist suppression after the Manchurian Incident. However, in the 1930s, movements similar to his were emerging in Southeast Asia—in Burma, in particular, where, under the first post-independence Prime Minister U Nu, a Buddhist socialist movement was

[20] Senō 1975b.

formed.[21] These important points in modern Asian Buddhist history should not be forgotten.

To repeat, we need to learn two things from Senō's experiment. First, the problems of poverty and environmental destruction brought on by a "globalist" economy can only be solved through a reform of the economic system. At the same time, however, the goal cannot be simply framed in terms of economics, but rather seen as the development of a truly full human life, especially as a vehicle through which people can pursue their religious values.

In addition, Max-Neef emphasises two themes. First, the foundation of economic life is desire, and this desire needs to be analyzed. Second, human beings can only be classified as "stupid"—a rather blunt term which nevertheless correlates with the Shin Buddhist focus on the "ordinary person."

What are the most basic human needs? Usually, one would say things like clothing, food, and shelter. However, these needs are all characterized by physicality or concreteness. Such a focus on concrete needs will never allow the poor to rise above the structures of the contemporary economic system, focused on physical satisfaction. Max-Neef's contribution here is his insistence that we should give up our dependence on the concrete—and experiment with using mental and spiritual satisfaction as the main criterion for development.

Max-Neef's claim that the future of economics is not to be found in an analysis of physical necessities but rather in an investigation of truly human needs, has two parts. First, the foundations of such needs are limited, and can be classified. Second, basic human needs are shared among all cultures of all times and places. All that changes are the means of satisfying these needs from culture to culture.[22]

What are these few basic human needs? Max-Neef lists the following nine: 1) Subsistence; 2) Protection; 3) Affection; 4) Understanding; 5) Participation; 6) Idleness; 7) Creation; 8) Identity; 9) Freedom. According to this classification, our understanding of Subsistence is broadened, so that it can be measured by standards beyond things like food, clothing and shelter. Medical care fits into the domain of Protection, education falls within the more general category of Understanding, while things like authoritarianism, the destruction of nature, and political oppression fail to measure up to the subsistence standards of Affection.

[21] Cf. Butwell 1963.

[22] Max-Neef 1991, p. 18.

What do people want to gain through economic activity? By clarifying the objectives, the economic system itself may change. Max-Neef maintains that it should be changed. Within the paradigm of "growth economics," it is generally thought that material production satisfies human needs. However, according to his paradigm, such needs that can be satisfied by material production are insignificant. It goes without saying that the present economic system based on GNP should be disposed of.

Thus, Max-Neef concludes that, beyond the nine basic needs listed above, in the future a tenth should be added—Transcendence.[23] An admirable notion! This coincides with the idea of Takagi Kenmyō, who considered the final goal of working to be the cultivation of one's mind, in order to freely practice the Buddhist way.

Regarding Max-Neef's classification of human needs by way of spirituality, we are reminded of Kiyozawa Manshi's experiment with measuring human subsistence in terms of what he called "minimal possible." What do humans need? The answer is not "things"—more important by far is gaining the "perfectly settled ground," or one's spiritual foundation. This does not require the complete renunciation of all material goods, but rather the process of coming to realize for what purpose such things exist.

Moreover, in regard to the Shin Buddhist vision of economic ethics sketched above, Max-Neef says that it is necessary to touch on the "stupidity" that is part of human nature. In his 1989 Schumacher Memorial Lecture, entitled "A Stupid Way of Life," he speaks of the universal character of stupidity among human beings: "I realized that stupidity is a cosmically democratic force. It contaminates everyone beyond race, creed and ideology. No one is safe. And whether in the North, the South, the West or the East, we commit the same stupidities over and again. Something happens to render us immune to experience."[24]

In particular, Max-Neef warns that this foolishness is an obstacle that stands in the way of the realization that interdependence and interconnectedness are means of guaranteeing the welfare of humanity as well as the safety of the earth itself. It also hinders our chances of solving the present, miserable situation. At the same time, Max-Neef has no doubt that we do have resources by which to overcome our collective stupidity. With the help of the Socratic maxim "know thyself," one is able to connect personal transforma-

[23] Ibid., p. 27.
[24] Ibid., p. 107.

tion with overcoming the foolishness of the world. This argument is related to the ideas of Schumacher and Payutto, and is also connected to the desires of Kyōgoku, as introduced above. How do we overcome this stupidity? It is more than simply a matter of the reforms mentioned earlier—one might say that it is the eternal issue facing humanity.

Conclusion

In response to the advanced capitalist system's encounter with crises, various grass-roots organizations from around the world have sprung up. One example is the Fair Trade Mark Movement, which began during the 1970s in what was then West Germany. Those involved in this movement established a principle whereby a) trade with Third World nations would require a partnership b) in which it would be necessary to pay for goods in advance, and c) part of any sales from the goods would be saved in a fund for the developing countries. One of their mottoes was "The price for a gourmet lifestyle should not be environmental destruction." The basic ethical intent behind the movement was to counter the kind of free-wheeling economic activity which endlessly pursues the cheapest possible goods and labour. Taking a humanistic perspective, the movement aimed at trying to bring an end to such economic activity, while proposing a just and fair society in which both private and public benefits are weighed.

While religion was not directly involved in the Fair Trade Mark Movement, it shows very clearly that we need to reflect upon the kind of "growth economics" which places undue confidence in the "invisible hand" of the marketplace. Moreover, with respect to such a stance, if religions, which can most clearly distinguish the evils and greediness of human beings, were to join in the attempt to lay new economic foundations for society, efforts like this to bring to an end the present system might become more effective.

Regarding the subject of this paper, "Shin Buddhism and Economic Ethics," I have not in this short piece been able to provide the reader with much in the way of specific suggestions. However, along with Sarvodaya's Ariyaratne and Engaged Buddhists everywhere, I share the notion that we must clearly distinguish between "need" and "greed." For those who live in Amida Buddha's Original Vow, I believe this is also fundamental to economic ethics. The difference between "need" and "greed" is that, in the point of view proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, while the true needs of all human beings on earth can be satisfied, our greed, in short, those things for

which we crave, cannot be satisfied. In the future, it is the mission for us, who find our foundation in religion, to oppose any economic system controlled by greed.

From now on, it is very important that those people involved in the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, the monks concerned with development in Thailand, Buddhists in Vietnam and Burma, Engaged Buddhists of America and what is more, those Christians and Muslims who are critical of the modern capitalist system, continue to exchange ideas and thoughts on these matters. By virtue of this continuing exchange, it is certain that much can be learned, and it may also be that the unique insights of Shin Buddhism on society and economics will be helpful in pointing out new directions. If the goal is, as far as possible, to effect changes in the economic or legal system, it is not then simply a matter of what is in the heart of an individual. Rather, collective effort is indispensable for the spread of awareness of these problems—and the sustaining will to tackle them.

(Translated by James Mark Shields)

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