Shinran and Authority in Buddhism

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Master Genkū—the eminent founder who had enabled the true essence of the Pure Land way to spread vigorously [in Japan]—and a number of his followers, without receiving any deliberation of their [alleged] crimes, were summarily sentenced to death or were dispossessed of their monkhood, given [secular] names, and consigned to distant banishment. I was among the latter. Hence, I am now neither a monk [hisō], nor an individual in ordinary worldly life [hizoku]. For this reason, I have taken the term Toku ["stubble-haired"] as my name.[1]

JŌDO SHINSHŪ BUDDHISM—the largest of the traditional Japanese Buddhist institutions—is still widely misperceived. The one dominant impression of Shin is that it is the Buddhism for those who are not disciplined enough to participate in the "real," i.e. renunciant (or at least meditative) Buddhist practices which define "normative Buddhism." The reasons for the development of this misleading impression are remarkably complex.[2] Yet the essential issue in Shinran's thought and in the subsequent Shin tradition has always been obvious: not an inferiority complex towards monastic Buddhism, but an articulation of a radically independent sense of self-legitimating Buddhist experience, a puristic Mahāyānist "suddenness."

Shinran's teaching was a comprehensive, systematic reformulation or renarrativization of the Pure Land mythos based on a rearticulated "leap" notion of authority. The question of authority has been so visceral that Shinran's rhetoric has historically been difficult for people outside the Shin tradition to grasp (including other Japanese Buddhists). A high degree of noncommunica-

[1] Yoshifumi Ueda, ed., *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way: A Translation of Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō*, 4 vols. (Kyoto: Shin Buddhism Translation Series, Hongwanji International Center, 1983–1990), vol. 4, p. 613 (slightly altered for clarity).

[2] See Galen Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida: Orientalism and History in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

tion has ensued.[3] Yet Shinran's ideas[4] can be summarized clearly as a logical triangle with three conceptual clusters: enlightenment as *ekō;* the idea of Buddhist practice as *akunin shōki* awareness; and the institutional transcendence of the lay-monk polarity in the *hisō hizoku* principle.[5]

The *ekō* ("turning of merit") cluster was fundamental. Shinran's basic insight was that enlightenment had to happen in the final analysis by itself, by some process coming as it were from "outside" the ego. The term *ekō* contained two meanings: the spontaneous religious transformation he called absolute "yielding" or "entrusting" (*shinjin*) in relation to the deity of the Amida Buddha (symbolizing perfect enlightenment), and the revalorization of the concepts "Pure Land" and "entrusting" so that they meant perfect enlightenment and basic earthly enlightenment respectively. The deep linkage between

[3] Zen schools, for example, often criticized the Shin tradition for its laxity in monastic practices, borrowing the Pure Land rhetoric of "easy practice" out of its Shin context; this ignored Shin's overt theoretical rejection of monastic authority, as well as the rhetorical aspect of the opposition of "difficult" and "easy." Scholars in the academic monastic traditions rarely even engaged Shin; those that tried, such as Kegon's Hōtan (1651–1736), could find the *Kyōgyōshinshō* impossible to understand. (Kiritani Junnin, *Kyōgyōshinshō ni kiku*, 3 vols., [Tokyo: Kyōiku Shinchōsha, 1979], vol. 1, p. 21.)

[4] Summaries of Shinran's thought include Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to his Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989), Dennis Gira, *Le Sens de la Conversion dans l'Énseignement de Shinran* (Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose (Collége de France, Bibliothéque de l'Institute des Hautes Études Japonaises, 1985), Alfred Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965), or Alicia and Daigan Matsunaga, *Foundations of Japanese Buddhism,* Vol. II, The Mass Movement (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International), pp. 95–106.

[5] Shinran's original ideas were presented, even at their most "popular," in a form of technical Buddhological writing related to *p'an chiao* (J., *hankyō* [kyōsōhanjaku]), the East Asian Buddhist tradition of justifying a presentation of Buddhist doctrine in terms of rankings or modulations of the accepted textual tradition. (On *p'an chiao*, see Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 181–182, 303–311, 318–319; see *kyōsōhanjaku* in Kaneko Daiei et al., eds., *Shinshū shinjiten* [Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1983], pp. 108–109.) The pervasive relation to *p'an chiao* first meant that Shin doctrine was specially concerned about only a very narrow issue, the authority question of *ekō*. Second, it meant that it was inseparably tied to longstanding features of Pure Land rhetoric and was embedded in the Sino-Japanese Mahāyāna philosophical tradition; it presupposed a shared philosophy and sensibility. But presentation of Shinran's doctrines in his own *p'an chiao* style—in other words, in terms of his own *Kyōgyōshinshō* schematizations and even their popularizations in the wasan and other works—is noncommunicative to any but an informed Buddhist audience.

these two aspects of *ekō* was in the fundamental relaxation of "normal" human ego effort. For Shinran, spontaneous "entrusting" was the only way enlightenment could come about. In terms of his linguistic reformulation, *shinjin* was a reliance on "that power" (*tariki*), most accurately a reference to the power of the Eighteenth Vow of Amida laid out in the Larger Pure Land Sutra as interpreted idiosyncratically by Shinran. In one sense the Vow as understood by Shinran was the declaration of a logical tautology, asserting that the only condition for perfect enlightenment after death (i.e., rebirth in the Pure Land) was a basic enlightenment experience in life; in another, more powerful sense the power of the Vow also lay in the suggestion that the Amida Buddha quite independently of human institutions had a certain dynamic energy, an ability to transfer merit (*parināmanā*) or to spontaneously work to effect enlightenment in human minds. In short, *ekō* implied the notion of *paramārthasatya* (*shintai*, the truth of supreme enlightenment) as an active agent. The Eighteenth Vow or the "working of the Amida Buddha" via *ekō* did not involve monasticism, meditation, texts, other Buddhist deities, and any ritual practices understood as able to cause enlightenment intentionally; all of these miscellaneous practices were lumped together under the classification of self-power (*jiriki*), for Shinran's *ekō* involved giving up the idea that intentional practices had instrumental value in the final analysis.[6] The practice of vocal nembutsu was also redefined and revalorized, becoming not only the sole meaningful ritual but also no more (and no less) than the expression of thanksgiving that the deity of Amida Buddha was constantly engaged in bringing enlightenment about in the course of ordinary human life.[7]

Shinran's *ekō* concept at first looks unconventional, but it was simply a restatement of traditional Mahāyāna themes. One such theme was the traditional Mahāyāna dialectic of the interrelationship and overlap between the

[6] "Yielding to the Buddha" (*shinjin*) in Shinran's Pure Land language was the same as the forty-first and higher bodhisattva ranks in conventional monastic schemata. (Like earlier Buddhist concepts of *sraddhā* ("faith"), Shinran's *shinjin* had no meaning outside of its unique context (viz., the idea of "conversion;" see Gira). Theories about the rapid realization of Buddhahood had already emerged with Saichō and Kūkai, where *sokushin jōbutsu* meant a stage of basic satoric realization in this life; thus the concept was long current. (Paul Groner, "Sokushin jōbutsu Traditions at Mt. Hiei," in George J. Tanabe, Jr., and Willa Jane Tanabe, eds., *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989], pp. 53–74.)

[7] The interpretation of *nen* was the traditional crux. Conventional monastic Pure Land teachings understood this to mean a range of practices; popular Pure Land and some of Hōnen's followers took it to mean physical vocalization of the name of the Buddha; Shinran took it to mean the involuntary satoric *shinjin* transformation itself, only secondarily (and ritually) expressed in the vocalization of the Buddha's name.

realms of enlightenment and ignorance. Shinran's thought, like all Mahāyāna thought, expressed the ultimate identity of opposites combined with the paradoxical transformation of those opposites into one another; *shinjin* was merely an alternate term for the realization of this dual simultaneous samsāra-and-nirvāna position.[8]

Even more importantly, Shinran's idea of *ekō*, although it had no precedent in conventional Pure Land interpretation, was but a recapitulation in the Pure Land rhetorical context of one of the most ancient problems of Indian thought, that of the "leap" to religious transformation. The monistic religious rhetorics which dominated traditional Buddhism contained irresolvable logical contradictions because they could not explain the gap between the ordinary experience of reality and the Higher Reality, or else, they resorted to some conceptual devices (such as levels of reality in various Indian systems) which functioned as dualistic explanations anyway. Indeed, the theories of the most important Indian traditions in general—including both Nāgārjuna and *bhakti* schools—ultimately admitted of no clear formal causal relationship (*ajātivāda*) between the state of ignorance and the state of enlightenment;[9] the idea that the fruit of enlightenment at the end of the path of practice (*mārga*) must be "instantaneously", i.e., noncausally, realized became a universal (if implicit) assumption.[10] Although in normal institutional practice this situation never caused significant doubts about the centrality of classical Buddhist monastic life's ritual and mythos, it raised many persistent logical problems about the exact status of the path in relation to the leap.[11]

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[8] Ueda Yoshifumi, "The Mahayana Structure of Shinran's Thought, Part I," *The Eastern Buddhist* vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 57–78 and "The Mahayana Structure of Shinran's Thought, Part II," vol. 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1984), pp. 30–54. But as Ueda notes (Part II, p. 54) the trend in Shin rhetoric after Shinran was to speak monotonously of the *shinjin* experience as a promise of "rebirth" or karmic liberation into the supreme enlightenment, rather than to explore the Mahāyānist complexities of the samsāra/nirvāna simultaneity or to pursue the clarification of relationships with other kinds of Buddhist rhetoric. The specialized narrowness of the Shinshū *p'an chiao* academic tradition and its political emphasis has made Shinran's thought seem more intellectually naive than it was.

[9] Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 236–254.

[10] David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989), pp. 6–8, 141–182.

[11] See Ruegg and the essays in Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii

Shinran's minimalism restated the spontaneist, *ajātivāda* truism utilizing a bipolar (rather than a monistic) rhetoric. It explicitly postulated a gap between the ideal reality of *paramārthasatya* and the problematic ordinary reality of ego and attachment. For Shinran, it was only as ego and attachment were dissolved and broken down by the activity of *paramārthasatya* (Amida Buddha), which came as it were from "outside" the troubled ordinary mind, that this boundary was softened. Classical Shin doctrine presented this dichotomy as never being fully overcomeable in a living person anyway—no human experience could become so fluid as to be entirely at one with the perfect *pratītyasamutpāda*—but what could be achieved, in the state of Yielding or "right assurance," was an understanding that one had gotten close enough to enlightenment in life that one's unwanted karmic continuation would cease at death.[12] In any case, by (provisionally) situating "enlightenment" and "human ignorance" as separate spheres, the logical problems of self-reference which monistic conceptualization entailed (as in Ch'an/Zen) were eliminated.

The idea of reliance on an "external" deity—in Shinran's case Amitābha—was normal in Mahāyāna religious life. For example, the texts of Bhāvaviveka, a sixth century Madhyamaka thinker, showed that the concept of emptiness and the concept of the Buddha were inseparable, and that to "see" the philosophical idea was the same as seeing "the Buddha" and vice versa. Not only was emptiness associated with a specific form of sensory perception, but visual power yielded concrete visions of the Buddha's physical form which might be merged with intellectual understanding in a single philosophical and devotional act.[13] While the gap between worshipper and Buddha who is worshipped was ultimately broken down in nonduality, that nonduality was inseparable from the "dualistic" experience of concrete manifestation via deity. Out of this combination of self-reliance and dependence on Buddhas and bodhisattvas arose the special irony characteristic of the more sophisticated

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Press, 1987). The disputes over the conceptualization of the path and the *mārga*-enlightenment relationship eventuated most prominently in the sudden and gradual controversies associated with Ch'an and in the famous Ch'an-Tibetan debate studied by Ruegg.

[12] Strangely, this particular configuration of Buddhist myth had never previously appeared in Asian Buddhism in spite of the pervasive prior awareness of the idea of the active bodhisattva or buddha, the idea of *parināma[nā]* (merit transfer from a bodhisattva) and the generic awareness that final enlightenment must of necessity be instantaneous.

[13] Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), pp. 3–4; see also Eckel, "Gratitude to an Empty Savior: A Study of the Concept of Gratitude in Mahāyāna Buddhist Philosophy," *History of Religions*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1985), pp. 57–75.

Mahāyāna literature: to be truly independent was to realize one's dependence on others, especially spiritual beings manifesting emptiness.[14]

Shinran's idea of reliance was more abstract than that of classical Indian or Chinese Buddhism. A strong element of visionary experience had manifested itself in Shinran's own youthful experience, and the principles of his doctrines were partly discovered in transcendental encounters with Buddhist deities or texts. However, once Shinran's mature doctrine was established, the importance of classical visionary experience dropped away and played little part in the later mainstream teaching.[15] Shinran's interpretation of the Pure Land mythos had a relatively modern character because it short-circuited the mediating feature of conventional Buddhist religiosity which had consisted of the supernormal bodhisattvas and visionary experience. Although the mythic framework had been set up by the efforts of the bodhisattva Dharmākara in the immemorial past, Shinran's own interpretation of *shinjin* went directly to the "formless" or "non-cognitive" realm of *paramārthasatya* as active agent, thus bypassing the deities and altered states traditionally cultivated by specialists.[16] Through *ekō*, ultimate enlightenment (the Amida) communicated with the world of the human directly, changing the Amida from a more or

[14] An important part of Bhāvaviveka's rhetoric was even given over to the concept of "previous vows" (*pranidhāna*), by which the Buddha expressed his activity to rescue humankind (Eckel, *To See the Buddha*, pp. 17–18, 51–61, 68–83, 147–48). Thus gratitude to an "empty" deity, the symbolized "otherness" of perfect emptiness, saturated Mahāyāna. (Cf. George R. Elder, "'Grace' in Martin Luther and Tantric Buddhism," in Houston, G.W., ed., *The Cross and the Lotus: Christianity and Buddhism in Dialogue* [Dehli: Motilal, 1985], pp. 39–49; Elder discusses how tantric Buddhism also can externalize the Buddha's action as "grace.") These ideas originated separately from the Pure Land mythos per se.

[15] The Heian genre of *ōjōden* (records of visionary encounter with Amida) tended to fade in importance after the Kamakura period. (See Frederic J. Kotas, "Ojoden: Accounts of Rebirth in the Pure Land," University of Washington PhD dissertation 1987, pp. 198–199.)

[16] Shinran's *tariki* system paid less attention to the visionary details of the mythic *sambhogakāya* or to the physical, concrete engagement with a visionary deity via traditional practices of visualization *samādhi* or even oral nembutsu. Conventionally the Pure Land was a *hōdo* or "recompensed" land, one of the regions of existence where the *sambhogakāya* or enjoyment body of the Buddha manifested itself, for this was the aspect of the Buddha most associated with the tradition of visionary contact; on the other hand, supreme perfect enlightenment or *dharmakāya* had been something more transcendent, beyond and above the *hōdo* Pure Land. Shinran collapsed the conventional categories so that Pure Land was both *hōdo* and supreme *dharmakāya* in one. This shift retained the bipolarity between ignorance and enlightenment but obviated the visionary.

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less physical, concretely visualized deity to a relatively abstract representation of perfected *pratītyasamutpāda*. Shinran's Amida was no longer an object either "interior" or "exterior," but was still a transforming "force" still somehow "other" by virtue of the gap between ignorance and enlightenment.[17]

Having done away with the usual intentional and visionary traditions, practice for Shinran consisted instead of the recognition of the bipolarity of the states of ignorance and enlightenment in everyday life, i.e. the push and pull of human ignorance and Amida's light.[18] This theory of practice constituted the second cluster, *akunin shōki* awareness. The "evil person" (*akunin*), defined according to Shinran's special dyadic view, was inherently the true object (*shōki*) of the activity of the Amida. However, Shinran's rhetoric of the power of the vow and the final "leap" to basic satori was deceptive in that it concealed how much a definite disciplinary regime was built into the approach, although it was distinctively nonmonastic and mundane. Thus, rather than relying on precepts, visualization and meditation, Shinran's approach relied on critical introspective study of the operations of the ego in ordinary daily life and on an eventual recognition of the polar relationship between the suffering produced by these ego operations and the liberation produced by the intervention by the *paramārthasatya*/Amida (from "outside" as it were) into the ordinary ego frame.[19]

Though independent of tantrism as such as practiced in China and Japan, a relationship existed between Shinran's mild-mannered, mundane introspective study of ego and the more exotic transgressive practices of tantric Buddhism. In each case, the world of ignorance was examined and exploited as

[17] The terminology which Shin retained for its own working iconography of Amida images was not *sambhogakāya*, but *hōben hōshin* (*upāya* dharma-bodies), i.e. provisional representations of the supreme ultimate (but not the same as *sambhogakāya*).

[18] Shinran's understanding of karma was subordinated to his overall ideas of *ekō* and *akunin shōki*. (Leslie Kawamura, "Shinran's View of Karma," in Ronald W. Neufeldt, *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986], pp. 191–202 and Ueda Yoshifumi, "Freedom and Necessity in Shinran's Concept of Karma, *The Eastern Buddhist* N.S. vol. 19, no. 1 [Spring 1986], pp. 76–100.)

[19] Shinran's teaching was distinguished by the absence of anything that could be called *śamatha* (concentrative meditation). If nembutsu recitation in other Pure Land teachings or in Zen-oriented systems was primarily a form of concentrative meditation, Shinran's idea of becoming aware of the dyadic relationship of ego and enlightenment was more like *vipasyanā* ("insight meditation"). (On the ambiguity of the uses of *śamatha* in traditional Buddhism, see Ruegg.)

part of a systematic scheme to lift and direct attention to the presence of other liberatory possibilities. In the case of Shin, one major aspect of this approach was the acceptance of sexuality in normal life, or at least a marginalization of renunciant sexual control as a main issue.[20]

Shinran's ideas about enlightenment via *ekō* and correct practice as *akunin shōki* awareness culminated in the denial of the essential meaningfulness of the monk-lay categories in the obtaining of enlightenment.[21] This was the third cluster, the *hisō hizoku* (neither monk nor lay) principle. Conventional

[20] But here too there was a difference with specialist tantric practice: where tantra developed complex and dramatic ritual procedures to merge with the deities and break the boundaries of ignorance, Shin practice remained mundane, using daily life as the object of its special kind of *vipasyanā*. Although the idea was not theoretically developed in traditional Shin doctrine, some scholars have suggested that these tantra-like themes of enlightenment-in-"transgression" played a role in Shinran's marriage, which was more complex than its surface character (violation of the monastic precepts) would suggest. (Minamoto Junko, "On Shinran's Marriage," *Young East* N.S. vol. 10 [Summer 1984], p. 3, pp. 3–8.)

[21] Hosokawa Gyōshin, "Shinran no 'Mukai myōji no biku' ni tsuite," in Chiba Jōryū and Hataya Akira, eds. *Shinran shōnin to Shinshū* (Kyoto: Yoshikawa Kōbundō, 1985), pp. 29–41, discusses Shinran in detail as a "preceptless monk" or "monk in name only." Shinran has been compared to Vimalakīrti (see Miyai Yoshio, *Nihon jōdokyō no seiritsu* [Tokyo: Seikō shobō, 1979, pp. 201–240] or Mikiri Jikai, "Yuimakyō ni mirareru kairitsu," in Sasaki Kyōgō, ed. *Kairitsu shisō no kenkyū* [Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1981], pp. 329–341), but even the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (*Yuimakyō*) supports the precepts. Since the Shin teaching is neither monastic nor guru-initiated, it is not clear (despite its fund of practical social wisdom) that the Shin is really describable as a traditional bodhisattva path. (Yün-hua Jan, "The Bodhisattva Idea in Chinese Literature: Typology and Significance," in *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism* [Waterloo, Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981], pp. 125–152; in the same volume, Hisao Inagaki, "The Bodhisattva Doctrine as Conceived and Developed by the Founders of the New Sects in the Heian and Kamakura Periods," pp. 165–192; and Leslie S. Kawamura, "The Myōkōnin: Japan's Representation of the Bodhisattva," pp. 223–237.) Shinran's own view was made clearest in the *Tannishō:*

"In the matter of compassion, the Path of Sages and the Pure Land path differ. Compassion in the Path of Sages is to [intentionally] pity, sympathize with and care for beings. But the desire to save others from suffering is vastly difficult to fulfil. Compassion in the Pure Land path lies in saying the Name [in *shinjin* celebration], quickly attaining Buddhahood, and freely benefiting sentient beings bearing a [*tariki*] heart of great love and great compassion. [Because] in our present lives, it is hard to carry out the [intentional bodhisattva] desire to aid others however much love and tenderness we may feel; hence such compassion always falls short of fulfillment." (Dennis Hirota,

Buddhism had already implicitly agreed that enlightenment involved a "leap" whose exact karmic preconditions were not precisely knowable, but conventional Buddhism had generally accepted without question the mythic models of monasticism or the charismatic teacher in a legitimating lineage. (Indeed, classical monastic Buddhism tended to presuppose a necessary homology between its experiential and institutional dichotomies, that is, the experiential dichotomy between wisdom and ignorance must normally be correlated with the institutional distinction between monk and lay.) Shinran's doctrine rejected the institutional dichotomy while preserving the experiential one. This modification of the institutional theory in Buddhism had major repercussions. According to Shinran no person or lineage could mediate the working of the Buddha in another (as distinguished, however, from being able to provide a correct religious description of the *tariki* enlightenment process). Thus, even more than in monastic lineage traditions, Shinran's theory emphasized the individual as the independent locus of enlightenment with minimal conventions.

Buddhism could still be embodied in a community of followers and in a teaching leadership, but not a monastic community and not a monastic leadership. The working principle instead became equal followership (*dōbō*) among persons linked by acceptance of the *tariki* theory, replacing the kinds of hierarchy presumed in traditional forms of Buddhist institutionalization. The model for a Buddhist community which emerged from Shinran's thought was so different from the models of monastic Buddhism that it initiated an entirely different politics: it allowed the development of a new kind of Buddhist organization based on an underlying egalitarian principle. Furthermore, putting enlightenment theoretically beyond the control of any specific teacher or any specific instrumental practices generated a flexible inclusivity; followers had to agree on the *tariki* principle and on the authority claim of the Honganji family to maintain the proper teaching about it, but did not have to agree on much else.

The denial, or marginalization, of conventional monastic status meant the marginalization of the semantic field associated with either asceticism in the traditional institutions or guru-disciple relationships in tantric Buddhism, especially magic and thaumaturgy (such as conventional merit transfer from monks to ancestors). This shift especially involved a denial of the uses of magic and thaumaturgy by states or aristocrats for private purposes and a rejection of the use of Buddhism as an instrument of political control over the

trans., *Tannishō: A Primer: A Record of the Words of Shinran Set Down in Lamentation Over Departures from his Teaching* [Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1982], p. 24; slightly altered for clarity.)

people. Magic and thaumaturgy had been networked with *kami* and with *honji suijaku* concepts in ways linked to the political power establishment. The rejected field of conventional monastic Buddhist semantics also included a range of pollution-purity concerns which were connected to the maintenance of the oppressive social statuses of women and eta.

Shinran did not attack the traditional mythos of Buddhism so much as go completely around it and ignore it in favor of an independent approach. Criticism of monasticism was implicit, but Shin (like Nichiren in yet another way) had such a self-sustaining mythos of its own that its propositions did not depend on, and were ultimately not defined by, the contrasts with monasticism.

The three interlocking clusters of ideas in Shinran's thought were accompanied by a stylistic shift in the presentation of Buddhism, toward a simplification of ritual, text and iconography. Nevertheless, Shin shared the general features of Mahāyāna tradition with the monastic schools: philosophy, ritual, chanting and music, architecture, textual study, moral seriousness (even if the formal attitude toward the monastic precepts was different), religious education, and karma theory. Indeed what remained striking was not how much Shinshū differed from other kinds of Buddhism, but how much it paralleled them. Furthermore, even without a sophisticated understanding of Buddhist *śūnyatā* philosophy on the part of a follower, Shinran's rhetoric distinctively inculcated strong emotional, ethical and political ideas: the *ekō* concept yielded a mood of universal hope and, for lack of a better word, "piety;" the practice of *akunin shōki* awareness taught humility and self-criticism; and *hisō hizoku* gestured toward an absolute idea of underlying human spiritual equality. These emotional, ethical and political ideas together bonded into a powerful new moral field, a field which transcended the old concept of Buddhist practice as a gradual progress to rebirth as monk after many karmic cycles.

Of course, even though Shinran's thought was rooted in traditional Mahāyānist understandings about the spontaneity of enlightenment, in many respects it was also so creatively unconventional, its legitimating claims so formally tenuous, and the political authority implications so serious, that the doctrines were open to many criticisms. These became as much a part of the tradition as Shinran's ideas themselves. Two major issues stood out: Shinran's difficulties with achieving conventional textual legitimation, and the misleading outward appearance of the *akunin shōki* rhetoric which accompanied *ekō*.

Shinran exaggerated the formal validity of his legitimating claims. The traditional Honganji lineage notion that Shinran reflected Hōnen's original intent has always been doubtful: the Pure Land tradition closest to Hōnen was probably Benchō's Chinzei-ha and its teachings about the literal *nembutsu*, the conventional Pure Land, and the residual monastic path. However, the most fundamentally problematic issue was Shinran's technique of using the Buddhist

scriptures to justify his ideas. Successful normal interpretation required meeting the expectations of received Buddhist conventions: texts had to be acceptable, word definitions and usage had to be acceptable, and a schematic conceptual structure had to be set up and aligned with traditional Buddhist concerns. Instead, Shinran imposed his *ekō* ideas on his materials and reorganized the conventional terms to fit his purposes.[22] Indeed, Shinran generated his dry and nonvisionary rhetoric of Buddhist enlightenment by stringing together conceptual and linguistic bits from a body of Buddhist rhetoric which was in fact largely visionary; this process required a particularly creative recombinant hybridization of inherited East Asian Buddhism. The idiosyncratic intellectual discourse which resulted was highly rational, sophisticated and systematic on its own terms, and yet was at the same time forced and artificial with respect to its original source texts.[23] Consequently, Shinran's handling was simply not persuasive to the normal, i.e. monastic, community.

The most confusing aspect of Shinran's rhetoric was the embedded language of the "easy" path of yielding to Amida as opposed to the "difficult" path of the monastic sages. Language subordinating Pure Land to monastic Buddhism had naturally been built into Pure Land rhetoric from India onwards and was part of its received conceptual structure. In Shinran, the easy path language was merged with what appears to be Shinran's own distinctive personal language of self-abnegation.

> I know truly how grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and advantage; so that I rejoice not at all at entering the stage of the truly settled [*shinjin*] and feel no happiness at

[22] The notion that Shinran's "leap" ideas could be read into any of the seven "patriarchs" he selected for his mythos was implausible. (According to Shinran's theory, the elements of *tariki* teaching had been found in seven of the major earlier teachers: Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Tan-luan, Tao-ch'o, Shan-tao, Genshin, and Hōnen.)

[23] The approach had a Rube Goldberg quality, and like a Rube Goldberg invention required a certain suspension of disbelief. Shin apologists even in English have too often maintained a disingenousness about this relationship and presented the difficult *p'an chiao* texts as if they were intelligible at face value. This remains one of the barriers to the intelligibility of Shinran's language outside of the Shin community. (See Luis O. Gómez, "Shinran's Faith and the Sacred Name of Amida," *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 38, no. 1, esp. pp. 81–84.) Where this problem has been recognized, it has been addressed mainly in the limited terms of how Shinran's readings of the source texts diverged literally from the normal readings. (See e.g., Ueda, *Kyōgyōshinshō* for notes on Shinran's variant readings.)

coming nearer the realization of true enlightenment. How ugly it is! How wretched![24]

Modern commentators especially have latched onto this passage to show that as an individual Shinran was lacking in self-confidence or self-respect and that somehow this individual failure is the key to the tradition.[25] However, while to some extent Shinran (like any Buddhist intellectual) was clearly an individual with a profound sense of self-analysis, treating the self-reflection passages in isolation radically ignores the impersonal larger context of Shinran's language. In actuality, the statements on self-reflection were part of the comprehensive interpretation systematically reconstructed around *ekō, hisō hizoku* and particularly the regime of *akunin shōki* practice. Since *akunin shōki* represented a particular kind of sophisticated mythic approach, the language of self-abnegation had a strongly rhetorical quality and served as a structural aspect of Shinran's bipolar Buddhist conceptualization. When Shinran used the character *gu* ("foolish") famously to describe himself in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* and some other works, it was in the sense of "precept breaker," thus establishing his nonmonastic Buddhist mythos.[26] The explicit language of self-criticism or self-abnegation actually occupied only a small portion of Shinran's doctrinal corpus.[27]

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[24] As translated in Ueda, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, vol. II, p. 279; cf. Suzuki, D.T. trans. and commentary, *The Kyōgyōshinshō: The Collection of Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith and Realizing of the Pure Land* (Kvoto: Shinshū Ōtaniha, 1973), p. 140. Cited for example in Takahatake Takamichi, *Young Man Shinran: A Reappraisal of Shinran's Life* (Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfrid Laurier University Press: Waterloo, Ontario, 1987), p. 102 or Bloom, p. 29.

[25] See especially Shinran's invented term for himself, Gutoku. Suzuki, for example, glossed this as consisting of two Chinese characters meaning literally "ignorant" and "bald-headed." This suggested Shinran's unworthiness to be in the monastic priesthood, his commonness, his stupidity. (Suzuki, *Kyōgyōshinshō,* pp. 140, 212; viz. also the paradigmatic treatment by Bloom, pp. 28–30.)

[26] Bandō Shōjun, "Shinran no kairitsukan," in Sasaki Kyōgo, ed. *Kairitsu shisō no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1981), pp. 555–579. More accurately than Suzuki, Ueda and Hirota gloss the meaning of the character "Toku" in the name Gutoku as short-haired, stubble-headed, or badly-shaven. The term was used to describe the hair of monks who had let it grow out longer than appropriate; thus it was a term of derision for those who broke the precepts. (*Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*, p. 34.) In the terms of his own *tariki* thought, Shinran's self-appellation of Gutoku is best considered a complex irony directed not only at himself but at the monastic institution.

[27] The Gutoku passage cited is the only statement like it in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*; a few other statements along these lines appear in the *Tannishō*, a posthumous work by one

Overall, Shinran's writing was quite preponderantly sūtra-based Mahāyā-nist language manipulated at both popular and technical levels. He was not a confessional writer, but a systematic mytho-philosopher. No unambiguous evidence exists that Shinran thought of his approach as inferior to the monastic one. Some of Shinran's original remarks, as well as the attitude of the later tradition, suggest that he even directed a certain amount of sarcasm towards monasticism which is concealed behind the surface rhetoric of "easy" and "difficult."

> [I]f you imagine in me some special knowledge of a way to birth other than the nembutsu or a familiarity with the writings that teach it, you are greatly mistaken. If that is the case, you would do better to visit the many eminent scholars in Nara or on Mt. Hiei and inquire fully of them about the essentials for birth. I simply accept and entrust myself to what a good teacher told me, "Just say the Name and be liberated by Amida"; nothing else is involved.[28]

It may be assumed that Shinran was aware that he was issuing a challenge to the mythos of monastic Buddhism and its authority.[29]

This ex-insider's conflicted relationship with normal Buddhist authority and

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of Shinran's followers which is thought to record some of his oral teaching. However, almost all of the language of self-criticism or despair in Shinran occurs in the *wasan* verse set *Shōzōmatsu wasan* (verses on the *mappō* decline of the dharma), where the overt subject is the decline of monastic Buddhism, which accentuates the need for Shinran's *ekō* theory. Thus almost every such passage can be assimilated to Shinran's impersonal *tariki* theory. In a very few places the personal voice of Shinran seems to appear (for example, his reflection on his own egoistic desire to be a teacher (Ryukoku University Translation Center, *Shōzōmatsu Wasan: Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age*, Kyoto: Ryukoku University Press, 1980, no. 116, p. 120).

[28] Hirota, *Tannishō*, pp. 35–36; slightly altered.

[29] Takahatake, pp. 5–6, 89. The first words in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* are *hisokani omonmireba* and *tsutsushinde:*

"I reflect within myself [*hisokani omonmireba*]: The universal Vow difficult to fathom is indeed a great vessel bearing us across the ocean difficult to cross. . . . Reverently [*tsutsushinde*] contemplating the true essence of the Pure Land way . . ." (Ueda, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, vol. 1, p. 57, 63; Kiritani, vol. 1, pp. 76, 102). However, *hisokani* ("keeping it to oneself") and *tsutsushinde* ("with restraint, with self-control, fearing danger") can also be rendered as "carefully," "circumspectly" or "cautiously;" such renderings would be in consonance with the original political environment which faced Shinran. Of course, later interpretation, especially as routinized in the Tokugawa period, tried to emphasize the innocuousness of the *tariki* theory of authority.

its mytho-philosophical conventions may be the real key to Shinran. Above all, nothing about the subsequent history of the Shin tradition suggested a weak sensibility lacking in energy or activity. Shinran's successors and the larger Shin doctrinal tradition which grew out of the original work stressed positive Shinranian themes of the inclusiveness of the *tariki hongan* ("Main Vow of the other-power") and the construction of the universal *kyōdan* (community of the teaching). This community became the largest, richest, most independent, and most active in traditional Japan. Thus, far from being simply a "failed monk," behind the masks of technical interpretation and his own self-deprecation, Shinran may be construed as being one of the most shrewdly and profoundly rebellious individuals in East Asian history.