

A PERSONALLY TRANSMITTED TRADITION OF TRUE PURE LAND DOCTRINE
 SOON TO BE MADE PUBLIC UNDER THE TITLE, SHINSHŪSŌDENGISHO

I am grateful to the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, for graciously lending me the pages of its Bulletin for introducing a literature which I believe to be indispensable for the understanding of Japanese Buddhism and of Japanese thought in general.

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Buddhism was publicly transmitted to Japan via China and Korea in the 6th century (officially, 538). About fifty years later, it took firm hold through the activity of Prince Shōtoku (574-622). But it was only from the 11th century onwards, during the Kamakura Period, that Japanese Buddhism was born. This happened when Hōnen (1133-1212) and Shinran (1180-1270) started the Pure Land School, Nichiren (1222-1282) opened the Nichiren sect, and Eisai (1141-1215) and Dōgen (1200-1251) brought Zen Buddhism over from China and Japanized it. The Japanese Buddhism born in the Kamakura period can be considered to be the sense of unity with nature and being itself, which is an original legacy of the Japanese people, clarified and heightened into a self-conscious religiosity.

In retrospect, the history of Buddhism in the three countries - India, China, Japan - presents the following picture. Indian Buddhism is sometimes called "Dharma-istic," as indeed it delved into and stressed the dharma, the truth, the unique and universal being. Chinese Buddhism, on the other hand, earned the name of "doctrinalism." By an exercise of unique imaginative genius, the Chinese worked out a classification by critical appraisal of the different Buddhist doctrines, in the "five periods and eight doctrines" of the T'ien-t'ai school, the "five vehicles and ten schools" of the Hua-yen School, and so forth. They tried to grasp Sakyamuni's religious experience by a structural ordering of the various sacred doctrines which Sakyamuni preached during his lifetime.

Against this background, Japanese Buddhism, as represented by Nichiren and Shinran, can be called "introspective" or "heart-centered" (kanjinshugi). One might say that this Japanese Buddhism, through an awakening to the self by the grace of the teachings of Sakyamuni, opened up a world of personal reality beyond the individual self. I would add that this is the particular way that Soga Ryōjin presents the history of Buddhism in his A Clarification of Shinran Shōnin's

Position through a Discussion of the Characteristics of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Buddhism.

As a typical representative of this heart-centeredness, Nichiren believed himself to be a reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Visistacāritra (Jap., Jōgyō Bosatsu - one of the Buddha's disciples, according to the Lotus Sutra), placed himself firmly on the standpoint of the "holy path of self-effort," and offered his life to the incantation of the sacred formula (daimoku) and to building on earth the world of the Lotus Sutra. In clear contrast to Nichiren, and conscious of being a poor creature, Shinran called himself Gutoku Shinran. He adopted as his standpoint "the Pure Land gate of other-power," and looked up to the world of the truth of Amida's Vow (hongan) and Holy Name (nembutsu).

The Nichiren school of the daimoku and the Pure Land school of the nembutsu live on today amidst the simple people of Japan. In the Tokugawa Period (from the 17th century onwards) the nembutsu penetrated the lives of the common people and took the form of Myōkōnin ("wonderfully good people"), people who, far from all institution and doctrine, stress religious experience. By the way, these Myōkōnin were discovered and introduced to the world by D.T.Suzuki. In the cultural sphere, on the other hand, the nembutsu spirit can be said to have fused with the popular art forms of the Tokugawa period, kabuki and bunraku e.g., and to live on there up to the present. As is well known, Zen inspired the warrior culture in the Nō theatre, the tea ceremony, etc. Moreover, Zen itself appears on the surface of culture, and Zen people are not the only ones to recognize the existence of a typical Zen culture. Nembutsu's relationship to culture is a different one: the nembutsu became part of the "climate" of Japanese culture, it melted away into the very flesh and blood of the common people of Japan, and thus nourished Japanese culture. Therein we detect the true nature of the nembutsu.

All this may be taken as an introduction to the history of the Pure Land doctrine of Shinran. Shinran's doctrine and faith are transmitted through his grandson, Nyoshin (1239-1300) and Kakunyo (1270-1351). At the time of the eighth patriarch, Rennyo (1415-1499), they spread widely among the people. The high esteem of the historical tradition - the kechimyakusōjō (the transmission from person to person) and the kudensōjō (the transmission from mouth to mouth) - is present in Buddhism from its very beginning. As to the Shinran - Nyoshin - Kakunyo - Rennyo line, although each of them left writings behind, that should not make us forget the role of oral tradition. The Tannishō is a record of things orally transmitted by Shinran in which we can indeed read things which are not to be found in Shinran's works. This should help remind us of the importance of oral tradition in the Pure Land school.

As a matter of fact, Rennyo chose five of his children -- Renjun, Rengai, etc. -- to form the "Five Houses" (goke): houses of personal transmission of Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō doctrine. The ninth patriarch, Jitsunyo (1457-1525), in turn, founded three such houses. To these

houses was entrusted the study of the doctrine, mainly on the basis of the oral tradition. There the foundations of a "theology" of the True Pure Land school were laid, centered in the Kyōgyōshinshō. This lineage survives even today in the form of specially designated temples, known as the "gokaji" (the five temples).

In particular, the Pure Land doctrine studied and transmitted in the lineage of Renjun (1463-1540) has remained, for all practical purposes, unpublished. This doctrine referred to in our title, is now on the point of being published by the Higashi-honganji, under the title Shinshūsōdengisho.

In the Tokugawa period, the religious doctrine of the various Buddhist organizations came under the influence of the Recommendation of Learning, one of the policies of the feudal regime. In every sect, a school system - called gakuryō or gakurin - was established and gradually developed. While all of these schools were subsidized, they came under the control of the feudal regime, and the learning there became more and more annotative and philological. In this way the original texts were established with great exactitude, but the religious character and even the thought character of these studies became very tenuous. As a result, the common people searching for religion drew further and further away from the religious organization and its official doctrine.

Given these historical circumstances, the traditional doctrine transmitted in the gokaji did not become the mainstream of the doctrine of the organization. The five temples simply continued to accumulate their studies, while lecturing from time to time in the presence of the successive Hosshu (patriarchs) of the Honganji. Since they did not constitute the mainstream, there was no influence by the feudal regime. Still, they did come under the influence of the spirit of the times with its recommendation of learning, and produced outstanding theologians such as Ichigen (1677-1746) and Shingen (1704-1753) of the Kōzenji (Osaka), and Shinkaku (1714-1761) and Shinshō (1731-1783) of the Shinshūji (Sakai).

These scholars worked in the spirit of Japanese Buddhism as described above, and developed a deeply religious kind of theology, completely different in character from the mainstream exegetical doctrine of the True Pure Land organizations. This theology clarified many problems which in the official doctrine have been left in their religiously unclear form, and occasionally preferred interpretations diametrically opposite to official doctrine. This theology is now on the point of being made public. It will certainly bring great changes in the traditional True Pure Land doctrine, and it can be expected to exert great influence on the Buddhist doctrine in Japan in its entirety.

This personally transmitted religious doctrine has been preserved in its original old-style language, mainly in Osaka's Kōzenji, but also in the Shinshūji (Sakai), Ekōji (Osaka), and Honshūji (Mie prefecture).

Since its founding in 1936, an organization known as the Sōjōgakuen has labored at the study and ordering of this doctrinal legacy. This organization, whose central figure is the resident bonze of the Shinshūji, Ashikaga Enshō (Professor Emeritus of California University), continues its work even at present. It is due to Professor Ashikaga's efforts that now the Doctrinal Research Institute of the Higashi-honganji has taken up the publication of that doctrine.

The literature of this doctrinal heritage has been slumbering in the sutra halls of various temples. Much of it has been discovered and is being put in order, but it is not inconceivable that part of it remains as yet undiscovered. At present, the following texts are scheduled for publication:

I. Sutra section: Lectures on the Daimuryōjukyō, Kanmuryōjukyō, and Amidakyō.

II. Section on Shinran's precursors: Lectures on the works of India's Nagarjuna (Jap., Ryūjū) and Vasubandhu (Jap., Tenjin), China's T'anluan (Jap., Donran), Tao-cho (Jap., Dōshaku), and Shantao (Jap., Zendō), and Japan's Hōnen.

III. Shinran section: Lectures on the Kyōgyōshinshō, Jōdomonruijushō, Gutakushō, Sanjōwasan, and on various short texts.

The number of texts is very great and they present a surprisingly systematic doctrine.