

The Development of *Mappō* Thought in Japan (II)

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The Mappō Tōmyōki

Mappō ceased to be analyzed in its mere political implications and started to be felt and suffered as an existential problem on a larger scale after the appearance of a short treatise known as *Mappō tōmyōki* 末法燈明記 (The candle of the Latter Dharma) at the beginning of the Kamakura era.

Traditionally attributed to Saichō (767–822), the *Mappō tōmyōki* has been the object of lively debate among scholars, some of whom defend its authenticity, while others consider it a forgery by a Pure Land believer of the Heian period. Whatever the answer, we know that the first person to mention it in his writings was Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), and that the major thinkers of the Kamakura period, including Eisai, Dōgen, Shinran, and Nichiren were greatly influenced by it.

The *Mappō tōmyōki* is a defense of the monastic community against the criticism of people denouncing the decline of morality in monks and nuns' behavior, and of emperor Kanmu 桓武 (r. 781–806) who was trying to put an end to such behavior with regulations on the moral code of the Buddhist community of Nara. The author argues that the government, in its criticism, tends to forget that these monks are living in the Last Dharma Age (*mappō*) and that, therefore, they cannot apply to themselves rules which were made for and fitted to monks living in the ideal period of the True Doctrine. Since in the Last Age only verbal teachings survive, while practices are non-existent and enlightenment unreachable, precepts also have disappeared and, therefore, to maintain that monks are breaking precepts is meaningless. How can something which is non-existent be broken? For the same reason, precepts cannot be kept. The *Mappō tōmyōki* says on this point: "If there were Dharmas of precepts, there may be the

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breaking of the precepts, but since by now there are no Dharmas of precepts, what precepts are there to break? And since there is no breaking of the precepts, how much less is there the keeping of the precepts?" (MATSUBARA 1960 [hereafter "MT"], p. 180; RHODES 1980, pp. 91–92).

Moreover, since a person keeping the precepts in the Last Age is as rare as finding a "tiger in the marketplace," we should see in the nominal monks of this age – nominal because they are monks in name only – the True Treasure of the world, the merit-field of the people. People were invited to worship them because they had reached the highest spiritual level achievable in the period of the Last Doctrine. By shaving their heads and putting on the Buddhist robes, these monks did something superior to the usual activities of common beings. By choosing the Buddhist way they indicate the path to *nirvāṇa* to various people. The *Mappō tōmyōki* implies that those monks who strive to keep the precepts, thus bowing to the requirements of the government, show a formal attitude towards Buddhism, forgetting the human meaning of their religion. They are, therefore, compared to locusts which destroy the country, and condemned according to a passage from the *Ninnōkyō* 仁王經 (Sūtra of the benevolent kings, T. 8, 824–845), "If any disciple of mine serves the government, he is not my disciple." These monks, following formal precepts not suitable to their age, are doers of false good since, if they had to follow the real precepts, they should abstain from "stepping on the king's land and drinking the king's water" (MT, p. 193; RHODES, pp. 102–103). Therefore, the government was invited to stop its discrimination between monks who kept the precepts and monks who did not, in order to avoid the ruin of the country.

Shinran and the Mappō Tōmyōki

Besides its strictly political meaning, the *Mappō tōmyōki* was extremely influential on the thinkers of the Kamakura period in general, and on Shinran in particular, on three points:

1. In showing a deep consciousness of the fragile, foolish, unenlightened (*oroka*, 愚) nature of human beings living in the Last Age, which brought about the necessity to reflect upon oneself and experience a deep feeling of repentance.

The *Mappō tōmyōki*, in this sense, pointed not only to the Buddhist community, but to laymen in general who tended to forget their true nature while despising the nominal monks. This feeling of malaise caused by the real understanding of oneself reached its apex with Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), who surnamed himself

Gutoku Zenshin 愚禿善信, where “Gu” means “foolish” or “ignorant,” and shows his realization of his true nature.

2. In its concern with the salvation of all human beings, not only of those few who strove to reach enlightenment through exterior practices, thus showing a tendency to be in complete accord with Mahāyāna teachings.

The *Mappō tōmyōki* does not encourage the practice of evil, but justifies it as an inevitable trend of the times, encouraging people to be conscious of this situation and to meditate upon it, and thus realize that mere formal acts cannot be considered good practices. Even though a monk commits evil practices, he is still able to reveal the hidden storehouse of all goodness and virtue to others, thus becoming a good master to sentient beings (MT, p. 188; RHODES, p. 98). On this point the *Mappō tōmyōki* was still addressing a religious audience, and Shinran would develop this same concept by applying it to all human beings.

3. In showing the necessity of judging things according to the constant correlation of the three elements time (*ji* 時), teachings (*kyō* 教), and human capabilities (*ki* 機).

In its discussion of nominal monks, the *Mappō tōmyōki* stresses the fact that in a world devoid of the real Buddha Treasure, of *pratyekabuddha*, *arhat*, wise sages, people who have obtained *samādhi*, keepers of precepts, and monks who keep the precepts imperfectly, a nominal monk must be considered the supreme treasure, in the same way that nickel, iron, pewter, lead, or tin would be considered priceless treasures in a world devoid of gold, silver, and brass (MT, pp. 181–182, RHODES, pp. 92–93). Every age has its own priceless treasure: the Last Dharma Age’s priceless treasure is the nominal monk, whose limited capability must follow the teaching prescribed for the age in which he is living. A monk living in the Last Dharma Age cannot behave according to the precepts of the time of the True Doctrine, otherwise “the teachings and the capabilities will be opposed to each other, and the Doctrine and the people won’t match” (MT, p. 191; RHODES, p. 101).

The deep influence that *Mappō tōmyōki* had on the thought of Shinran is acknowledged by the fact that he quoted it almost entirely in the sixth roll of his *Ken jōdo shinjitsu kyōgyōshinshō monrui* 顯淨土真実教行信証文類 (Collection of passages expounding the true teaching, living, faith and realizing of the Pure Land) begun in 1224. The reading of such a treatise must have had a not small influence on his resolution at twenty-nine years

of age to leave Mt. Hiei and abandon the official Tendai teachings in order to attend Hōnen's hermitage in Yoshimizu and embrace the Pure Land faith. In using the text of the *Mappō tōmyōki*, Shinran left aside all political implications, and addressed his attention to the absence of precepts during the Last Dharma Age, and to the impossibility of reaching enlightenment through training and practices. Following the teachings of the Jōdo patriarchs Tao-cho 道綽 (562–645) and Hōnen, teachings reinforced by the *Mappō tōmyōki*'s idea of the correlation of time, teachings, and human capabilities, Shinran stressed in his main work the unfitness of the teachings of traditional Buddhism, known as the Holy Path (*shōdō* 聖道), when applied to the present age. He showed how difficult it was to follow doctrines made for people living in the True Dharma age, whose understanding was much greater than that of the people living in the present time. Instead of these difficult practices (*nangyō* 難行), he suggested the necessity of following a way suitable to all people living in the Imitation, Last Dharma Ages, and after the Dharma-extinction, a way which made no distinction “between the noble and the humble, between the black-robed and the white-robed, between male and female, old and young, which did not question the amount of sinfulness; it did not weigh the duration of discipline one had gone through, nor had it anything to do with discipline or morality, with suddenness or gradualness, with the contemplative or practical states of mind, with the right views or the wrong views, with thought or no-thought, with living moments or the moment to die, with many thoughts or one thought” (IENAGA 1971, p. 133; SUZUKI 1973, pp. 118–119).

The Pure Land Path (*jōdomon* 淨土門) gave him the answer to the problem, being a teaching which proclaimed itself to overcome the barriers of time, suitable as it was to the time of Śākyamuni's life, and of the True, Imitation, and Last Dharma Ages. It offered, in fact, a solution easy to grasp for people of all times. *Kyōgyōshinshō* says on this point: “Indeed we know that the various teachings of the Path of Sages are practicable only for the Buddha's time and the Right Dharma Age, not for the Imitation and the Last Dharma Ages and after the Dharma-extinction. The time for those teachings has already passed and they do not agree with the capacities of sentient beings, whereas the true teaching of the Pure Land compassionately guides the defiled and evil multitudes in the Imitation and Last Dharma Ages and after the Dharma-extinction, as well as those in the Buddha's time and the True Dharma Age” (IENAGA 1971, pp. 214–215; RYUKOKU 1980, p. xv).

Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age

The Path of Sages aimed at reaching enlightenment through practices dictated by a self-effort (*jiriki* 自力) attitude in a time when practices were non-existent and there were no precepts to which human beings could conform their behavior. Only the absolute trust in an Other-Power (*tariki* 他力), Amida, could solve problems unsolvable by beings of the present time. Shinran came back to this theme at the end of his life, when in 1257 he wrote in his “Hymns on the Last Age” (*Shōzōmatsu wasan* 正像末和贊) a poem on the unsuitability of the teachings of the Path of Sages in the Last Dharma Age:

The aspiration in the Path of Sages for enlightenment through
self-power
Is beyond our minds and words.
For us, ignorant beings, always sinking in the ocean of saṃsāra,
How is it possible to waken such an aspiration?²

The *Mappō tōmyōki* offered to Shinran the opportunity to justify the existence of the Pure Land school as the only way available to people living in an age devoid of precepts. This is also confirmed by Shinran's explanation of the reason why nominal monks are the Buddhist Treasure of the Last Age. As he says in *Kyōgyōshinshō*, at the end of the long quotation from *Mappō tōmyōki*, the nominal monks' importance is acknowledged on the ground that, as it is stated in the *Daihikyō* (Sūtra of great compassion 大悲經, T. 12, 945–973), “if they have called upon Buddha's name even only once, their merit will not be in vain” (IENAGA 1971, p. 225).

The practice of *nenbutsu* as a proof of the nominal monks' trusting in Amida's compassion justified in Shinran's eyes the worthy existence of those monks for whom *Mappō tōmyōki* had been written, and against whom traditional Buddhism had been so demanding. No matter if they were monks in name only, they had to be respected and revered in the same way as Śākyamuni's best disciples.

In the *Shōzōmatsu wasan* one hymn dedicated to such monks is:

Although they are monks in name only and do not follow the
precepts,
This is the defiled world of the Last Dharma Age,

² *Jiriki shōdō no bodaishin / Kokoro mo kotoba mo oyobarezu / Jōmotsu ruten no bongu wa / Ikude ka hōkai seshimubeki*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, ITŌ 1981, p. 148; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (16), p. 16. Henceforth in my notes *Shōzōmatsu wasan* refers to ITŌ 1981 and *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* to the English translation by the RYUKOKU UNIVERSITY TRANSLATION CENTER, 1980.

So, equally with Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana,
We are encouraged to pay homage to and revere them.³

But Shinran, in his attempt to show that salvation was available to everybody, went much further than the *Mappō tōmyōki*, pointing out that there was no reason to differentiate between monks and common beings, since we are all destined to be embraced by Amida's compassion. Common beings are the Buddhist Treasure, in the same way as nominal monks, since they share the same nature, live in the same period, and have the same opportunities to reach enlightenment. This way of thinking came to Shinran from his long period of absence from the capital (1207–1245), when he had the opportunity to travel extensively all around Japan, continuing, at the same time, his work of evangelism and the common life of husband and father. While lamenting being neither a monk nor a layman, he experienced all the difficulties of life, feeling more and more the necessity of finding a religious answer which could satisfy people living in this world. This explains Shinran's feeling of *mappō* as the present reality, where beings are necessarily evil. As a man of *mappō* living with other beings with whom he was sharing the same nature, Shinran, for the first time in the history of Japanese thought, realized that *mappō* was not something outside human beings, so he was able to say that "I cannot consider my existence apart from the existence of *mappō*." *Mappō* was equated by Shinran to the eternal cycle of birth and death, being nothing but existence, *samsāra*. To escape *mappō*, therefore, meant in Shinran's judgment to escape oneself, a thing impossible to do from the perspective of this world. For a man enduring the hardships of this life, sensible to the requests of people looking for concrete answers grounded in the present reality, the weakness of the traditional teachings of the Pure Land which had satisfied the necessities of the Heian nobility were exposed. If the problem of existence required a solution satisfactory to people living in this world, the traditional escapist approach to *mappō* – to abandon this defiled world in order to reach the Pure Land (*onri edo gongu jōdo* 厭離穢土欣求淨土) through training and practices – was of no avail. This was the solution followed by Genshin and his followers who had secluded themselves in mountain huts, and by several members of the nobility who looked for seclusion in their gorgeous palaces. Shinran, in the same Pure Land tradition and respectful of its main doctrines, tried to provide an answer more relevant to the present world, keeping the existence of human beings at the center of his

³ *Mukai myōji no biku naredo / Mappō jokuse no yo to narite / Sharihotsu Mokuren ni hitoshikute / Kuyō kugyō o susume shimu*. From *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (106), p. 106.

thought. The answer came in the *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, a work concerned with the destiny of people living in the Last Dharma Age and with Shinran's own destiny. All previous ideas about *mappō* – the consciousness of decline in the Three Ages, Genshin's view of human sin, the Heian nobility's sense of social instability – are objects of deep reflection, revealing Shinran's search for meaning in the present life.

The *Shōzōmatsu wasan* starts with the presentation of the Three Dharma Ages. We know from the *Kyōgyōshinshō* that Shinran adopted the year 949 B.C. as the date of Buddha's demise, and that he accepted the theory according to which the True Dharma Age lasted five hundred years and the Imitation Age one thousand years, thus saying that Gennin 1 (1224) of the Kamakura period was already the six hundred eighty-third year (mistake for six hundred seventy-third year) of the Last Dharma Age (IENAGA 1971, p. 217). Shinran tended to emphasize a single division of the three Dharma Ages, either at the middle of the Imitation Dharma Age, or between the True and Imitation Dharma Ages. In this second period all Buddhist scriptures except those of the Jōdo school were destined to lose their effectiveness.⁴ Moreover, Shinran talked about the five defilements in this world, to each of which he dedicated a poem. He started by describing the impurity of kalpa (*kōjoku* 劫濁), the time when the life span of human beings was destined to fluctuate between eighty-thousand years and ten years, as a consequence of the worsening of the karma of sentient beings. This was an inevitable law dictated by the continuous passing of time and by the increasing defilements in the world. Shinran says on this point:

When the tens of thousands of years' life span of sentient
beings,
Because of the gradual decay of their good karma,
Was shortened to twenty-thousand years,
The world was given the name "evil world of five defilements."⁵

Moreover, he talked about the impurity of the mind and body of sentient beings (*shujōjoku* 衆生濁), stressing the fact that human beings became smaller and smaller as a consequence of the increasing of defilements and viciousness in human beings. Here Shinran was influenced by the *Fotsu t'ung chi* 仏祖統記 (T. 49, 129–476), by the Chinese monk Tshe p'an 志磐 of the T'ien-t'ai sect, where we read that length and height of human beings

⁴ *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 235 (1), 236 (2), 237 (3); *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (2), (3), (4).

⁵ *Shumanzai no ujō mo / Kahō yōyaku otoroete / Nimanzai ni itarite wa / Gōjoku akusei no na o etari*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 239 (5), p.144; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (6), p.6.

are proportional and vary according to the passing of time and the growth of defilements. When the length of human life increases to eighty-four thousand years, the height of human beings is eight *jō* (about twenty-five meters). However, since the life span shortens one year every hundred years, so the height decreases by one *sun* (about 3 cm.) every hundred years. Therefore when, at the top of defilement, the life span is ten years, the height of men will be one *shaku* (about 30.5 cm.) (T. 49, 299a). Shinran's hymn says:

When, with the passing of time, we reach the corrupted kalpa,
The bodies of sentient beings grow smaller and smaller.
Since the wickedness of the five defilements increases,
They become like spiteful dragons and poisonous snakes.⁶

Such circumstances bring about the rise of ignorance (Jpn. *mumyō* 無明, Skt. *avidyā*), causing feelings of hatred in human hearts, as it is stated in the hymn on the impurity of evil passions (*bonnōjoku* 煩惱濁):

Ignorance and passions grow thick
Filling all corners like particles of dust.
Love and hate rise up in human hearts
Like mountain peaks and high ridges.⁷

Ignorance causes anger and heretical views, encouraging people to slander those practicing *nenbutsu*. While writing the following hymn on the impurity of views (*kenjoku* 見濁), Shinran must have thought of the persecution undergone by his master Hōnen and by Shinran himself, for having preached a non-meditative type of *nenbutsu* in order to cut all signs of self-effort, and to use *nenbutsu* as the proof of complete trust in Amida. Therefore, in the slanderers of the followers of the *nenbutsu* of this hymn we can see the official monks of Nara and Mt. Hiei:

The false views of sentient beings grow thicker and thicker
Like dense forests of thorns and brambles.
They slander the followers of the *nenbutsu*
And by anger they try to destroy the faith.⁸

⁶ *Kōjoku no toki utsuru ni wa / Ujō yōyaku shinshō nari / Gojoku akuja masaru yue / Akuryū dokujū no gotoku nari.* From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 240 (6), p.145; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (7), p.7.

⁷ *Mumyō bonnō shigeku nite / Jinju no gotoku henman su / Aizō ijun suru koto wa / Kōbu gakusan ni kotonarazu.* From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 241 (7), p.145; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (8), p.8.

⁸ *Ujō no jaken shijō nite / Sōrin kokushi no gotoku nari / Nenbutsu no shinja o gihō shite / Hae shindoku sakari nari.* From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 242 (8), p. 145; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (9), p. 9.

By following wrong views men inflict harm upon themselves, not realizing how close to death they are and how brief is the life of their surroundings. In the hymn on the impurity of man's life (*myōjoku* 命濁) we read the sad destiny of human beings:

Now that, because of its impurity, human life is so short,
Man and his surrounding are destined to come to an end.
Since they turn away from the true, liking only false views,
They unreasonably inflict harm on each other.⁹

In such conditions human beings cannot even hope to escape their evil nature by themselves. All practices, all actions, even those thought to be the most meritorious, are false and futile for the simple reason that they spring out of a human mind which is always moved by selfish motivations. To believe in the possibility of breaking the chain of birth and death is an illusion bringing sad consequences, since nothing can be solved by self-effort. Evil is the main component of a human being, whose mind was compared by Shinran to the deceitfulness of serpents and scorpions.¹⁰ Therefore, the main problem faced by Shinran was to explain how it was possible to escape from the chain of causation if the individual was defenseless as far as the accumulation of good karma was concerned. Shinran brought the Jōdo teachings to their extreme conclusions, giving to Amida an absolute power by which all human beings could be saved. Amida was presented by Shinran as the perfect bodhisattva who had temporarily renounced reaching supreme enlightenment in order to bring to salvation all sentient beings. His compassion was shown by the forty-eight vows, made when he was known as bodhisattva Hōzō, in which he promised that he would achieve his goal or else he would not accept enlightenment. Of these forty-eight vows presented in the *Muryōjukyō* 無量壽經 (The larger sūtra of eternal life), eight were mentioned by Shinran in his *Kyōgyōshinshō*, among which the eighteenth summarizes Amida's plans:

If, upon my attaining Buddhahood, all beings in the ten quarters aspiring in all sincerity and faith to be born in my Country, pronouncing my name up to ten times, were not to be born there, then may I not attain the Supreme Enlightenment. Excepted from this are those who have committed the five grave offenses and those who slander the True Dharma (SUZUKI 1973, p. 338).

⁹ *Myōjoku chūyō setsuna nite / Eshō nihō metsumōsu / Haishō hija o konomu yue / Ō ni ada o zo okoshikeru*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 243 (9), p. 146; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (10), p. 10.

¹⁰ *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 317 (3), p. 172; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (96), p. 96.

Shinran's interpretation of this vow was quite different from that of previous Pure Land teachers who believed in the effort of the individual in order to reach the Pure Land. We may think of the Heian nobility intent on piling up continuous recitations of Amida's name, so to be accepted by Amida in his land. Determination to be born there was thought to be the necessary state of mind required for the practice of the *nenbutsu*. In Shinran's interpretation, faith (*shinjin* 信心) is not something which is to be cultivated by the practitioner. It is Amida's sincere mind given to beings, flowing into them, in a time when a person had neither the ability nor the strength to arouse by himself a feeling of faith. Faith was considered by Shinran to be a total trust in Amida's vow which promises salvation to everybody. Shinran, in the preface to the third roll of his *Kyōgyōshinshō*, criticized all those laymen and monks of the Last Dharma Age for not believing that faith comes from Amida's will, for doubting Amida's compassion, and for trying to obtain a personal faith through meditation and practical discipline. They are called "ignorant of the true faith which is as solid as vajra" (IENAGA 1971, p. 71; SUZUKI 1973, p. 85).

Nenbutsu had been interpreted by Shan-tao 善導 (613–681) and Genshin as the chief means of salvation for the coarse minds of ordinary people too weak to undertake practices of purification and meditation. Shinran considered *nenbutsu* not a way to achieve birth in Amida's Paradise, but a consequence of the impulse received by Amida, which is to say that the urge or inspiration to pronounce Amida's name comes as a gift from Amida. Therefore the continuous repetition of the name is of no avail, since salvation comes from Buddha, not from the individual's mind. The *Kyōgyōshinshō*, again in the third roll, states that "true faith inevitably provides the name, but the name does not assuredly provide the faith of the Vow Power" (Bloom 1965, p. 73). This is the clearest proof that faith, not *nenbutsu*, is at the center of the problem of salvation, and that birth into the Pure Land is caused by faith (in Shinran's meaning), not by *nenbutsu* or any other practice. The practice of *nenbutsu* was explained by Shinran as the height of Amida's activity as a compassionate bodhisattva, who doesn't hesitate to transfer his merits to others. From this perspective *nenbutsu* became a real gift offered by the turning-over of Amida's meritorious practice (*ekō-hotsugan shin* 廻向発願心), and not coming from the will of sentient beings, as a means of attaining birth in the Pure Land. This is stated in the following hymn of *Shōzōmatsu wasan*:

Since pronouncing the Name with true faith
Is what is transferred by Amida,

It is called “non-transference from the side of the common beings.”

Therefore, we must distinguish it from reciting the *nenbutsu* through self-power.¹¹

Faith is Amida's gift arisen and manifested when a person is aware of one's sinful state and of the availability of Buddha's compassion. It is the moment when salvation is guaranteed through a conversion called by Shinran “transverse transcendence” (*ōchō* 横超), a conversion coming directly from Amida. No contrivance is involved, and it allows people to cut off the five evil paths and pass over the sea of birth and death (Bloom 1965, pp. 58–59). The concept of faith as the complete rejection of self-centered actions was epoch-making in so far as it allowed human beings to accept themselves as they were, with their passions and evil nature. At the same time, it offered a means to escape the bondage of causation and karma through complete trust, the only way to enlightenment in the time of the Last Dharma. Karma worked independent of Amida who, through his power, could transcend it, breaking the bondage of birth and death to which human beings were enslaved. For a person arisen to faith, the world of karma is destined to end at one's death. This is because, according to Shinran, those who had obtained faith could reach in this life the stage of assurance of definitely attaining ultimate realization (*shōjōju* 正定聚), a stage traditionally accorded only to a bodhisattva of an advanced stage, who was sure to realize supreme enlightenment. Those in whom faith was arisen obtained in this world the result of what was called “profit in the present” (*genyaku* 現益), the stage of being “equal to perfect enlightenment” (*tōshōgaku* 等正覺), thus assuring them not only birth in the Pure Land but also attainment of Buddhahood (*jōbutsu* 成仏) at the time of their death. Therefore human beings had the potential to reach in this life a stage of enlightenment accorded by previous Jōdo teachings only to those already born in the Pure Land, and the assurance of becoming a Buddha immediately at the time of death, without having to go through a series of births in the Pure Land, as it was believed in Shinran's time. Therefore, for Shinran, birth in Amida's Paradise (*ōjō* 往生) occurred in this life, as soon as faith was obtained. Moreover, Shinran dispelled the fear of the possibility of losing the high stage obtained in this life by saying that when faith arises in us there was no way to lose it. This explains the reason why

¹¹ *Shinjitsu shinjin no shōmyō wa / Mida ekō no hō nareba / Fuekō to nazukete zo / Jiriki no shōnen kirawaruru*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 272 (38), p. 155; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (39), p. 39.

such a stage is also known as the stage of “non-retrogression” (*futaiten* 不退転). Common beings were guaranteed to attain in this world the same stage as the bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, thus being able to reach supreme enlightenment immediately after their present life. But, whereas people of faith obtained Buddhahood at the same time as their death, it took five billion six hundred seventy million years for Maitreya to become a Buddha. This is stated in the following hymn:

Five billion six hundred seventy million years will pass
 Before the bodhisattva Maitreya becomes a Buddha.
 Those who have obtained true faith
 Will achieve enlightenment at this time.¹²

Shinran transformed the future-oriented interpretation of the Jōdo beliefs by the early patriarchs into a way of thinking which assured human beings that ultimate salvation was reachable in this life. The first patriarch of Jōdo in China, T'an-luan 曇鸞 (476–542), stressed the fact that the stage of non-retrogression and enlightenment could only be achieved after one's birth into the Pure Land, whose blessed nature would allow common mortals to perform the bodhisattva discipline. Shinran refuted this theory on the ground that one moment of faith in this life had the power to determine once and for all the destiny of the individual. By giving to the believer a spiritual status equal to that of a Buddha, Shinran rescued men from the fear of their sinful nature, cutting them off from the process of causation. Amida's vow was, according to Shinran, the only way available to common beings to escape the six evil forms of existence and the eight kinds of calamities – to be born in hell, in the animal world, in the world of hungry ghosts, in the Heaven of Longevity, in the continent Uttara-Kuru, to be born blind, deaf, and dumb, to be born secularly wise, and to be born before the birth or after the death of Śākyamuni. At the same time, as an immediate consequence of the attaining of faith, the believers, while living in this world, were assured enjoyment of the following ten benefits, as stated in the roll on faith in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*:

They will be protected by spiritual powers.
 They will be provided with the highest merits.
 They will be able to convert evil into good.
 They will be well thought of by Buddhas.
 They will be praised by Buddhas.

¹² *Gojūrokuoku shichi senman / Miroku Bosatsu wa toshi o hemu / Makoto no shinjin uru hito wa / Kono tabi satori o hirakubeshi*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 259 (25), p. 151; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (26), p. 26. See also *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 260 (26).

They will always be in the protective light radiating from the light of Amida.

Their minds will be filled with feelings of joy.

They will know what it is to be grateful and how to requite favors.

They will be able to practice the great compassionate heart all the time.

They will attain to the group of the right Definite assurance (*nyūshōjōju no yaku* 入正定聚の益 Skt. *Samyaktvaniyata-rāṣi*). (IENAGA 1971, p.99; SUZUKI, pp. 126–127).

The third benefit is of particular importance, since it touches on evil, one of the main themes in Shinran's thought. Starting from the axiom that human nature is necessarily evil and that nothing can be done about it, Shinran showed that, thanks to Amida's vow which transforms evil into good, human beings did not need to destroy or escape evil. This is because, while the believers' body was in the world of karma, their minds were already in the Pure Land of Amida. Shinran compared human minds, either good or evil, to various rivers flowing into the ocean and becoming one with it. Thanks to Amida's vow, good and evil were immediately turned into compassion, where no differentiation was allowed. The *Shōzōmatsu wasan* says on this point:

When the waters of the good and evil hearts of foolish beings
Enter into the ocean of Amida's Wisdom-Vow,
Then immediately
They turn into the heart of great compassion.¹³

Here the two notions of good and evil were both discarded on the ground that they were value judgments based on the relativity of human minds. Yuiembō, one of the immediate disciples of Shinran, recorded in his devotional tract *Tannishō* 歎異抄 (Passages deploring deviations of faith), that Shinran used to say that he didn't know anything about good and evil for the reason that his insight could never be "as penetrating as to fathom the depth of Amida's own mind as to the goodness and badness of things." Since common beings had no means to discriminate between good and evil, they were left only with the choice to entrust themselves completely to Amida, and not worry about their evil nature. Although karma keeps on following its course, the devotee who had been shined on by Amida's

¹³ *Mida chigan no kōkai ni / Bonbu zen'aku no shinsui mo / Kinyū shimureba sunawachi ni / Daihishin to zo tenzunaru. Shōzōmatsu wasan* 273 (39), p. 156; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (40), p. 40.

light was freed of all burdens and crimes, since karma had lost all its effects on him. There was no reason, therefore, to grieve concerning past crimes, since the vow was a ship and a raft over the vast sea of *samsāra*, and the power of Amida's vow was inexhaustible, as the following hymn indicates:

Since limitless is the power of Amida's Vow
 Our evil karma, however deep it may be, is not heavy.
 Since boundless is Buddha's wisdom
 He will never abandon even the most bewildered and lost
 being.¹⁴

Not only do human beings need not grieve over evil, but they should rejoice, knowing that it is only through their defilements that they can realize the presence of the other-power within themselves. Evil is the fundamental characteristic in the salvation of all beings, since it is because of evil human nature that Amida decided to save them. Moreover, evil is the cause which makes people realize that self-effort practices are fruitless, since they are the product of minds doubtful of Amida. Only those who cannot be sure of Amida's doing, thus not trusting him completely, struggle to reach salvation through personal practices. Therefore, the real crime acknowledged by Shinran was doubt, whose emotion leads one ultimately to faith. This explains Shinran's apparent paradox according to which if a good man is born in the Pure Land, a wicked man has many more chances to be born there.¹⁵ This because a good man reciting *nen-butsu* and making copies of sūtras in order to reach enlightenment relies on his own power, forgetting the only way available to men of the Last Age, namely Amida's power. On the contrary, a sinful man, realizing his evil nature thanks to Amida's compassion, finally entrusts himself completely to the other power. We must read the following hymn from the *Jōdo kōsō wasan* 浄土高僧和讃 (Hymns on the Pure Land patriarchs, 1248) in this light:

Karma hindrance is the substance of merit,
 It is like ice and water.
 The more ice, the more water,
 The more impediment, the more merit.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ganriki mugu ni mashimaseba / Zaigō jinjū mo omokarazu / Butchi muhen ni mashimaseba / Sanran hōisu mo sulerarezu*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 270 (36), p.155; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (37), p.37. See also on the same topic *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 269 (35).

¹⁵ "Even a good man is born in the Pure Land, and how much more so with a wicked man!" Itō 1981, p. 15; Imadate 1973, p. 208.

¹⁶ *Zaishō kudoku no tai to naru / Kōri to mizu no gotoku nite/ Kōri ōki ni mizu ōshi / Sawari ōki ni toku ōshi*. From *Jōdo kōsō wasan* 156 (20), ITŌ 1981, p.114.

Faith, therefore, was required by Shinran, but no deeds of morality, since faith makes the believer stand above morality where no sins nor karmic effects will affect him (*Tannishō* 7. ITŌ 1981, p. 19; IMADATE 1973, p.210). There are no deeds of morality that can surpass the *nenbutsu* when recited from the perspective of the true Jōdo believer, as an act of “no-deed” (*higyō* 非行) and “no-good” (*hizen* 非善) (*Tannishō* 8. ITŌ, p. 20; IMADATE, p. 210), as an expression of gratitude for the benevolence of Amida, who accepts all beings with their sins. *Nenbutsu* is not a practice followed for the sake of filial piety (*Tannishō* 5. ITŌ, p. 17; IMADATE, p. 209), or for any other practical reason which can impose our will on Amida’s will.

In order to stress the depth of the crime committed by those who doubt Buddha’s wisdom and strive to reach the Pure Land through self-effort, Shinran reserved two different places inside Amida’s Paradise for “good” people and “evil” people. The second were destined to the Land of Recompense (*hōdo* 報土) where, as we have already seen, the believer immediately becomes a Buddha, and, thanks to the returning phase of merit-transference (*gensō ekō* 還相廻向), he can come back to this world for the sake of others. The first must endure birth in the Border Land (*henji* 辺地) of the Pure Land, where people must wait five hundred years before being able to see Amida and listen to his teachings. During these five hundred years, people born in the Border Land must repent of having doubted Amida’s compassion. This land was also known as the Castle of Doubt (*gijō* 疑城); as the Realm of Sloth and Complacency (*keman* 懈慢), since negligent people are destined to be born in this land; as the Womb-Palace (*taigu* 胎宮), since here are kept those who cannot see Buddha, Dharma, and *saṅgha*, thus being likened to a baby who cannot see the light in his mother’s womb; and as the Jail of the Seven Treasures (*shippō no goku* 七宝の獄). This land, in fact, looks like a jail where people are in golden chains, reminding them of the destiny of the princes of King Cakravartin who were bound with chains of gold and isolated by the king for their misdeeds. Since the people confined in this land had not entrusted themselves to Amida, they are still under the influence of karmic laws, waiting for their complete repentance, so as to be freed from the severe law of causation. Moreover, they cannot come back to this life in order to save other human beings, thus being unable to fulfill the greatest wish of those awakened to enlightenment, i.e. to come again to this world and transfer (Buddha’s) merits to others, in the same way as Amida has transferred his merits to us (*ōsō ekō* 往生廻向).

From the several poems on the Border Land appearing in *Shōzōmatsu wasan* we will take two examples:

Those who commit the crime of doubting the Buddha's wisdom

Are destined to stop in the Border Land, the realm of sloth and complacency.

Since the crime of doubting is grave,
Many years and kalpas have to be spent there.¹⁷

Since all those who do virtuous deeds through self-power
Doubt the inconceivability of the Buddha's wisdom,
Due to the laws of karma
They get born in the prison of the seven treasures.¹⁸

Shinran's condemnation of any sort of deeds made for selfish purposes was meant to justify a religious system, not to satisfy moral demands. People who interpreted Shinran's ideas as an ethical system misunderstood his abrogation of formal acts, thinking that the believer was allowed to be unconcerned about his behavior, and judged Shinran's thought a justification of crime and non-virtuous acts. Shinran made it quite clear in his letters addressed to disciples that to recite *nenbutsu* pretending to be taken into Amida's compassion, while committing things which should not be committed, was to be considered a serious hindrance on the way to enlightenment. Shinran showed his indignation at being accused of preaching a behavior unrelated to moral norms. "This is deplorable!" he exclaimed in a letter collected in *Mattōshō* 末燈鈔 (Lamp for the Latter Ages, 1333) by his great-grandson Jūkaku, stressing the fact that to be driven to evil by illusion and to do it on purpose were two completely different things.¹⁹ To continue a life of evil after having been taken into Amida's compassion was unthinkable since, when faith was achieved, one should "come to abhor such a self and lament his continued existence in birth and death" (*Mattōshō* 20. ITŌ, p. 232; UEDA, p. 61). To the wrong view that, since Amida's vow was made for the salvation of evil-doers, evil deeds were to be intentionally committed to be born in the Pure Land, Shinran answered that one must not take poison only because the remedy

¹⁷ *Butchi giwaku no tsumi ni yori / Keman henji ni tomarunari / Giwaku no tsumi no fukaki yue / Nensai kōshu o furu to toku*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 295 (3), p. 164; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (63), p. 63.

¹⁸ *Jiriki shozen no hito wa mina / Butchi no fushigi o utagaeba / Jigō jitoku no dōri nite / Shippō no goku ni zo irinikeru*. From *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 312 (22), p. 170; *Shinran's Hymns on the Last Age* (67), p. 67.

¹⁹ *Mattōshō* 16, in ITŌ, p. 220; see also UEDA 1978, p. 52.

may be near at hand.²⁰ Evil itself is not an obstacle to salvation, but to do evil in order to reach salvation meant to rely on one's effort, with a clear purpose in mind. But, first of all, it means to misunderstand Shinran's theological goal as an attempt to build a moral code for human beings. No code was possible for people of the Last Dharma Age, so much were they influenced by the *Mappō tōmyōki*'s idea of the disappearance of all precepts.

Conclusion

Usually decades, even centuries are needed before philosophical systems or simply ways of thinking spread and are accepted by large strata of the population, first of all the intellectuals. At the same time Shinran was proclaiming the necessity to counteract *mappō* within daily activities of this world, the poet Kamo no Chōmei 鴨 長明 (1153–1216) was trying to flee worldly defilements by secluding himself in a hut on Mt. Hino, putting into practice Genshin's suggestion to "despise this defiled realm and to long for the pure Land" (*onri edo gongu jōdo*). Shinran, contrary to his own expectations and purpose, opened the way to the re-evaluation of this human world and of its values, as we can see from the approach that the Japanese of the fourteenth century took toward the problem of *mappō*. Urabe Kenkō 卜部兼好 (ca.1280–ca.1352) attempted to exorcize the fear of Final Age thought by emphasizing the faith that a changing society was starting to feel in its practical achievements, more than in the fear caused by inscrutable laws. The fourteenth century witnessed an increasing confidence in human potentialities, which brought the final rejection of the concept of *mappō*, seen as a historical justification and pretext of human evil. To put it in the words of the historian Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房 (1293–1354), worldly conditions were destined to worsen not because of external factors incomprehensible to the human mind, but because of the "gradual nurturing of evil peoples' hearts,"²¹ where we are led back again to the main thesis of the *Daijikkō*, the starting point of all debates on *mappō*.²²

ABBREVIATION

T. ⇒ TAKAKUSU Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and WATANABE Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭, eds. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [Newly

²⁰ *Tannishō* 13. ITŌ, p. 31; IMADATE, p. 215. The same idea appears in *Mattōshō* 20, p. 231; UEDA, p. 61.

²¹ *Jinnō shōtōki*, in IWASA 1965, p. 185 and VARLEY 1980, p. 261.

²² For further information on *mappō* thought in Japan in the 13th and 14th centuries see MARRA 1984, pp. 313–350 and 1985, pp. 319–342.

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