

Jérôme Ducor

SHINRAN  
AND PURE LAND BUDDHISM



Rev. Dr. Jérôme Ducor has been one of my best friends since we first met at Geneva Airport almost forty years ago. At that time, I was accompanying the late Monshu Emeritus Kosho Ohtani of Hongwanji who was to attend the Shin Buddhist Conference held at Shingyoji Temple, Geneva. Since then we have had chances to exchange our friendship occasionally in Europe or in Japan. Recently through Skype he attends our Friday meeting held at the Hongwanji International Center for the translation of Shin Buddhist scriptures and proposes precious advices to us. What is amazing is his unchanging concern in the Shin Buddhist Teaching, the appreciation of which he has deepened year by year.

This publication “Shinran and Pure Land Buddhism” is a result of his scholarship and his deep faith in the teaching of Amida Buddha’s compassion as clarified by Shinran, Founder of Jodo Shinshu School. Not a few books have been published in order to introduce Shinran’s Pure Land Buddhism so far, but as far as I know this is excellent in its composite structure and the author’s appreciation of the teaching.

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[p. 1]

### Foreword

*"Shinran affirms that faith in the grace of the Buddha Amida is sufficient, and that man is unable to acquire merits to bliss in any way. Nevertheless, he demands from his followers a moral conduct as a fruit and manifestation of faith in salvation. This is exactly Luther's position on good works.*

*Like Luther too, Shinran rejects pilgrimages, penance, fasting, superstition and all the practices of magic. He abolished the celibacy of priests, monks and nuns. (...)*

*Like Luther, he composed hymns on the salvation conferred by grace to be sung in religious ceremonies; like him, he assigned an important place in worship to preaching.*

*The fact that Jōdo-shinshū Buddhism has such an obvious spiritual relationship with 'Lutheran heresy' is immediately noticed by the Jesuit missionaries who entered Japan in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century."*

*Albert Schweitzer*<sup>1</sup>

[p. 2] This book is a revised and expanded version of the one published in French some ten years ago under the title "Shinran, A Buddhist reformer in medieval Japan?"<sup>2</sup> It mainly offers an introduction to the life and work of Shinran, while keeping in mind questions that may arise when put into perspective with Christianity.

Though little known to the general Western public, Shinran (1173-1263) is a Buddhist monk famous in Japan for having founded an independent school under the name of Jōdo-Shinshū, the "True Pure Land School". It should be noted at the outset that while the West has some familiarity with Zen, the latter tradition represents only three of the sixteen schools of Japanese Buddhism. Of the thirteen other ones, four belong to the Pure Land tradition, and one of these is the Jōdo-Shinshū of Shinran. Moreover - and despite its name - the Pure Land is not an ecological movement! As one of the oldest and most widespread Buddhist movements in the Far East, it represents a complete spiritual path that pursues the goal common to Buddhism as a whole: deliverance from universal suffering. However, its real originality lies in its simple - but not simplistic - method, which consists in reaching, after death, the land - or *Pure Land* - of the Buddha Amida.

Yet, despite the richness of its spirituality and history, the Pure Land tradition remains in the West one of the most misunderstood of the Buddhist paths. Paradoxically, it was one of the very first expressions of Buddhism news of which reached Europe, as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to Christian missionaries in Japan. It was also one of the first fields to be studied by "Buddhologists", those European [p. 3] scholars who translated and published its fundamental texts, beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The lack of interest shown by the contemporary Western public for this tradition is for the most part a result of a superficial approach touching only upon its external characteristics, which gives it the

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<sup>1</sup> Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965): *Les grands penseurs de l'Inde, étude de philosophie comparée* (Paris 1945), p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Ducor, Jérôme: *Shinran, Un réformateur bouddhiste dans le Japon médiéval ?* (Collection Le Maître et le disciple); Gollion, Infolio éditions, 2008.

appearance of a second-rate form of Buddhism or even of a monotheistic deviation from the Buddha's doctrine.

This applies particularly to Shinran himself, whose thought and life have led him to be called the "Luther of Japanese Buddhism". Upon deeper inspection, however, it soon becomes clear that this comparison with the German reformer is inappropriate. It is well known that Shinran had children despite being a monk, but he was not the first to do so in the context of Japanese Buddhism. Admittedly, his doctrine proclaims the inefficiency of good works and the absolute effectiveness of faith, but this relates to a *Buddha* and not to a Creator. Shinran was a tireless preacher and wrote in the vernacular, but he never laid claim to any reform nor did he follow any political aim. If Shinran is known among the general public in Japan today, it is less for the above-mentioned characteristics than for having declared:

"Even the good will be born in the Pure Land, let alone the bad!"

It is therefore a presentation of the life and thought of this paradoxical character that we propose in this work, in the hope of going beyond that stage of simple polite curiosity to which he has most often been subjected in the West. Since Shinran is positioned at the end of a long line of development in the Buddhist tradition, stretching from India in the time of the Buddha to medieval Japan, it seems appropriate to begin with a short introduction tracing the history of Pure Land Buddhism, as well as its main doctrinal notions. [p. 4]

N.B.

All quotations are translated from the original sources.

In quotations, the paragraphs (§) referred to are those of the *Jōdo-Shinshū seiten*, *chūshakuban* edition (see Bibliography).



## Introduction

[p. 5]

### Pure Land Buddhism

*The Pure Land is one of the main traditions of the Greater Vehicle (Mahāyāna), that branch of Buddhism that emphasizes the possibility for all beings to become Buddha themselves.*

According to the Greater Vehicle, all Buddhas possess a Pure Land which they build as they progress as candidates (*bodhisattva*) along the path to Awakening, or Enlightenment. In the Far East, however, the expression was eventually applied to *the* Pure Land *par excellence*, the one known as Sukhāvātī (“The Happy One”). This is the domain in which a Buddha named *Amida* 阿彌陀 is currently preaching. His name, which can be shortened to *'Mida*, is the Sino-Japanese abbreviation of the double name of his in Sanskrit, *Amitābha* (“Infinite-Light”) and *Amitāyus* (“Infinite-Life”).

The Pure Land is the most widespread Buddhist current throughout the Far East, whether in China, Vietnam, Korea, or Japan. Over the centuries, it has given birth to various traditions, grouped under the generic term “teachings of the Pure Land” (Japanese: *Jōdokyō* 淨土教), sometimes rendered [p. 6] by “Jodoism” but more often than not by the questionable term “Amidism”, or even “Amidaism” and “Amithābism”. These latter designations are best avoided, as they suggest that the Pure Land teaching is a doctrine expounded by the Buddha Amida himself, or even that it constitutes a teaching distinct from that of Buddhism. Outside the sphere of Chinese cultural influence, teachings related to the Buddha Amitābha / Amitāyus also occupy an important place in Tibetan Buddhism.

#### A. Doctrinal basis

The expression “Pure Land” or “Purified Land” (*jōdo* 淨土) is the most common term used in Far Eastern Buddhism to designate in all its fullness what Indian sources call a “Buddha-field” (*buddhakṣetra*). In general, a Buddha-field can be defined as the field covered by the radiance of the realization of a Perfectly Accomplished Buddha. This concept is based on the principle that a Buddha does not remain inactive after attaining Awakening but that, on the contrary, he accomplishes “Buddha work” (*buddhakārya*) by sharing the fruits of his realization with beings as yet unawakened, essentially through his teaching of the path leading to deliverance.

#### 1. Buddha-fields in the Greater Vehicle

According to Mahāyāna, the progression of a Bodhisattva on the path to Awakening is a conquest of oneself, assimilated to the accomplishments of a heroic prince who conquers a territory to build the kingdom of which he will become the sovereign. A Buddha's field is therefore presented as his “kingdom” or [p. 7] “realm” (*kokudo* 國土), or his “Buddha land” (*butsudo* 佛土), which he has gradually built up as a Bodhisattva and decorated with his merits through his purification of passions (*bonnō* 煩惱, *kleśa*), according to a process that explains the expression “Pure Land”. After achieving the supreme, perfect and complete Awakening (*anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*), the former Bodhisattva reigns as a Buddha in his Pure Land, where he delivers his teaching. For the preaching of the Law is the main function of such a field: it is through teaching that a perfectly accomplished Buddha achieves his Buddha-work.

Moreover, as the Greater Vehicle postulates the universality of Buddha nature inherent in all beings (*buddhatā*), it also affirms the current existence of multitudes of Buddha-fields surrounding our own universe, which coexist but do not overlap. Thus, even after the disappearance of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, beings can, by following certain practices, go to be born at the moment of death in the field of a Buddha, and there to hear the Law preached directly from the very mouth of an Awakened One.

However, the presence at the present time of various Buddhas in some of the universes surrounding ours is denied by the “Southern” tradition of Buddhism, including the Theravāda School established in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. This tradition is admittedly familiar with the notion of “Buddha-fields” (*buddhakkhetta*), and describes three types of them<sup>3</sup>.

The first is the field of birth of a Buddha (*jātikkhetta*), the framework of his existence, from his birth until his entry into the final nirvāṇa; in practical terms, it constitutes a world [p. 8] gathering ten thousand universes similar to ours.

The second type is the field of authority of a Buddha (*āṇākkhetta*), in which certain formulas of protection derived from his words (*paritta*) take effect, and which encompasses one hundred billion universes.

The third type is the field of investigation of a Buddha (*visayakkhetta*), the field of his omniscience, which, by definition, is unlimited.

Still, the existence of Buddhas of the Present in all directions around our universe is categorically denied by the Exegesis (*Abhidhamma*) of the Pāli canon. It may even be said that this point of divergence is one of the most significant between the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions. It appears clearly in the treatise *Kathāvatthu* (“Points of Controversy”)<sup>4</sup>:

“*That the Buddhas persist in all directions. Do you mean that they persist in the eastern quarter? You deny. Then you contradict yourself. You assent. Then I ask, How is this Eastern Buddha named? What is his family? his clan? What the names of his parents? Or of his pair of elect disciples? Or of his body-servant? What sort of raiment or bowl does he bear? And in what village, town, city, kingdom, or country?*” (the same questions are repeated for the other five directions)<sup>5</sup>.

From the standpoint of the Greater Vehicle, this controversy is well documented by the *Treatise on the Larger Sūtra of the [p. 9] Perfection of Wisdom* attributed to Nāgārjuna (~243-300), and translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in 402-406 AD (*Daichidoron* 大智度論). This text identifies the opponents of the existence of Buddhas of the Present as the Sarvāstivāda School that argues that according to the scriptures there cannot be two Buddhas at one and the same time:

“It is impossible, monks, it cannot come to pass, that in one world-system at one and the same time there should arise two Arahants who are Fully Enlightened Ones”<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Buddhaghosa (5<sup>th</sup> century AD): *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, ch. XIII, 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Kathāvatthu*, XXI-6 (*Sabbadisā kathā*): “Sabbā disā buddhā tiṭṭhantīti? Āmantā. Puratthimāya disāya buddho tiṭṭhantīti? Na hevaṃ vattabbe – pe. Puratthimāya disāya buddho tiṭṭhatīti? Āmantā. Kiṃnāmo so bhagavā, kiṃjacco, kiṃgotto, kiṃnāmā tassa bhagavato mātāpitaro, kiṃnāmāṃ tassa bhagavato sāvakayugam, ko nāmo tassa bhagavato upatthāko, kīdisaṃ cīvaraṃ dhāreti, kīdisaṃ pattāṃ dhāreti, katarasmiṃ gāme vā nigame vā nagare vā raṭṭhe vā janapade vāti? Na hevaṃ vattabbe – pe”, etc. *Kathāvatthu*, (ed. by Arnold C. Taylor; London, Pali Text Society, 1894, 1979), vol. I, pp. 354-355.

<sup>5</sup> Td. Shwe Zan Aung & C.A.F. Rhys Davids (London, Pali Text Society / Luzac 1915), pp. 354-355.

<sup>6</sup> *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, I, xv, 10 (td. F. L. Woodward; London, Pali Text Society / Luzac, 1970), p. 26. See *Chū-*

The *Daichidoron* refutes this objection by stating that, although two Buddhas cannot cohabit simultaneously in any given universe, this does not exclude the existence of other Buddhas in other distinct universes. It then presents what amounts to a treatise in itself, presenting the following arguments in favour of the existence of Buddhas currently present in the Ten Directions. First of all, they respond to a necessity: if there is suffering in the universes of the Ten Directions, how could a Buddha not manifest himself there? Secondly, as there have been countless Buddhas in the past and as there will be countless in the future, there must necessarily be countless in the present. Thirdly, if the Buddha Śākyamuni did not mention them in his sermons to the listeners of the Smaller Vehicle (Hinayāna), this was in order to prevent them from sinking into laziness; however, Śākyamuni did not affirm in these sermons that the Buddhas of the Present do not exist. And the *Daichidoron* concludes with an argument resembling a form of Pascal's wager:

"If the Buddhas of the Ten Directions exist and you say [p. 10] they do not exist, you commit an immeasurable fault. If the Buddhas of the Ten Directions do not exist and I say they do exist, I conceive of infinite Buddhas and I receive the merit for worshipping them. For, it is my good intention that causes the greatness of the merit. (...)

With the physical eye, a human being cannot know them at all. But if, just through the faith of his heart, he says they do exist, his merit is infinite. (...) Common sense already makes it clear that man must, of himself, have faith in their existence. And all the more, how can there be no faith when the Buddha himself has proclaimed in the Mahāyāna that the Buddhas of the Ten Directions really exist?"<sup>7</sup>

Let us return to the concept of Buddha-fields according to the Greater Vehicle. As a field of radiance of an Awakened One, all of them share the same general qualities. However, the various Buddha-fields in their diversity also have their own specific characteristics. Indeed, all Buddhas obtain an identical realization of the perfect Awakening through their *general vow*, which is none other than the "thought of Awakening" (*bodhicitta*), that is, the vow to achieve Awakening in order to help all beings to obtain deliverance themselves. Through this general vow, all Awakened Ones therefore share the same realization, as indicated by the title of "buddha" common to all of them. On the other hand, during his career as a Bodhisattva, a future Buddha also produces a second type of vow, in order to adapt his realization to the circumstantial needs of the beings to be delivered: these are his *particular vows*, which will distinguish his personal [p. 11] realization and earn him his own proper name.

Several sermons of the Buddha Śākyamuni describe the specific characteristics of the fields of different Buddhas and the various methods of being born there. Throughout the history of the Greater Vehicle, some of these Buddhas enjoyed greater popularity than others. Among the more famous Pure Lands, one can mention "Joyful" (*Abhirati*), the domain of the Buddha Akṣobhya, located to the east of our universe and the fruit of his twenty vows; and "Beryl" (*Vaidūrya*) of the Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru, also to the east of our universe and the fruit of his twelve vows<sup>8</sup>. The same is true of the Buddha Śākyamuni with

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*Agongyō* 中阿含經 (*Madhyamāgama*): “若世中有二如來者，終無是處” (T. 1, 26, pp. 723c-724a); *Jō-Agongyō* 長阿含經 (*Dīrghāgama*): “欲使現在有二佛出世，無有是處” (T. 1, 1, pp. 78c-79a).

<sup>7</sup> Nāgārjuna, *Daichidoron* (Ch. *Dazhidulun*), vol. 9: “若有十方佛，汝言無得無限罪。若無十方佛，而我言有生無量佛想得恭敬福。所以善心因緣福德力大故。 (...) 肉眼人雖俱不知，但心信言有其福無量。 (...) 人自用心尚應信有。何況佛自說摩訶衍中，言實有十方佛而不信耶” (T. 25, 1509, p. 126b).

<sup>8</sup> Dantinne, Jean: *La Splendeur de l'Inébranlable (Akṣobhya)* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Institut Orientaliste, 1983); Birnbaum, Raoul: *The Healing Buddha (Bhaiṣajyaguru)* (Boulder, Shambala Publications, 1979).

his five hundred vows<sup>9</sup>: his Buddha-field is none other than our own universe called "Endurance" (*Sahā*), which appears as a soiled land (*edo* 穢土) only to those unawakened beings, as explained by the *Sūtra of Vimalakīrti*<sup>10</sup>, while its purified aspect is presented in the *Lotus Sūtra*<sup>11</sup>. Buddhas are not the only ones to enjoy such a domain: having reached the eve of perfect Awakening, the greatest Bodhisattvas have also almost completed their own Buddha-field, even if it is not yet comparable to that of a perfectly accomplished Awakened One. This is the case, in particular, of the Pure Land Potalaka of the Bodhisattva Avalokitasvara, considered the paragon of compassion of the Greater Vehicle.

The most famous Pure Land by far, however, is "The Happy [p. 12] One" (*Sukhāvātī*), translated into Chinese as "Ultimate-Happiness" (*Gokuraku* 極樂), "Peaceful-Happiness" (*Anraku* 安樂), or "Peaceful-Sustenance" (*Annyō* 安養). Established by the Buddha Amida through his forty-eight special vows, it is this Pure Land which was to enjoy incomparable success in Far Eastern Buddhism.

## 2. The Scriptures dedicated to the Buddha Amida

The Chinese Buddhist canon, also used in Korea, Vietnam and Japan, contains translations from Sanskrit of about one hundred eighty sermons of the Buddha Śākyamuni (*sūtra*) mentioning the Buddha Amida and his Pure Land, and about twenty treatises by Indian masters; many of these texts also feature in the Tibetan canon. In addition, there are many commentaries, sub-commentaries and original works by teachers of the respective schools in each of these countries.

Pure Land Buddhism has developed mainly from two types of sūtras, which have given rise to two main doctrinal trends: on the one hand, the *Sūtra of the Samādhi for Encountering Face-to-Face the Buddhas of the Present*; and on the other hand, the *Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras*.

a) The *Sūtra on the Samādhi for Encountering Face-to-Face the Buddhas of the Present* (*Hanju zammaikyō* 般舟三昧經) was translated by Lokakṣema in 179 AD, making it one of the oldest dated texts of the Greater Vehicle<sup>12</sup>. Sanskrit fragments are preserved (*Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*), as well as three other Chinese versions and a Tibetan translation. The method recommended by [p. 13] this sūtra, which is characteristic of the Greater Vehicle, is intended for both men and women, clerics and laity. Besides arduous preliminary exercises, it consists of a one-week retreat during which the Buddha Amida is commemorated, day and night, with great faith. At the end of this practice, the practitioner may see, in front of him and in the here and now, the Buddhas of the Ten Directions and hear their teaching. The remarkable feature of this method is that it requires neither the

<sup>9</sup> Yamada, Isshi 山田一止: *Karuṇāpūṇḍarīka*, 2 vol. (London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> McRae, John R.: *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (BDK English Tripitaka, 26-1; Berkeley, Numata Center, 2004); Watson, Burton: *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (Columbia University Press, 1997); Lamotte, Etienne: *L'enseignement de Vimalakīrti* (Louvain, 1962).

<sup>11</sup> Hurtvitz, Leon: *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (1976; New York, Columbia University Press, 2009); Kubo, Tsugunari 久保継成 & Yuyama, Akira 湯山明: *The Lotus Sūtra* (BDK English Tripitaka, 13-1; Berkeley, Numata Center, 1993); Robert, Jean-Noël: *Le Sūtra du Lotus* (Paris, Fayard, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Three volumes version (T. 13, 418), td. Paul Harrison: *The Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* (BDK English Tripitaka, 25-II; Berkeley, 1998); one volume version (T. 13, 417), td. Inagaki, Hisao 稲垣久雄: "Pan-chou-san-mei-ching", in *Indo-tetsugaku to bukkyō*, Indian Philosophy and Buddhism: Essays in Honour of Professor Kōtatsu Fujita on His Sixtieth Birthday" (Kyoto, 1989), pp. 49-88.

possession of the "divine eye" (*divyacakṣus*) resulting from meditation, nor even the renunciation of desires.

b) The *Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras* (*Jōdo-Sambukyō* 淨土三部經) forms a set consisting of the following three sūtras<sup>13</sup>:

i. The *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life* (*Muryōju-kyō* 無量壽經) is traditionally considered to have been translated by Saṃghavarman in 252 A.D., but it was probably revised or rewritten by Buddhahadra and his disciple Baoyun 寶雲 in 421. It is preserved in Sanskrit under the title "Sūtra of the Arrangement of the The Happy One" (*Sukhāvātīvyhūha-sūtra*, larger version), as well as in Tibetan<sup>14</sup>, and in four other Chinese translations. This sūtra relates the spiritual journey of the Bodhisattva Treasure-of-the-Law (Dharmākara) - the future Buddha Amida - and [p. 14] especially his Primal Vow (*hongan* 本願), which is detailed in forty-eight particular vows. Among them, one can distinguish the vows relating to the Buddha Amida himself and the other inhabitants of his Pure Land, from the vows related to the scenery of the Pure Land and, finally, those concerning the method of being born there. The text goes on to describe the fulfilment of these vows while describing the ornaments of the Pure Land obtained by Amida.

ii. The *Sūtra of Contemplations on Immeasurable-Life* (*Kan-Muryōju-kyō* 觀無量壽經, abr. *Kangyō*) was translated by Kālayāśas with Senghan 僧含, around 430 A.D. and is only preserved in Chinese<sup>15</sup>. It provides various methods to contemplate the Buddha Amida and his Pure Land in this very life, while teaching the pronunciation of his name to be born there at the moment of death, through the formula "Reverence to the Buddha Amida!" (*Namo Amida Butsu* 南無阿彌陀佛)<sup>16</sup>.

iii. The *Sūtra of Amida* (*Amida-kyō* 阿彌陀經) was translated by Kumārajīva in 402 A.D. It is also preserved in Sanskrit (*Sukhāvātīvyhūha-sūtra*, smaller version) and Tibetan<sup>17</sup>, as well as in another Chinese translation attributed to Xuanzang and dated 650. This sūtra describes the particularities of the Pure Land as well as the method of "keeping the [p. 15] name" of the Buddha Amida<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Td. Yamamoto, Kōshō 山本晃紹: *The Shinshū Seiten* (Honolulu, Hompa-Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, 1955), pp. 7-106; Eracle, Jean: *Trois Sôûtras et un Traité sur la Terre Pure* (1984; Paris, Editions Points, 2008); Inagaki, Hisao: *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (in coll. with Harold Stewart; Kyoto, Nagata Bunshodo, 1994); *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, 2 vols (Gadjin M. Nagao & Hisao Inagaki, gen. ed.; Shin Buddhism Translation Series; Kyoto, Hongwanji-ha International Center, 2003; Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 2009); Mack, Karen J.: *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (Tokyo, Jodo Shu Press, 2014); Kleine, Christoph: *Der Buddhismus des Reinen Landes* (Verlag der Weltreligionen im Insel Verlag, 2015), pp. 11-132.

<sup>14</sup> *Phags-pa 'Od-dpag-med kyi bkod-pa zhes-bya-ba theg-pa chen-po'i mdo*, td. Jinamitra, Dānaśīla and Ye-śes-de (9<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>15</sup> Td. Yamada, Meiji 山田明爾 (dir.): *The Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life as Expounded by Śākyamuni Buddha* (Kyoto, Ryukoku University Translation Center, 1984); Ducor, Jérôme & Loveday, Helen: *Le Sūtra des contemplations du Buddha Vie-Infinie*, préface de Jean-Noël Robert, BEHE 145; Turnhout, Brepols, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Chinese *Namo Amituo Fo*; Vietnamese *Nam-mô A-di-dà Phât* (abbr. *Mô Phât*); Korean *Namo Amita Bul*.

<sup>17</sup> *Phags-pa Bde-ba-can gyi bkod-pa zhes-bya-ba theg-pa chen-po'i mdo*, td. Dānaśīla and Ye-śes-de (9<sup>th</sup> c.).

<sup>18</sup> Td. Ducor, Jérôme: *Le Sūtra d'Amida prêché par le Buddha* (Société Suisse-Asie, Monographies, vol. 29; Bern, Peter Lang, 1998).

### 3. Commemoration of the Buddha

Generally speaking, the method advocated by the Pure Land sūtras refers to the practice of commemorating the Buddha (*buddhānusr̥ti*), which could be rendered literally in English by the neologism "buddha-recollection", but which we will later mention in its Sino-Japanese translation as "*nembustu* " (念佛). Originally, it was a well-known exercise in ancient Buddhism, included in Pali scriptures (*buddhānussati*). It consists in recalling the Buddha Śākyamuni through his main titles according to this formula:

"Yes, the Blessed One is thus-arrived, holy, correctly and fully awakened, gifted with science and practice, well-come, knower of the world, unsurpassable, leader of beings to guide, teacher of gods and men, awakened and blessed!"<sup>19</sup>

Such a classic practice makes it possible to avoid fear, especially in the face of death; moreover, it induces, at the very least, a birth in a good destiny. Thus, from the beginning, the *buddhānusr̥ti* included a double mental *and* oral dimension, namely: the recollection of the Buddha *and* the recitation of his titles. Applied to the Buddha Amida, the practice of *nembutsu* will retain this double dimension throughout the history of its development in the Far East. [p. 16]

### 4. The question of external influences

In the West, the Pure Land doctrine with its exclusive focus on the Buddha Amida must have seemed sufficiently inconsistent with the commonly accepted ideas surrounding Buddhism that the question was raised as to whether it was not the result of influences from outside Buddhism, or even from outside India. As early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western authors such as Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), raised the possibility that concepts related to the Brahmanic divinity Varuṇa and his city of Sukhā may have influenced the emergence of teachings about Amitābha's Sukhāvātī. Looking further afield, some imagined links with Zoroastrian Iran, or even with Nestorian or Chaldean Christianity, although the presence of the latter in Central Asia is only documented from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In India, the tradition of devotion (*bhakti*) based on the *Bhagavadgītā* was suggested as a possible source, though it is difficult to establish which one influenced the other. In fact, no serious study has been able to provide any evidence.

Most specialists would today agree that it now appears that the Pure Land tradition with its scriptures belonging to the so-called "proto-Mahāyāna" is not so much a natural development of the Greater Vehicle as one of its most intrinsic components, particularly in its exaltation of the supraworldly nature (*lokottara*) of the Perfectly Accomplished Buddha, as well as in the ideal of the Bodhisattva<sup>20</sup>.

On the whole, from a Buddhist point of view, the Pure Land doctrine appears just as trustworthy as the teachings on the past lives of Buddha Śākyamuni, as reported in the *Jataka* texts. No author of the Greater Vehicle will therefore question [p. 17] the existence of Amida and his Pure Land, any more than that of any other Buddha. The discussions around Amida - and they were numerous - focused on the nature of the Pure Land and the pre-eminence of his vows.

<sup>19</sup> In the Sanskrit text of the *Sūtra on the Top of the Standard (Dhvajāgra-sūtra)*: "Iti hi sa bhagavāṃ tathāgato 'rhāṃ samyaksambuddho vidyācaraṇasaṃpanna sugato lokavid anuttaraḥ puruṣadamyasārathi śāstā devamanuṣyāṇāṃ buddho bhagavāṃ".

<sup>20</sup> References in Ducor, Jérôme: "Les sources de la Sukhāvātī", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27-2 (2004, p. 357-410), pp. 398-400.

## 5. What the Buddha Amida is not

Contrary to the ideas of earlier Western commentators, the teaching of the Pure Land does not represent a monotheistic deviance of Buddhism. It remains exclusively within the framework of the Greater Vehicle and, as such, rejects any interpretation that sees the Buddha Amida as a supreme ruler (*Īśvara*). Hence Pure Land Buddhism is just as atheistic as the rest of Buddhism. Amida's establishment of his Pure Land and the birth of beings in this Buddha-field take place strictly within the framework of the law of karma, in other words within the chain of reaction of the causes and effects of actions. As the Chinese master Tanluan 曇鸞 (476-542) explained, the Pure Land is pure because the vows and practices of the future Amida, from the time when he was a Bodhisattva, were also pure<sup>21</sup>.

Like all other Buddhas, Amida is unable to modify the karma of beings. However, in accordance with the ideal of compassion of the Greater Vehicle, he provides them with a framework and a method enabling them to achieve Awakening, even for the least capable among them. The canonical texts thus describe Amida as an instructor in his Pure Land, but never as a judge or a saviour. For when beings living in delusion commit faults, it is always in the sense of karmic law, and they cannot therefore be considered as “sins”, as that would imply [p. 18] disobedience to a divine will. This is why the notion of a grace of forgiveness does not apply to Amida or his work either.

As a Buddha-field, the Pure Land itself cannot be described as a “paradise” (*svarga*), as is still frequently seen in Western literature. In Buddhism, the term *svarga* is used solely to designate the multiple abodes of the gods (*deva*), divided into no less than twenty-seven paradises, all of which remain part of the cycle of births and deaths (*samsāra*)<sup>22</sup>. Despite the immeasurable longevity they can enjoy in their paradises, in the end the gods all die and are reborn in one of the other five realms of rebirth of the cycle, of men, titans (*asura*), hungry spirits (*preta*), animals or hells. Moreover, the joy achieved in the Pure Land has nothing in common with “external” happiness, which is that of the physical senses; nor is it even the “internal” happiness enjoyed by monks whose meditation is equal to that of one of the paradises of the gods. The joy of the Pure Land is called “joy of the music of Law” (*hōgaku-raku* 法樂樂), for it is the imperishable happiness of nirvāṇa, born of wisdom that perceives the true nature of things<sup>23</sup>. The Pure Land of Amida is in fact *beyond the cycle of births and deaths*. In other words, according to the eloquent expression of the great specialist in scriptural sources of Sukhāvātī, Fujita Kōtatsu, it is “a world of another dimension”<sup>24</sup>.

One might also be tempted to interpret the Pure Land as nothing more than a simple myth or an inert symbol. Some of its own representatives have tried this since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But for the masters of this tradition and their followers, [p. 19] the Pure Land is indeed a reality, and even the expression of the highest of realities<sup>25</sup>. Admittedly, it lies outside of modern scientific experimentation, and the arrival in Japan of Western

<sup>21</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū* (see bibliography), vol. 2, § 97: “因淨故果淨” (T. 40, p. 841b / Jssz 1, p. 515).

<sup>22</sup> Full explanation in Sadataka Akira 定方辰: *Buddhist Cosmology* (Tokyo, Kōsei Publishing Co., 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 2, § 114 (T. 40, p. 843a / Jssz 1, p. 523).

<sup>24</sup> Fujita Kōtatsu 藤田宏達: “The Origin of the Pure Land” (*The Eastern Buddhist*, N. S. 29-1, 1996, pp. 33-52), pp. 44-48. In Japanese: “*tahō sekai no jōdo* 他方世界の浄土”, see Fujita Kōtatsu: *Jōdo-Sambukyō no kenkyū* 浄土三部経の研究 (Tōkyō, Iwanami shoten, 2007), pp. 391-395.

<sup>25</sup> For a survey of various ways of presenting the Pure Land, see Kenneth K. Tanaka: “Amida and Pure Land within a Contemporary Worldview: From Shinran’s Literal Symbolism to Figurative Symbolism”, in *Path of No Path*, Contemporary Studies in Pure Land Buddhism Honoring Roger Corless (Richard K. Payne, ed.; Berkeley, Numata Center, 2009), pp. 215-241.

astronomy sparked heated debates about its existence, as well as about traditional Buddhist cosmology as a whole. While the Pure Land does not belong to the restricted sphere of our world (*lokadhātu*), it belongs to the spiritual experience within the sphere of the ultimate reality of elementary nature (*dharmadhātu*), beyond the limited perception of the physical eye that beings living in delusion must satisfy themselves with. In this respect, I can do no better than to quote from Fugen Kōju, one of the present leading authorities on Jōdo-Shinshū:

“It can be said that what is called ‘truth’ in the world of science, in common parlance, is a matter of *objective relevance*. What is objectively proven to be real is true. Faced with this, I wonder if we could not say that ‘truth’ in the world of religion is a matter of *subjective necessity*. Religion begins entertaining a concrete connection with us from the moment when we wonder about the existence of our own person, in other words, when our own person becomes a problem. The ‘Pure Land’ is also similar to this: it is not a universe that is positively demonstrated in an objective way. It is a universe whose obviousness is demonstrated by [p. 20] subjective necessity.”<sup>26</sup>

Reading the canonical texts describing the Pure Land can indeed be confusing because of the particularly colourful and flowery descriptive language used for its ornaments. However, when carefully considered, it can be seen that the trees of jewels, the gentle rivers and the birds created by the Buddha Amida for his environment do nothing else than make the sound of the Buddhist Law resound and echo:

“If men and gods of this realm [Amida’s Pure Land] see his tree of Awakening, they obtain the triple endurance: first, purely verbal endurance; second, endurance by logic; third, endurance towards the no-birth of the elements. (...) Moreover, there is no sound of these musics that is not the sound of the Law. (...) Some hear the sound ‘ten powers’, the sound ‘absence of fear’, the sound ‘uncommon qualities’, the sound ‘wisdom of sublime sciences’, the sound ‘no production’, the sound ‘neither appearance nor disappearance’, the sound ‘endurance of unborn’, up to the sound of ‘anointing of nectar’ and other sounds of the wonderful Law. Such sounds are an infinite joy for those who appreciate what they have heard.”

“All these birds, six times a day, produce a harmonious sound. This sound proclaims doctrines such as the five faculties, the five forces, the seven members of the *bodhi* (Awakening), and the eight branches of the Holy Path. On hearing this [p. 21] sound, beings of this land, all alike, commemorate the Buddha, commemorate the Law and commemorate the Community.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> “Objective relevance” (*kyakkanteki datōsei* 客観的妥当性), “subjective necessity” (*shutaiteki hitsuzensei* 主体的必然性); in Fugen Kōju 普賢晃壽, *Amida Butsu no sukui* 阿弥陀仏の救い (Kyōto, Nagata Bunshōdō, 2008), p. 96: “科学の世界における「真理」というものは、一般的に申せば、客観的妥当性にあるということができるとでしょう。客観的にその実在が証明されるのであれば、それが真実であります。これに対して、宗教の世界における「真理」は、主体的必然性にあるということができるとはなないかと思ひます。宗教は、我々自己自身の存在が問われるとき、言い換えれば自己自身が問題になるとき、初めて具体的に私と関わりをもつに至るのであります。「お浄土」もこれと同じであつて、客観的に実証される世界ではない。主体的必然性の上より、確証されている世界であります”.

<sup>27</sup> *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, vol. 1, § 15-16: “若彼國人天，見此樹者得三法忍。一者音響忍，二者柔順忍，三者無生法忍 (...) 又其樂聲無非法音 (...) 或十力無畏，不共法聲，諸通慧聲，無所作聲，不起滅聲，無生忍聲，乃至甘露灌頂衆妙法聲。如是等聲，稱其所聞歡喜無量”；*Sūtra of Amida*, § 3: “是諸衆鳥，晝夜六時出和雅音。其音演暢五根五力七菩提分八聖道分如是等法。其土衆生聞是音已，皆悉念佛念法念僧” (T. 12, p. 271ab, 347a / Jssz 1, pp. 36-38, 106-107).



To sum up, all these elements are to be understood as the expression of the transcendent qualities of the Buddha Amida and the Dharma. Classical exegesis details twenty-nine of these qualities, while noting that they can all be condensed into the first of them: this is none other than purity, identified as the “unconditioned elementary body of true wisdom”<sup>28</sup>.

## B. History

*The Pure Land tradition is not a particularity of Japanese Buddhism: for centuries, it has permeated and continues to permeate all countries of the Greater Vehicle. However, some Japanese schools are distinguished by their exclusive practice of nembutsu, which they trace back to Shandao, a 7<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese master.*

### 1. The worship of Amitābha in India

India has few ancient historical documents, and only two inscriptions related to the cult of Amitābha have been [p. 22] preserved there, though one is of crucial value. In 1977, in Govindnagar near the town of Māthura, the base of a standing Buddha statue was discovered bearing an inscription dedicated to the "Blessed Buddha Amitābha" (*bhagavato buddhasya amitābhasya*), which can be dated to 104 AD<sup>29</sup>. This is not only the oldest document referring to this Buddha but also one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest, dated testimony of the whole Greater Vehicle.

Other than this, the history of Pure Land Buddhism in India is essentially limited to that of the formation of its scriptures. The respectability of the Pure Land tradition is however revealed if one turns to the chronology of Chinese translations of its sūtras, the first of which date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. This presupposes, in the opinion of modern Indianists, that Sanskrit originals were already circulating at the turn of the Christian era. The founders of the two main philosophical traditions of the Greater Vehicle also touch upon the Pure Land in their works. Nāgārjuna (3<sup>rd</sup> century), a patriarch common to the entire Greater Vehicle and founder of the Mādhyamika School, mentions it, for example, in his *Treatise on the Analysis of the Ten Stages* (*Jūju bibasha ron* 十住毘婆沙論), translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva around 408<sup>30</sup>. Vasubandhu (4<sup>th</sup> century), master of the idealistic Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda School, also composed a *Treatise on the Pure Land* (*Jōdoron* 淨土論), translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci around 529.

However, according to the testimony of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664), worship of the [p. 23] Buddha Amitābha seemed to be competing in India with that of Bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, who will appear among mankind some 5,670 million years after Śākyamuni's death. Maitreya had the advantage of belonging both to the earliest forms of Buddhism as well as to the Greater Vehicle. Moreover, it might seem easier to be reborn before him to benefit from his teachings,

<sup>28</sup> Vasubandhu, *Jōdoron* (see bibliography), ch. 4, § 17: “*Shinjitsu chie mui hosshin* 眞實智慧無爲法身” (T. 26, p. 232b / Jssz 1, p. 440).

<sup>29</sup> See Salomon, Richard & Schopen, Gregory: “On an Alleged Reference to Amitābha in a Kharoṣṭhī Inscription on a Gandhārian Relief”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 25 / 1-2 (2002), pp. 3-31.

<sup>30</sup> Inagaki, Hisao: *Nāgārjuna's Discourse on the Ten Stages* (Kyoto, Ryūkoku Gakkai, 1998); Tokunaga, Michio 徳永道雄 (Gen. Ed.) “Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, Chapter on Easy Practice”, *The Pure Land Writings*, Vol. I (Kyoto, Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 2012), pp. 1-35.

because the paradise of the gods Tuṣita, where he is waiting for the moment to manifest himself among men, is still part of the cycle of births and deaths that we are living in<sup>31</sup>.

The Pure Land texts passed from India to China from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD onwards, from China to Japan during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, and from India to Tibet at the turn of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## 2. Pure Land in China

The Pure Land Scriptures were commented on by the most important masters of various schools of Chinese Buddhism, notably by Jicang 吉藏 (549-623) for Mādhyamika, and by Kuiji 窺基 (532-682) for Yogācāra. However, following the interpretation of Hōnen, the founder of the Japanese Pure Land School, three specific traditions can be distinguished in China: those of Lushan, Cimin, and Shandao<sup>32</sup>. [p. 24]

### a) The Lushan Tradition

Aside from the translation of its sūtras, the first significant event in the history of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism occurred very precisely on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 402, on Lushan 廬山, a mountain south of Yangzi River, in Jiangxi province. Under the leadership of the monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416), some one hundred twenty-three religious and lay people took the vow, before an image of the Buddha Amida, to help one another reach his Pure Land: the first to be born there would strive to assist their surviving comrades in obtaining the same result. This community principally followed the *Sūtra on the Samādhi for Encountering Face-to-Face the Buddhas of the Present*. Though, contrary to widespread opinion, it was not an independent school in the strict sense of the term, it was nevertheless influential among the many monks who, over the centuries, went on pilgrimage to Lushan, a site which gave its name to this Chinese Pure Land tradition.

Among these pilgrims, it is worth mentioning Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597), the founder of the Tiantai 天台 Buddhist School, who made several trips to Lushan. In his seminal work, "The Great Calming and Contemplation" (*Makashikan* 摩訶止觀), Zhiyi presents a meditative method comprising four concentrations (*samādhi*), one of which is called "constant walking *samādhi*". Also based on the *Sūtra on the Samādhi for Encountering the Buddhas*, it requires walking for 90 days and nights, circumambulating the image of the Buddha Amida, meditating on him exclusively while pronouncing his name. In addition, another of these concentrations, entitled "constant sitting *samādhi*" or "*samādhi* of the unique practice", consists of sitting for ninety days in silence, concentrated on the Buddha [p. 25] Amida<sup>33</sup>. The Pure Land thus occupies an important place in the Tiantai tradition

<sup>31</sup> Xuanzang as quoted by Daoshi 道世 (?-683), *Essentials of the Sūtras* (*Shokyō yōshū* 諸經要集): “玄奘法師云，西方道俗並作彌勒業，爲同欲界其行易成，大小乘師皆許此法。彌陀淨土悉凡鄙穢修行難成” (T. 54, 2123, pp. 6c-7a).

<sup>32</sup> Hōnen, *Senjakushū* 選擇集 (see Bibliography), ch. I: “於淨土一宗諸家不同。所謂廬山慧遠法師，慈愍三藏，道綽善導等是也” (T. 83, 2608, p. 2c / Jssz. 1, p. 1258). See Mochizuki, Shinkō 望月信享: *Pure Land Buddhism in China*, 2 vol. (td. Leo Pruden, ed. Richard K. Payne & Natalie E.F. Quli; Berkeley, Institute of Buddhist Studies & BDK America, 2016); Jones, Charles B.: *Chinese Pure Land Buddhism*, Understanding a Tradition of Practice (Pure Land Buddhist Studies; Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Td. Paul L. Swanson: *Clear Serenity, Quiet Insight* (3 vol.; Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), vol. 1, resp. pp. 264-284 & 246-263 (T. 46, 1911, pp. 12a-13a & 11a-12a).

and was to be later introduced along with it to Japan, where it is referred to as the "Tendai Pure Land teaching" (*Tendai Jōdokyō* 天台淨土教).

### b) The Tradition of Cimin

This tradition goes back to the monk Huiji 慧日 (680-748), who received from the Emperor the name and title "Tripitaka Master Cimin" (Cimin *sanzang* 慈愍三藏) after visiting India and Gandhāra from 702 to 719. His teaching aimed at a harmonious combination of Zen meditation (Ch. *chan* 禪) with the practice of monastic discipline and Pure Land.

This syncretic tendency would later prevail in China, from the Song era (960-1279) onwards, thanks in particular to Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-976), 3<sup>rd</sup> patriarch of the Fayuan 法眼 branch of the Chan School and also considered the 6<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the modern Chinese Pure Land School<sup>34</sup>, or Ciun Zunshi 慈雲尊式 (964-1032), the 16<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the Tiantai School. Finally, Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535-1615), reckoned as the 8<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the modern Chinese Pure Land School, completed the synthesis of Zen and nembutsu (Ch. *nianfo* 念佛), which has been maintained to this day<sup>35</sup>.

### c) The Tradition of Shandao

The tradition in Chinese Buddhism most specifically devoted to the Pure Land, and the one with the most far-[p. 26] reaching consequences for Japan, is that of the master Shandao, a tradition whose origin goes back to Tanluan 曇鸞 (476-542). Born near the great monastic centre of Wutaishan 五臺山 (Shanxi province), Tanluan was first a master of the Mādhyamika School. After a serious illness, however, he turned to Taoism as a disciple of the famous Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536), before meeting the Buddhist translator Bodhiruci, who guided him towards Pure Land teachings. Later, Tanluan composed a key commentary on Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land* (*Ōjōronchū* 往生論註)<sup>36</sup>.

Tanluan's posthumous disciple was Daochuo 道綽 (562-645). Once a Chan practitioner under master Huizan 慧瓚 (536-607), he converted to Pure Land after reading Tanluan's epitaph. Daochuo gave many lectures on the *Sūtra of Contemplations on Immeasurable-Life*, which gave rise to his only work: the *Collection on the Land Peaceful-Happiness* (*Anrakushū* 安樂集)<sup>37</sup>. He justifies his adhesion to Pure Land teachings by the arrival of the "vanishing of the Law" (*mappō* 末法). Buddhism is notable among world religions for

<sup>34</sup> See Shih, Heng-ching 釋恆清: *The Syncretism of Ch'an and Pure Land Buddhism* (New York, Peter Lang, 1992); and Welter, Albert: *The Meaning of Myriad Good Deeds, A Study of Yung-ming Yen-shou and the Wan-shan t'ung-kuei chi*; New York, Peter Lang, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> See Yü, Chün-fang 于君方: *The Renewal of Buddhism in China, Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*; New York, Columbia University Press, 1981.

<sup>36</sup> Td. Inagaki, Hisao: *T'an-luan's Commentary on Vasubandhu's Discourse on the Pure Land* (Kyoto, Nagata Bunshodo, 1998); Corless, Roger: *A Commentary on The Upadeśa on the Sutras of Limitless Life* (rev. by Kameyama Takahiko 龜山隆彦; ed. by Richard Payne), *Pacific World Journal*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 17 (2015), pp. 69-233; *Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land (The Pure Land Writings, Vol. II)*; Kyoto, Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 2018); Ducor, Jérôme: *Tanluan, Commentaire au Traité de la naissance dans la Terre Pure de Vasubandhu* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Td. Inagaki, Zuiō Hisao: *Collection of passages on the Land of Peace and Bliss, An Le Chi, by Tao-ch'o* (Horai Association International, 2014).

predicting its own disappearance, for it too is subject to the universal law of impermanence. In his sermons, the Buddha Śākyamuni announced that after his death, his teachings would first pass through the two periods of the correct Law and the counterfeit Law, of a duration of 1000 years each, before the beginning of a final period of a hundred centuries, that of the vanishing of the Law, which would lead to the total extinction of his teachings, [p. 27] until a new Buddha, Maitreya, once again set in motion the wheel of the Law. However, according to calculations worked out in China - a country always concerned with chronology - the period of the vanishing of the Law had begun very precisely in 551 A.D., shortly before Daochuo's birth.

Daochuo deduced from this the invalidity of all teachings advocating sanctification in this world by means of difficult practices extending over several cosmic periods, and so collected them all under the general title "Method of the Way of the Saints" (*Shōdōmon* 聖道門). Instead, he recommended the "Method of the Pure Land" (*Jōdomon* 淨土門), leading to birth before the Buddha Amida from the next life, a comparatively easy practice and the only one, according to Daochuo, to remain achievable during the period of the vanishing of the Law.

His student Shandao 善導 (613-681) was one of the most original masters of the Pure Land<sup>38</sup>, notably in his *Commentary to the Sūtra of Contemplations* (*Kangyōsho* 觀經疏)<sup>39</sup>. Reading this sūtra in the light of the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, Shandao endeavoured to demonstrate that the pronunciation of the name of the Buddha Amida, or "vocal nembutsu" (*shōnen* 稱念), was a practice sufficient in itself to obtain birth in the Pure Land; this opened the way to a depreciation of the "contemplative nembutsu" (*kannen* 觀念), by which one tried to visualize this Buddha in order to contemplate him in the present life. The influence of Shandao's *Commentary* was so [p. 28] great that it can be seen in the frescoes of the famous Dunhuang caves in Central Asia (Gansu province)<sup>40</sup>. Although his tradition hardly survived the great anti-Buddhist persecution of 845, his writings had in the meantime been transmitted to Japan, and it was his tradition that would form the basis of the Japanese Pure Land School founded by Hōnen at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. Pure Land in Korea and Vietnam

Buddhism was gradually introduced into Korea between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it remained deeply influenced by China, inheriting its scriptural canon and most of its teachings, including that of the Pure Land (*Chōngt'o* 淨土). The most important Korean contribution to the history of the Pure Land tradition is that of Wonhyō 元曉 (617-689), author of authoritative commentaries that were acclaimed as far away as China and Japan<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Three works of him translated by Hisao Inagaki: "Liturgy for Birth (Ojoraisan)", *The Pure Land*, New Series, 17 (Kyoto, IASBS, 2000), pp. 122-195); "*Hanjusan*", *Ryūkoku Daigaku Ronshū*, no. 434-435 (1989), pp. 73-144; *Shan-tao's Kannenbōmon* (Kyoto, Nagata Bunshodo, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Pas, Julian F.: *Visions of Sukhāvati: Shan-Tao's Commentary on the Kuan Wu-liang-Shou-Fo Ching* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995). This study is rather problematic; see my review "Shandao et Hōnen, à propos du livre de Julian F. Pas 'Visions of Sukhāvati'", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 22-1 (1999), pp. 93-163.

<sup>40</sup> See Loveday, Helen : "L'iconographie du *Guanjing*", in Ducor & Loveday, *Le Sūtra des contemplations*, p. 233-384.

<sup>41</sup> See the various publications by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and A. Charles Muller, notably the volume edited by the latter: *Wonhyo, Selected Works* (Seoul, Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2012); Lee, Léo K. S. (Li Kye-San 李哲先): *Le maître Wōn-hyo de Sil-la du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Seoul, Librairie Catholique, Ka-tol-lik chul-pan-sa, 1986).

The master of Zen (*sŏn* 禪) Pojo Chinul 普照知訥 (1158-1210) was also strongly influenced by the doctrine of the Chinese Yongming Yanshou, with his synthesis of Zen and nembutsu (*yŏmbul* 念佛)<sup>42</sup>. Korean Buddhism was however to be subjected to the ever-increasing influence of Confucianism and no longer underwent any significant development, as far as our subject matter is concerned.

In Vietnam, the real rise of Buddhism is contemporary with the Chinese Tang dynasty, and its heyday occurred during the Ly dynasty (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century). The history of Buddhism [p. 29] there has fluctuated according to the various periods of Chinese domination of the country, but it is also essentially a combination of the teachings of Zen (*thiền* 禪) and Pure Land (*Tịnh độ* 淨土), associated with the cult of ancestors. This synthesis goes back to the Chinese master Caotang 草堂 (active 11<sup>th</sup> century), known in Vietnam as Thao-Duong (Thảo-Đường). Captured in 1069 during a campaign against the Ām-pā kingdom, he founded a Zen tradition that bears his name and dominated in the north of the country. His teachings also combine the practice of meditation with that of nembutsu (*niemphât* 念佛). During the Buddhist revival that marked Vietnam from the 1930s onwards, Pure Land teachings won the favour of the majority of the population, even though its followers remain officially classified among the practitioners of Zen.

#### 4. Tibet and the Sukhāvātī tradition

Buddhism entered Tibet from India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and Tibetan translations of the Sanskrit sūtras dedicated to Amitābha (Öpame, ‘*Od-dpag-med*), such as the *Longer Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra* and the *Shorter Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra*, appeared two centuries later. Although teachings on the Buddha-field Sukhāvātī (Dewachen, *Bde-ca-can*) occupy a very important place in Tibetan Buddhism, its interpretation does not represent a homogeneous tradition. In general, the Tibetan way to birth in Sukhāvātī requires four conditions: the production of the thought of Awakening (*bodhicitta*), the clear mental representation of the Buddha Amitābha and his domain, the purification of acts and, finally, intense prayers for birth in his Buddha-field. Several texts of such prayers (*monlam*) exist, composed by the greatest masters, including the reformer Tsongkhapa (1357-1419); one of the most famous [p. 30] of these is by Karma Chagme (or Ragasyas, 1613-1678)<sup>43</sup>.

No equivalent of the Sino-Japanese vocal nembutsu exists in Tibetan practice. Indeed, although the formula "Om Amidewa Hrī" dedicated to Amitābha is used in rituals, it is the famous "Om Mani Padme Hūm" of the Bodhisattva Avalokitasvara (Chenrezig), one of Amitābha's assistants, which is preferred in popular practice.

Tibetan rites related to Sukhāvātī are mainly characterized by two Tantric practices. The first is the ritual of life extension (*tsegrub*), centred on the Buddha Amitāyus (Tsepame, *Tshe-dpag-med*) assisted by the two female deities Uṣṇīṣavijayā (*Tsuktor Namgyalma*) and White-Tārā (*Drolma Karpo*), who form with him the "Triad of Longevity" (*Tselha namsum*). This ritual was imported from India by Rechungpa (1083-1161), at the request of the famous hermit Milarepa of the Kagyupa School, and then spread to all the other schools.

<sup>42</sup> Robert E. Buswell, Jr.: *The Collected Works of Chinul* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

<sup>43</sup> Georgios T. Halkias: *Luminous Bliss, A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (Pure Land Buddhist Studies; Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2017); Kapstein, Matthew T.: "Pure Land Buddhism in Tibet?", in *Approaching the Land of Bliss, Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha* (ed. by Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka; Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism; Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp. 16-51.

The second practice is that of "transfer" (*phowa*) at the moment of death, which consists in directing the consciousness towards the Buddha-field of Amitābha. This method is described in several apocryphal texts called "hidden treasures" (*terma*), including the famous "Tibetan Book of the Dead" (*Bardo thödol*). Finally, it should be noted that certain important masters, including the Panchen-Lama, are considered manifestations, or bodies of transformation (*tulku*), of the Buddha Amitābha. [p. 31]

## 5. Pure Land in Japan

While Japanese Pure Land Buddhism has followed its own historical course, it is distinguished above all by particularly original doctrinal developments, which have no equivalent in any other tradition in the Buddhist world.

### a) The beginnings

As early as 640, on return from a thirty-year journey to China, the Japanese pilgrim Eon 慧隱 gave a lecture at the Imperial Palace on the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Nara period), the entire Chinese Pure Land canon has reached Japan, and commentaries were being composed by Chikō 智光 (709-780) of the Mādhyamika School (Sanronshū 三論宗), and Zenju 善珠 (723-797) of the Vijñānavāda School (*Hossōshū* 法相宗).

In the following century, Saichō 最澄 (767-822) founded the Tendai School, after a stay in China from where he brought back an eclectic combination of Tiantai (with its Pure Land teaching), Zen, Tantrism, as well as the discipline of the Greater Vehicle. His disciple Ennin 圓仁 (794-864) also travelled to China and visited Wutaishan, where he collected the teachings of Fazhao 法照 (?-838), himself considered a reincarnation of Shandao. The monk Kūya 空也 (903-972) was among the first to popularize Pure Land teachings outside the monastic world, even going so far as to create a nembutsu dance (*nembutsu odori* 念佛踊り).

The Tendai School was given new life by Ryōgen 良源 (912-985)<sup>44</sup>, the teacher of the greatest Tendai master of the Pure Land, Genshin 源信 (942-1017). His *Essentials on Birth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjō-yōshū* 往生要集) could be described as a [p. 32] decisive work of Japanese Buddhism, while it is said that his literary qualities make him comparable to Dante<sup>45</sup>. Genshin also took part in a brotherhood of monks, the Congregation for the Samādhi of the Twenty-Five (*Nijūgo zammai e* 二十五三昧會), which was not unlike the community founded in China by Huiyuan five centuries earlier.

The Pure Land was then all the rage among the aristocracy, especially through the rites celebrating the arrival of the Buddha Amida welcoming the dying (*raigō* 來迎), a subject that has given rise to some of the most magnificent creations of Japanese Buddhist art<sup>46</sup>. This success was due in particular to a collective awareness of the vanishing of the Law

<sup>44</sup> Groner, Paul: *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei, Japanese Tendai in the Tenth Century* (Studies in East Asian Buddhism; Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Andrews, Allan A.: *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth* (Tokyo, Sophia University, 1973); Rhodes, Robert F.: *Genshin's Ōjōyōshū and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan* (Pure Land Buddhist Studies; Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Okazaki, Jōji 岡崎譲治: *Pure Land Buddhist Painting* (td. Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis; Tokyo, Kodansha International and Shibundo, 1977).

(*mappō* 末法), as a result of a succession of natural disasters that hit Japan at that time. Until then, Japanese Pure Land Buddhism did not possess any particular characteristics distinguishing it from the Chinese tradition. But this was to be quite different in the following period.

### b) The Jōdoshū of Hōnen

Hōnen 法然 (or Genkū 源空, 1133-1212), a monk in the Tendai School, rediscovered the works of Shandao through the *Ōjō-yōshū* of Genshin<sup>47</sup>. He then decided to establish the teachings of the Chinese master as an independent school, the [p. 33] Pure Land School (*Jōdoshū* 淨土宗), though without breaking from Tendai monastic discipline. In 1198, he set down his doctrine in his *Compilation on the Nembutsu Selected by the Primal Vow* (*Senjakushū* 選擇集), where he radicalized the principles of Shandao<sup>48</sup>. For the latter, the vocal nembutsu was *sufficient in itself*, but for Hōnen, it was the only *necessary* practice “because it follows the Vow of this Buddha” (*jun hi butsu gan ko* 順彼佛願故)<sup>49</sup>.

Hōnen's new school was the first to be founded in Japan in nearly two centuries, and he had not introduced it by making the consecratory journey from China. For this reason, and using the pretext of excesses of the part of some of his disciples, he was attacked by the established schools and finally condemned by the government to exile, from 1207 to 1211. His death, two months after his amnesty, did not hinder the success of his teaching, and his numerous disciples themselves set up a number of traditions and branches of the school. These differ from each other in the importance they attach to Tendai doctrine, as well as in the need or not to multiply recitations of the nembutsu. The most important branches are the Seizan 西山, founded by Shōkū 證空 (1177-1247), and the Chinzei 鎮西, initiated by Benchō 辨長 (1162-1238). Within the latter lineage, Shōgei 聖罔 (1341-1420) was the first to obtain separate ordinations from those of Tendai, thus establishing the independence of the Jōdoshū. Its headquarters are at the temple Chion'in 知恩院 in Kyōto, where the mausoleum of Hōnen is located. [p. 34]

### c) The Jōdo-Shinshū of Shinran

Shinran 親鸞 (or Zenshin 善信, 1173-1263)<sup>50</sup> became Hōnen's disciple in 1201, having first passed through Tendai. Exiled at the same time as his master, Shinran then settled in the eastern province, near present-day Tōkyō. In the 1230s, he returned to Kyōto to devote

<sup>47</sup> Coates, Harper Havelock & Ishizuka, Ryūgaku 石塚龍學: *Hōnen, The Buddhist Saint* (New York & London, Garland Publishing, 1981), from Shunshō 舜昌 (1255-1335): *Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezu* 法然上人行狀繪圖 (*The Illustrated Life of Hōnen Shōnin*); Atone Jōji 後根定璽 & Hayashi Yōko 林葉子: *The Promise of Amida Buddha, Hōnen's Path to Bliss* (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2011), from Ryōe 了慧 (1243-1330): *Kurodani Shōnin wagotōroku* 黒谷上人和語燈録 (*Records of the Lamp of the Sayings of His Eminence of Kurodani in Japanese*); Kleine, Christoph: *Hōnens Buddhismus des Reinen Landes* (Bern, Peter Lang, 1996); Repp, Martin: *Hōnens religiöses Denken* (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Td. *Hōnen's Senchakushū* (by Augustine, Morris J. & Kondō, Tesshō 近藤徹称; Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press / Tokyo, Taishō University, 1998); Ducor, Jérôme: *Hōnen, Le gué vers la Terre Pure, Senchakushū* (Paris, Fayard, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Hōnen, *Senjakushū*, ch. 2 (T. 83, p. 3a / Jssz 1, p. 1327).

<sup>50</sup> Yamamoto, Kōshō: *An Introduction to Shin Buddhism* (Ube, The Karinbunko, 1963); Kikumura, Norihiko 菊村紀彦: *Shinran: His Life and Thought* (Los Angeles, The Nembutsu Press, 1972); Bloom, Alfred: *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace* (Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1965).

himself to his literary work, and in particular to his voluminous treatise *Teaching, Practice, Faith and Realization* (*Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信證)<sup>51</sup>. Especially inspired by the Chinese master Tanluan, Shinran radicalized the nembutsu teaching by affirming the primacy of faith in the Buddha Amida's Vow over the pronunciation of his name.

Like Hōnen, Shinran did not seek to found a new institution. Nevertheless the originality of his interpretation gave birth to the True Pure Land School (*Jōdo-Shinshū* 淨土眞宗), whose name is abbreviated to "Shinshū"<sup>52</sup> and sometimes translated as "Shin Buddhism"<sup>53</sup>.

At his death, his followers were divided between two poles: that of the eastern province, mainly with the branch Takada-ha 高田派, and that of Kyōto, centred on Shinran's mausoleum, which in the 14<sup>th</sup> century became the temple known as Honganji 本願寺. Convinced that monastic discipline in the period of the vanishing of the Law had become obsolete, Shinran is famous for having openly married Eshinni 惠信 [p. 35] 尼 (1182-1268?), with whom he had six children; today, the patriarchy of the Honganji is still transmitted in an unbroken hereditary lineage<sup>54</sup>.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, following a dispute over the succession, the Shōgun supported the foundation of a second Honganji, located to the east of the first and thus called "Eastern Honganji" (*Higashi-Honganji* 東本願寺): it is the headquarters of the Ōtani branch of Shinshū (*Ōtani-ha* 大谷派), while the original Honganji, nicknamed "Western Honganji" (*Nishi-Honganji* 西本願寺), is the headquarters of the Honganji branch (*Honganji-ha* 本願寺派). These are the two main branches of this school, which has about twenty of them, but which are only distinguished by the lineage of their transmissions. Marriage of Jōdo-Shinshū clerics was legally ratified during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the patriarchs Ryōnyo 良如 of Honganji and his cousin Sennyō 宣如 of Higashi-Honganji married two sisters from the high aristocracy<sup>55</sup>. When the Shogunate published the *Temple Regulations for all Buddhist Schools* in 1665, it confirmed the traditional ban on women in temples, while providing however that "exceptions could be made for those who traditionally have wives"<sup>56</sup>. In 1872, the Government eventually abolished the obligation of monastic rules, including celibacy for all Buddhist schools<sup>57</sup>. Accordingly, most temples in Japan, all schools combined, are nowadays transmitted from father to child. [p. 36]

<sup>51</sup> *The Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto, Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 1-292; Inagaki, Hisao: *Kyōgyōshinshō* (BDK English Tripitaka 105-I; Berkeley, Numata Center, 2003); Yamamoto, Kōshō: *The Kyōgyōshinshō* (1958, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Ube, The Karibunko, 1975). Partial translations: Ishida, Mitsuyuki 石田充之 (dir.): *The Kyō Gyō Shin Shō* (Ryukoku Translation Series, V; Kyoto, 1966); Suzuki, Daisets 鈴木大拙: *Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō* (1973, n. ed. Kyoto, Shinshū Ōtani-ha Higashi Honganji / Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> The abbreviation "Shinshū" 眞宗 should not be confused with the word "shintō" 神道, which refers to the Japanese religion of the spirits of nature and ancestors.

<sup>53</sup> Dobbins, James C.: *Jōdo Shinshū, Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana Univ. Press, 1989).

<sup>54</sup> See my article: "Les patriarches de la branche Honganji du Jōdo-Shinshū", *Journal Asiatique*, 300-1 (Paris 2012), pp. 353-387.

<sup>55</sup> Ryōnyo (1612-1662) and Sennyō (1604-1658) married respectively Nyokōni 如高尼 (1613-1632) and Nyojūni 如徒尼 (?-1680), daughters of the chancellor (*kanpaku*) Kujō Yukiie 九條幸家 (1586-1665).

<sup>56</sup> *Shoshū jūin hatto* 諸宗寺院法度: "但在來妻帶者可爲格別" (11<sup>th</sup> of 7<sup>th</sup> month of Kambun 寛文 5).

<sup>57</sup> *Ordinance on celibacy and vegetarianism* (*Nikujiki saitai rei* 肉食妻帶令), April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1872.



#### d) Other schools

i. A former Jōdoshū follower, Ippen 一遍 (1239-1289) gained his independence after receiving a revelation at the Kumano 熊野 sanctuary<sup>58</sup>. He spent the last years of his life travelling all across Japan preaching, inaugurating a practice perpetuated by some of his successors. His doctrine consists of a synthesis of Pure Land and esotericism. Ippen is at the origin of the Last Hour School (Jishū 時宗), which is based at the Shōjōkōji 清淨光寺 (or Yūgyōji 遊行寺) in Fujisawa.

ii. Ryōnin 良忍 (1072-1152), a Tendai monk, developed his own doctrine, called the “fusional nembutsu” (*yūzū-nembutsu* 融通念佛). He is often referred to as the founder of the first Pure Land school in Japan, but it was only during the Edo period that the Yūzū-nembutsu-shū 融通念佛宗 was actually established as a school by Daitō 大通 (1649-1717). Its headquarters are located at the Dai-nembutsu-ji 大念佛寺 in Ōsaka.

iii. A final school related to the Pure Land tradition is the Ōbakushū 黄檗宗<sup>59</sup>. It is one of the three schools of Japanese Zen Buddhism, the least-well known in the West. It originated with the Chinese master Yinyuan 陰元 (J. Ingen, 1592-1673), who arrived in Japan in 1654 and transmitted a branch of the Rinzaï 臨濟 tradition of Zen which had incorporated the practice of nembutsu. In 1661, Yinyuan founded the Mampukuji 萬福寺 temple in Uji, still the [p. 37] mother temple of this school, which only became independent from Rinzaï in 1876.

### 6. The current situation in Asia and the West

The deep imprint left by Pure Land Buddhism on all countries of the Greater Vehicle is particularly evident in their popular conceptions of the afterlife, as well as in their funeral rites. Within the sphere of Chinese cultural influence, Pure Land practice is often associated with the cult of ancestors, which is essentially Confucian in origin.

Japan is one of the few countries to provide detailed religious statistics. According to figures from the Agency for Cultural Affairs for the year 2017, the Pure Land Schools together totalled some 29'996 temples, as well as 53'336 certified clerics (*kyōshi* 教師), both men and women. The number of declared lay followers is estimated at around 22.6 million, though this figure is uncertain: the notion of personal religious affiliation remains rather vague in Japan, as it is more a matter of family tradition. Jōdo-Shinshū alone has 20'960 temples, 40'045 clerics, and 16.1 million followers, figures that may be compared to those of Japanese Buddhism as a whole: 81'059 temples, 355'886 clerics, and 85.3 million followers for a total population of around 126.3 million inhabitants.

In the West, the presence of Pure Land Buddhism is due first and foremost to migrant Asian communities. Among the overseas Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean communities, Pure Land has followed a course similar to that of the Chinese tradition which resulted from Cimin. In communities of Japanese origin, it is mainly the Honganji branch of Jōdo-Shinshū that is represented. As early as 1889, it accompanied the Japanese emigration that settled in Hawaii, where it now has more than 30 temples. Its organization in the rest of the [p. 38] United States includes 60 temples, and 15 in Canada. It is also well represented in

<sup>58</sup> Hirota, Dennis: *No Abode, The Record of Ippen* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

<sup>59</sup> Baroni, Helen J.: *Obaku Zen, The Emergence of the Third Sect of Zen in Tokugawa Japan* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).

Central and South America, with recent developments in Taiwan, Nepal and Australia. In contrast, Pure Land Buddhism is still poorly understood and little practiced by Westerners. Europe, however, represents a special case since there are three Jōdo-Shinshū temples there, with small groups of native practitioners - including about ten clerics - in Germany, Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Switzerland. All of these groups are spiritually linked to the Honganji branch. [p. 39]

## Chapter 1. The Life of Shinran

Shinran's long life will certainly challenge the most well-meaning biographer. While certain specific points are well documented, the same cannot be said of several important events in his life, including his wedding, or even of entire periods, such as the time he spent preaching in the provinces. In 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan, the re-evaluation of his hagiography and the discovery of new historical sources have given rise to many contradictory, and sometimes heated, debates. There is no question of entering into the maze of this historiography here, and we will satisfy ourselves with a sketch that is as objective as possible. This summary is based on the best available sources, even if they cannot be cited in detail<sup>60</sup>.

For the most part, Shinran's biography can be divided into three main periods: his youth in Kyōto, his mature years in the provinces, and his old age back once again in Kyōto. [p. 40]

### A. Youth in Kyōto

*A young orphan, Shinran was ordained in the Tendai School before converting to Hōnen's Pure Land School, marrying, and then being condemned to exile.*

#### 1. Childhood and ordination

The founder of Jōdo-Shinshū was born in 1173 into a family of the lower nobility of Kyōto which lost its social rank following a family scandal.

Shinran belonged to the younger branch of the Hino 日野 family, itself part of the northern house of the illustrious aristocratic Fujiwara 藤原 clan. Composed of scholars trained in the Way of the Literati (*Kidendō* 紀傳道), his family had provided several generations of civil servants to the imperial administration. Hino Munemitsu 日野宗光 (1070-1143), for example, his great-grandfather, was a senior deputy in the Ministry of Ceremonies and director of its Office of Higher Education, while holding the Junior Upper 4<sup>th</sup> rank at the Court<sup>61</sup>. However, this honourable family tradition was upset by Shinran's grandfather, Hino Tsunemasa 日野經尹 (12<sup>th</sup> century). History only records that he was a student of literature but found himself out of office, reaching no higher than the Junior Lower 5<sup>th</sup> rank<sup>62</sup>. In circumstances of which we know nothing, Tsunemasa discredited himself to the point of known to posterity as a "debauched individual" (*hōratsu no hito* 放埒人). The scandal was so great in this Japanese society steeped [p. 41] in Confucian ethics that Tsunemasa and his descendants were removed from the Hino lineage and attached to a younger branch of the Southern Fujiwara house.

Shinran's father, Hino Arinori 日野有範 (c. 1144-1181?) being the youngest of Tsunemasa's three sons, was the one who suffered the most from the family downfall. At most, he succeeded in obtaining a junior position as an official of the house of one of the

<sup>60</sup> The letters of Eshinni 惠信尼 (1182-1268?); *The Biography of Shinran* (*Godenshō* 御傳鈔) by Kakunyo 覺如 (1270-1351); *The Chronicles of the Shōren'in* (*Mon'yōki* 門葉記) by Son'en 尊圓 (1298-1356) and others; *The Genealogy of Illustrious and Modest Families* (*Sompi bummyaku* 尊卑分脈) by Tōin Kinsada 洞院公定 (1340-1399) and others; etc.

<sup>61</sup> Jap. *Shikibusho taifu* 式部省大輔, *Daigakuryō kami* 大學寮頭, *ju shii jō* 從四位上.

<sup>62</sup> Jap. *monjōshō* 文章生, *san'i* 散位, *ju goi ge* 從五位下.

dowager empresses, but without going beyond the Senior Lower 5<sup>th</sup> rank<sup>63</sup>. Arinori even ended up leaving his position and retiring to Mimuroto 三室戸, to the south of Kyōto, where he lived as a tertiary (*nyūdō* 入道), that is, as a layman who had received the Buddhist tonsure without becoming a monk. Shinran lost his father when he was still a child and was taken care of by his two uncles. The eldest one, Hino Noritsuna 日野範綱, (c. 1140-1194-?) made him his adopted son (*yōshi* 養子). The second uncle, Hino Munenari 日野宗業 (1142-1219?) introduced Shinran to the Humanities, probably in order to restore the lost family honour by rekindling the tradition of literary studies. In 1217, Munenari himself would eventually reach the Junior 3<sup>rd</sup> rank (*jusanmi* 從三位), the lowest level of the aristocratic class (*kugyō* 公卿). Shinran's studies under Munenari's guidance explain why he was to prove a particularly accomplished scholar, as evidenced by his taste for philological analysis, his adoption of a particular calligraphic style inspired by a modern Chinese model of the times, and, finally, the importance of his written work mastering all genres, both in Chinese and Japanese, in prose and in verse.

According to unverifiable sources, Shinran lost his mother when he was still a child, but even without this ordeal, it is clear that his childhood was a sad one. That period was one [p. 42] of the darkest in Japanese history, falling as it did in the midst of the wars between the Taira and Minamoto clans (1180-1185), which led in 1192 to the establishment of the military junta of the generalissimo (*shōgun*) Minamoto Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147-1199) in Kamakura. In addition to these political and military disturbances, other disasters occurred - besides unusually severe typhoons and earthquakes -, not the least of which were the great Kyōto fire of 1177, and the appalling famines followed by epidemics of the years 1181-1182, which caused tens of thousands of deaths. All these tragedies were identified as signs of the vanishing of the Law (*mappō* 末法), which, according to the chronology adopted in Japan, began in 1051. It is not surprising therefore that religious vocations resurfaced after that date, especially among the large families of the nobility. This was precisely the case for Hino Arinori's children, and Shinran and his three younger brothers were all eventually ordained as monks<sup>64</sup>.

It was in the spring of his ninth year (1181) that Shinran was ordained, in a ceremony that included the tonsure and receiving the religious habit, as well as the conferring of a Buddhist name, the one chosen for the boy at that time being "Han'en" 範宴. The ordination took place under the leadership of Jien 慈圓 (alias Jichin 慈鎮, 1155-1225), a young prelate of the Tendai School to whom Shinran had been introduced by his uncle and adoptive father, Noritsuna. The event was certainly flattering: Jien belonged to the highest aristocracy of the time, being born into the Kujō family of the Fujiwara clan, one of the five families from which the most important imperial officials, including the emperor's regent, were chosen. It is not clear however whether Shinran then studied under [p. 43] Jien, who is well known both for his austere practices and for his accumulation of ecclesiastical honours, to the point that he was to become patriarch of the Tendai School four times.

In the same year, Shinran also received the precepts of the Greater Vehicle<sup>65</sup>. The ceremony of their transmission traditionally took place in the chapel of the Kaidan'in 戒壇

<sup>63</sup> Jap. *Kōtaiko-gu daishin* 皇太后宮大進, *shō goi ge* 正五位下.

<sup>64</sup> More details on Shinran's father and brothers in my review of the new edition of *The History of the Honganji* (*Honganji shi* 本願寺史, I, 2010): *Shin Buddhist Studies*, Newsletter of the IASBS, 25-1 (2014), pp. 5-10.

<sup>65</sup> According to Jōsen 乘尊 (1295-1377), *The Illustrated Life of Kakunyo* (Jssz 4, p. 429).

院 at the Enryakuji monastery 延曆寺, the Tendai headquarters on Mount Hiei 比叡, half a dozen kilometres northeast of Kyōto. This was conducted by the Tendai patriarch himself, at that time Myōun 明雲 (1115-1183), also a venerable cleric from an aristocratic family. It should be noted that the Mahayanistic fifty-eight precepts of the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* (*Bommōkyō* 梵網經) received by Shinran differ from the two hundred and fifty precepts of the Dharmaguptaka's discipline of the Smaller Vehicle by being fewer in number and more spiritual in content. Still, they cover the ordinary prescriptions of monastic life, including celibacy, classified as the third of the ten "heavy" precepts (*jūjūkai* 十重戒). The newly-ordained boy would observe these for the next twenty years.

## 2. As a Tendai Monk

From 1181 to 1201, Shinran lived the life of a Tendai monk in Enryakuji. This monastery originated as a humble hermitage established in 786 by Saichō, the master who had brought Tendai teachings from China. Within four centuries, it had developed into a vast complex of buildings that could accommodate several thousand monks and provide refined ceremonies. Among the latter, the sophisticated rites of Tantrism (*mikkyō* 密教) had aroused the enthusiasm of the [p. 44] aristocracy of the capital, particularly attracted by the worldly protection they could provide. The generosity shown by the nobility and the court turned the Enryakuji into a rich institution, which took in more and more lay brothers and serfs in order to look after the maintenance and defence of its vast domains, if necessary by force. This is the origin of the famous "soldier monks" (*sōhei* 僧兵), genuine factions whose aggressivity was equalled only by their arrogance towards scholastic monks (*gakuryō* 學侶), other monasteries, and even towards the imperial power, not hesitating to demonstrate in the streets of Kyōto when their interests were threatened. Moreover, two years before Shinran's ordination, servant monks (*dōshu* 堂衆) had even set fire to buildings of the Enryakuji to avenge themselves on the scholastic monks! It was in this somewhat surreal atmosphere that Shinran began his religious life on Mount Hiei.

### a) A modest ecclesiastical career

From these years, certainly crucial for his formation, we know only that Shinran exercised the simple function of chaplain (*dōsō* 堂僧). This term referred to clerics attached to a *jōgyōdō* 常行堂, a chapel originally intended for the practice of meditation through constant walking *samādhi* (*jōgyō zammai* 常行三昧). This Tendai meditative practice, developed by Zhiyi (*sup.* p. 16) and introduced into Japan by Saichō, consisted mainly of walking day and night for three months around an image of the Buddha Amida, focusing exclusively on him while reciting his name. This method was more complex than it seems, however, since it required not only contemplating the thirty-two physical marks of the Buddha, but also interpenetrating them with the three truths known as "emptiness, provisional, and middle" (*kūgechū* 空假中), that are ontological notions specific to Tendai philosophy. [p. 45] Moreover, this asceticism was very trying, as recently attested by several monks who tried to revive it: having only two hours a day to rest in a meditative posture, the practitioner can see his legs double in size, when he is not a victim of hallucinations<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> See Stevens, John: *The Marathon Monks of Mount Hiei* (Boston, Shambala, 1988), pp. 43-44, 124.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that Shinran was exposed to such a practice. As early as 851, Ennin, disciple of Saichō, had instituted in the *jōgyōdō* a much more liturgical practice, called the “pentatonic nembutsu” (*goe-nembutsu* 五會念佛), of which he had received the transmission in China. In 865, in accordance with Ennin's last wishes, his own disciple Sōō 相應 (813-918) simplified this practice into the method of “uninterrupted nembutsu” (*fudan-nembutsu* 不斷念佛). The beauty of this ritual, celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> moon for a week, earned it great notoriety among the aristocracy under the name of “Mountain Nembutsu” (*Yama no nembutsu* 山の念佛), and it was even adopted by important temples in the capital.

Thus, in Shinran's time, the chaplains of the *jōgyōdō* were hardly more than monks specialized in Buddhist liturgy and plainsong. Fourteen of them celebrated a daily “regular ritual” (*reiji* 例時), centred on the recitation of the *Sūtra of Amida*, while the annual calendar included only three events, one of which was the great uninterrupted nembutsu of the 8<sup>th</sup> moon (*dainembutsu* 大念佛), sung in a special tone (*inzei* 引聲). The ordinary activities of the chaplains were therefore relatively simple, as they did not fall within the Tendai esoteric ritual (*Taimitsu jisō* 台密事相) so popular at the time. However, because of their liturgical specialization, the chaplains were invited by large temples in Kyōto to improve certain ceremonies, such as the anniversaries of the deaths [p. 46] of members of the imperial family. Confirming their modest status, the chaplains were placed after the ordinary clerics of the host temple, but it was an opportunity for them to improve their everyday fare by receiving offerings.

The mediocrity of his status also suggests that Shinran could not or did not want to pursue an ecclesiastical career. Instead of becoming a cleric with a prelacy (*sōgō* 僧綱), as was later the case of his brother Jin'u 尋有 who reached the rank of esoteric master (*ajari* 阿闍梨) and held the title of clerical censor (*sōzu* 僧都), Shinran remained an ordinary cleric (*bonsō* 凡僧). This means that during his lifetime, he earned at most the title of “Master of the Law” (*hōshi* 法師). Nevertheless, his role as chaplain probably did have a profound effect on him. Indeed, this liturgical experience can be seen as one of the sources of his strong liking for Buddhist hymns, in Chinese and Japanese. In addition, it should be noted that the liturgies he celebrated while in this function were all centred on the Buddha Amida, which could not fail to leave a deep mark on his spirituality.

## b) Religious itinerary and spiritual crisis

This activity as chaplain of a *jōgyōdō* constitutes the monastic office that Shinran held at the Enryakuji. As far as his personal religious life is concerned, we know nothing of the conditions under which he was initiated into Tendai doctrine and practice, nor of the masters he was able to meet. While it can be assumed that he followed a classical curriculum, which would include the study of the sixty volumes of the *Tendai Great Trilogy*<sup>67</sup>, it is known that he followed the tradition of Ryōgon-Yokawa 楞嚴横川, that is of Genshin, the author of the *Essentials on Birth in the Pure Land*. And since this text [p. 47] includes a genuine meditation manual on the Buddha Amida, it is likely that Shinran embarked on this type of practice within the Tendai teaching of the Pure Land, a practice which was well suited to the liturgy of the *jōgyōdō*. Among the different methods described by Genshin, the most common seem to have been the “simplified and secondary

<sup>67</sup> The *Tendai Sandaibu* 天台三大部 includes three commentaries by Zhiyi: *Hokke genji* 法華玄義, *Hokke mongu* 法華文句, and *Makashikan* 摩訶止觀 (T. 33, 1716; 34, 1718; 46, 1911).

contemplations" (*zōryaku-kan* 雜略觀), which concern the tuft of silver hairs growing between the Buddha's eyebrows (*byakugō* 白毫, *ūrṇā*) and the light emanating from it. Given the importance of the theme of Amida's light in Shinran's subsequent teachings, it cannot be discounted that he was influenced by this type of practice from his time on Mount Hiei. As a matter of fact, a later autograph manuscript of Shinran's does record a similar method of contemplation<sup>68</sup>.

Whatever these twenty years meant for the young Shinran, they led to a spiritual impasse, which his first biographer simply mentioned in these terms:

"However, he was still preoccupied with monkey-like feelings of attachment to objects of the senses, and his thoughts were further reinforced in the elucubrations of desire and false views with mad obstinacy."<sup>69</sup>

### 3. A disciple of Hōnen

#### a) The revelation at Rokkakudō

Shinran seems to have long sought a master capable of responding to his spiritual crisis, but without success until 1201. In that year, he went in desperation to the Rokkakudō 六角堂 chapel in Kyōto, where he had a decisive experience, as [p. 48] a letter from his wife Eshinni later recounts:

"He left Mount [Hiei] and retired for a hundred days to the Rokkakudō praying for the next life. But at dawn of the 95<sup>th</sup> day, he received a revelation through a text from the Imperial Prince Shōtoku. During that same dawn, he went to seek the conditions for his rescue in the next life and met His Eminence Hōnen. And as he had retired to Rokkakudō for a hundred days, so he visited him for a hundred days, in rain, sun and storm."<sup>70</sup>

Two main reasons may have guided Shinran to the Rokkakudō. First of all, this chapel, the main building of the Chōhōji 頂法寺 founded in 587 by Imperial Prince Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574-622), was considered to be the first Buddhist temple ever established in Japan. By taking refuge there, Shinran seems to have been motivated by the need to return to the very source of Japanese Buddhism after his twenty unsuccessful years on Mount Hiei. Secondly, at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Shōtoku was the object of an extremely popular cult. Not only was this "Constantine" of Japanese Buddhism considered a manifestation of the Bodhisatva Kannon 觀音 (Avalokitasvara), the Bodhisatva of Compassion par excellence, but he also embodied a non-monastic approach to the Buddhist path, which could indeed attract a 29 year-old man such as Shinran, ordained since his earliest childhood<sup>71</sup>. However, we do not know the exact [p. 49] content of this

<sup>68</sup> This manuscript entitled *Shinbi Shōnin goshaku* 信微上人御釋 is kept at Honganji (Jssz 2).

<sup>69</sup> Kakunyo, *Hōonkō-shiki* (see bibliography): "然而色塵聲塵猿猴之情尚忙。愛論見論鶻膠之憶彌堅" (T. 83, p. 755c / Jssz 4, p. 64).

<sup>70</sup> Eshinni's letter 3 (1263): "山を出でて、六角堂に百日籠らせたまひて後世をいのらせたまひけるに、九十五日のあか月、聖徳太子の文を結びて、示現にあづからせたまひて候ひければ、やがてそのあか月出でさせたまひて、後世のたすからんずる縁にあひまゐらせんとたづねまゐらせて、法然上人にあひまゐらせて、また六角堂に百日籠らせたまひて候ひけるやうに、また百か日、降るにも照るにも、いかなるたいふにもまゐりてありしに" (Jssz 2, p. 1031).

<sup>71</sup> Como, Michael I. : *Shōtoku, Ethnicity, Ritual, and Violence in the Japanese Buddhist Tradition* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2008); Lee, Kenneth Doo Young: *The Prince and the Monk, Shotoku Worship in*

revelation, and we do not know why Shinran needed it in order to decide to consult Hōnen; the latter was admittedly already a celebrity in the capital, to the point that, so the chronicle says, the crowd rushed to his hermitage "forming a market outside his door"<sup>72</sup>.

Whatever the case, his meeting with Hōnen definitively changed the course of Shinran's life. He received from his master the new Buddhist name "Shakkū" 禪空, which combines a character from the name of Daochuo (J. Dōshaku 道綽) with a character from Hōnen's private name (Genkū 源空). This event was so crucial that Shinran even recorded it in his most formal work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, where he specifies that on this occasion, he abandoned the "various practices" and took refuge in the "Primal Vow"<sup>73</sup>. The jargon used here by Shinran shows that his departure from Hieizan was practically equivalent to leaving the Tendai Pure Land teaching (*Tendai Jōdokyō*) to join the Pure Land School (*Jōdoshū*) founded a quarter of a century earlier by Hōnen on the basis of Shandao's tradition. In other words, Shinran abandoned all methods other than the exclusive practice of vocal nembutsu based on the Primal Vow of the Buddha Amida.

However, it does not mean that Shinran then formally broke with the Tendai institution based at the Enryakuji temple, since Hōnen himself had not created a new line of ordination. Indeed, in terms of monastic discipline, Shinran's departure from Mount Hiei is more akin to what the texts of the time describe as a "retreat" (*inton* 隱遁). This expression was applied to clerics who left their offices and functions in order to devote themselves to deepening their own spiritual experience in more [p. 50] serene conditions than in their original monastic institution, without challenging their affiliation. Hōnen himself had followed a similar path: he entered Mount Hiei in 1145, left it thirty years later and settled in Yoshimizu 吉水, in the hills bordering the east of Kyōto, in order to devote himself to his exclusive nembutsu teaching. With his master Hōnen, Shinran shared other common points: both had entered religious life at a very young age after their fathers' death, and both had spent many years at the Enryakuji following Genshin's tradition.

By the time they met, Hōnen had already reached the respectable age of 69 and was a master at the height of his popularity, known for his erudition, his respect for monastic discipline, and his profound humanity, all qualities that enabled him to teach monks as well as laymen, aristocrats, and the ordinary people. Despite his commoner and provincial background, Hōnen had indeed managed to win the sympathy of important members of the court and high nobility, the most famous of whom was his patron Kujō Kanezane 九條兼實 (1149-1207), elder brother of the prelate Jien who had ordained Shinran, and who had been the regent, then chancellor, of the Emperor Go-Toba 後鳥羽 (1180-1239).

Among Hōnen's many disciples, who came from very different backgrounds, were several Tendai religious scholars, who, like him, had not formally broken with their original school. It was in this group that Shinran naturally inserted himself. However, we do not know what his living conditions were during the half-dozen years he studied with his master. At most, one can imagine that he lodged with some fellow disciples in the capital, because Hōnen had not founded a temple likely to house a community, and only half a dozen disciples in charge of his care lived with him in his hermitage in Yoshimizu. It may therefore be assumed that Shinran led a frugal life thanks to the generosity of his master's protectors, [p. 51] and that he also benefited from his own knowledge of the liturgy. Indeed, in 1192, Hōnen and his disciples had introduced the "Hymns of Praise for

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Shinran's Buddhism (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> Kakunyo, *Godenshō*, vol. 1, ch. 6 "貴賤轅をめぐらし, 門前, 市をなす" (T. 83, p. 751c / Jssz 4, p. 83).

<sup>73</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 188: "然愚禿釋鸞, 建仁辛酉曆, 棄雜行兮歸本願" (T. 83, p. 642c / Jssz 2, p. 254).



the Six Periods" (*Rokuji raisan* 六時禮讚), and the beauty of this plainsong delighted the aristocracy. It was a kind of Divine Office in the form of a dialogue between the celebrant and his assistants, marking six periods of the day and the night, during which the *Poems of Hymns in Praise of Birth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjō raisange* 往生禮讚偈) of Shandao were sung. In the spring of 1204, for example, Hōnen still conducted this liturgy at the temple Rengeōin 蓮華王院 during the 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary service held in memory of Emperor Go-Shirakawa, and it is likely that Shinran was invited to participate and would therefore have received some emolument, as was usual.

### b) Master-to-disciple transmission

During this period of discovery of the Pure Land School, Shinran undertook, among other things, to collate the writings of the Shandao tradition. Copies of the Chinese master's works annotated by Shinran's hand still exist. Also preserved is a copy of the *Sūtra of Contemplations* and one of the *Sūtra of Amida* in which he intermingled comments from several masters to form an impressive handwritten scroll over fourteen meters long!<sup>74</sup>

However, it was not the best time to focus on such a task. The traditional Buddhist institutions were showing some impatience with the development of Hōnen's movement and the excesses of some of his followers, who felt free to criticize established schools or to lead a dissolute life. As early as 1203, two years after Shinran's first visit to Yoshimizu, Hōnen had [p. 52] to defend himself by writing to Shinshō 眞性 (1167-1230), the Tendai patriarch. This proved insufficient in the face of growing unrest among the turbulent community of Mount Hiei, and Hōnen had to do so once again during the winter of 1204. At the same time, he also published a *Seven-article Manifesto* urging his disciples to avoid any outbursts, and some 190 of them - including Shinran - filed past during three days to countersign it<sup>75</sup>. Finally, Kujō Kanezane himself intervened with Shinshō, and the case had no further consequences for the time being.

Nevertheless, Hōnen had anticipated the threat to his community and in the spring of 1204 had taken the initiative by passing the manuscript of his main work, the *Senjakushū*, on to some relatives for them to copy it. The book had been written six years earlier at Kanezane's request, but Hōnen had asked him to keep it secret, aware of its explosive content. It should be recalled at this point that the transmission of a Buddhist text has always been considered of great importance, as it amounts to recognizing its recipient as the legitimate spiritual heir of his master, the writing being an extension of the latter's oral teaching, even after his death. Given Hōnen's great age and the difficulties that were appearing, the transmission of his *Senjakushū* at that time took on even more significance.

While the founder of Jōdoshū granted this privilege of transmission to half a dozen of his disciples only, he conferred it on Shinran in the summer of 1205. On that date, Hōnen allowed him to copy the work and he took the trouble of authenticating the finished copy by writing himself the title and epigraph, as well as the name "Shakkū" that he had bestowed on Shinran when they had met. As further proof of the trust [p. 53] he placed in his disciple, Hōnen also lent him his own portrait for copying. The new painting was again

<sup>74</sup> The copies of Shandao's works are kept at the Senjuji 尊修寺, the head temple of the Takada-ha branch of Shinshū; the copies of the sūtras are classified as National Treasures and kept at the Honganji (Jssz 3).

<sup>75</sup> The original manuscript is kept at the Nison'in 二尊院 temple in Kyōto (Jssz 6, pp. 25-30).

authenticated by the master in the autumn of the same year, and on this solemn occasion Hōnen gave Shinran the name "Zenshin" 善信, replacing that of "Shakkū"<sup>76</sup>.

This new name was not unknown to Shinran, as it had been revealed to him two years earlier. Indeed, in the summer of 1203, he had seen in a dream the Bodhisattva Kannon of Rokkakudō appearing to him in the form of a monk dressed in white, the colour of the laity. This apparition addressed Shinran by giving him precisely this unusual name of "Zenshin", before declaring this stanza to him:

"Practitioner! If you have to fornicate with a woman as a reward from the past,  
I shall assume the body of a splendid woman, and you will fornicate with me.  
In all your life, I will be the ornament

And at your death, I will guide your birth in [the Pure Land] Ultimate-Happiness."<sup>77</sup>

The Bodhisattva Kannon is one of Amida's assistants in the Pure Land and can manifest himself in various ways. In Rokkakudō, the very chapel where Shinran had obtained the revelation that led him to Hōnen, this Bodhisattva is more especially venerated in the form known as Nyoirin-Kannon 如意輪觀音, that is, "Kannon with the wheel and gem that fulfils all desires". It is no chance event that the Bodhisattva of compassion should manifest himself to Shinran in this particular form: the stanza he recited to Shinran is found [p. 54] almost literally in a text from the collection of esoteric rituals compiled by the Shingon scholar Kakuzen 覺禪 (1143-1218?). One of these rituals is precisely intended to leads to the transformation of Nyoirin-Kannon into "a splendid woman" for the benefit of a practitioner who "burns with desire"<sup>78</sup>. When put into perspective alongside this ritual, the dream of 1203 thus appears as heralding the fact that, monk though he was, Shinran would marry. And if we take into account that the name "Zenshin" mentioned in this dream in 1203 was then conferred to Shinran by Hōnen in the autumn of 1205, and that he was still using the name "Shakkū" in the summer of the same year, we may deduce that Shinran married at some point between these two dates.

### c) Marriage

One thing at least for which Shinran is known in the West is his marriage, the event which is thought to indicate his having rejected monastic discipline. However, many tales and theories have accrued around this union. Historically, it is known that Shinran married a woman going by the Buddhist name "Eshinni" 惠信尼 (1182-1268?), with whom he had six children. It is also known that her father was Miyoshi Tamenori 三善爲教, a low-ranking civil servant formerly appointed Prefect of the province of Echigo by Kujō Kanezane, and it is therefore not impossible that she herself was in the service of this protector of Hōnen's.

<sup>76</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 118: “元久乙丑歳，蒙恩恕兮書選擇。同年初夏中旬第四日，選擇本願念佛集内題字，并南無阿彌陀佛往生之業念佛爲本，與釋綽空字，以空眞筆令書之。同日空之眞影申預奉圖畫。同二年閏七月下旬第九日，眞影銘以眞筆令書南無阿彌陀佛與若我成佛 (...) 往生之眞文。又依夢告改綽空字，同日以御筆令書名之字畢” (T. 83, pp. 642c-643a / Jssz 2, pp. 254-255).

<sup>77</sup> Kakunyo, *Godenshō*, vol. 1, ch. 3: “建仁三年 (癸亥) 四月五日之夜寅時，上人夢想の告げましましき。かの記にいはいく (...) 行者宿報設女犯，我成玉女身被犯，一生之間能莊嚴，臨終引導生極樂” (T. 83, p. 750c / Jssz 4, p. 77).

<sup>78</sup> *Kakuzenshō* 覺禪鈔, vol. 49: “本尊變王玉女事。若發邪見心，淫欲熾盛可墮落於世，如意輪我成王玉女，爲其人親妻妾共生愛。一期生間莊嚴以福貴，令造無辺善事，西方極樂浄土，令成佛道莫生疑” (T. 89 [Zuzō 4], 3022, pp. 480b11-15).

In accordance with the traditional rules of the symbolism used in names, it can also be deduced that she received the name Eshinni 惠信尼 ("Faith of Wisdom") at the time of her marriage to Shinran, as this contains the same character [p. 55] *shin* 信 ("faith") as Zenshin 善信 ("Good Faith"), the name used by Nyoirin-Kannon to address her future husband in Shinran's dream in 1203, and which was eventually granted to Shinran by Hōnen in 1205. The granting of this name is all the more significant that it suggests that the old master formally endorsed this remarkable union. We will return to the significance of this event, but we must note that this marriage changed Shinran's status: in practical terms, he became a *shami* 沙彌, an expression derived from the Sanskrit *śrāmaṇera* and designating in Japan an ordained cleric who had returned to the world while preserving the external appearances of a monk.

It should also be noted that Eshinni, probably raised in Kyōto, was a cultivated woman, as can be evidenced by copies of sūtras in her hand and, above all, about ten letters written to her younger daughter Kakushinni 覺信尼 (1224-1283?)<sup>79</sup>. This correspondence provides some important details about Shinran's life, and also offers a new perspective on the relationship between the spouses. It informs us that, after a dream, Eshinni herself secretly saw Shinran as an incarnation of Kannon. Given that since his dream in 1203, Shinran also identified his wife with the manifestation of this Bodhisattva, it is easy to imagine the atmosphere of profound spirituality in which this extraordinary couple was immersed, each seeing in the other an incarnation of the paragon of Compassion. This spiritual communion must have considerably helped the young couple face the dark clouds that were gathering around Hōnen and his disciples. [p. 56]

#### d) Sentencing

At the beginning of the winter of 1205, it was no longer Mount Hiei, but the Kōbukuji 興福寺 in Nara, the prestigious temple of the Fujiwara clan, which went on the offensive. The temple's patriarch Jōkei 貞慶 (1155-1213)<sup>80</sup>, petitioned the Throne, on behalf of the established Buddhist schools, requesting two drastic measures: a outright ban on the "Exclusive Nembutsu School" (*Senju nembutsu shū* 専修念佛宗) and the condemnation of Hōnen and his disciples. But the emperor's decree issued shortly afterwards merely replied that the master should not be held responsible for the excesses of some of his disciples, and that only the leaders should be condemned. Thus, in the spring of 1206, only two of Hōnen's disciples were subjected to a light sentence that simply branded them as criminals, thereby depriving them of their religious status. This lack of willingness of the authorities to intervene more rigorously is explained, in particular, by the fact that they did not want to interfere in an internal conflict among the Buddhist schools, as well as by the deep esteem in which Hōnen was held at the highest levels of power.

Nevertheless the situation changed drastically at the end of the same year, when Junsai 遵西 and his acolyte Jūren-bō 住蓮房 celebrated the ritual of the *Hymns of Praise for the Six Periods*, at a time when the retired emperor Go-Toba had left Kyōto for a pilgrimage through the provinces. The beauty of the liturgy led to the conversion of two ladies of the Court, one of which was Bōmon no tsubone 坊門局, the mother of Dōjo 道助, son of Go-

<sup>79</sup> Ohtani Yoshiko 大谷嬉子 (1918-2000) : *The Life of Eshinni, The Wife of Shinran Shonin* (td. Taitetsu and Alice Unno; Kyoto, 1970, 1990); Dobbins, James C.: *Letters of the Nun Eshinni* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

<sup>80</sup> Ford, James L.: *Jōkei and Buddhist Devotion in Early Medieval Japan* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2006).

Toba, an event which caused something of a scandal: part of the ceremony having taken place at night, rumours ran rife about the nature of the relationship [p. 57] between the two women and the two clerics. As soon as he returned to the capital, the retired emperor let out his anger. At the first moon of 1207, he banned the "community of the exclusive practice of nembutsu" and ordered the beheading of some of the disciples, including Junsai and Jūren-bō. This time, Hōnen's protectors were of no avail, and he himself was sentenced to "distant" exile (*onru* 遠流), the most serious punishment after the death penalty. The same sentence was also imposed on seven of his disciples, including Shinran. The exiles were defrocked and handed over to the civil authorities; the 75 year-old master was sent to Shikoku Island, while his disciples were scattered in other provinces, his protector Kanezane dying of grief two months later. Due to his age, however, Hōnen's sentence was quickly commuted to a simple ban of entering the capital. Shinran, on the other hand, would spend five years in exile in the remote province of Echigo, several hundred kilometres northeast of Kyōto.

## **B. Mature years in the provinces**

*After five years in exile, Shinran spent about twenty years in western Japan, where his teachings attracted much support in the countryside.*

### **1. The ordeal of exile**

The life that awaits an exile is never enviable, particularly in 13<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Because of the ostracism to which he would be subjected, the condemned person could only survive by ensuring his own subsistence. To this end, he was first [p. 58] given a ration of rice and salt; then, in the following spring, he received seeds to plant, but nothing thereafter. It seems however that Shinran experienced some relief during his sentence, which was carried out in Naoetsu 直江津, capital of the province of Echigo (now Jōetsu 上越, Niigata prefecture), more than 400 kilometres northeast of Kyoto. This was not one of the "distant" destinations of exile provided for by the law: to meet legal requirements, Shinran should have travelled much further, crossing over to the island of Sado. And it is probably no coincidence that his uncle Hino Munenari had been appointed vice-prefect of Echigo a few days before the conviction of Hōnen and his disciples. The convicts were entitled to be accompanied by a few relatives, and Shinran thus went into exile with his wife. It appears that Eshinni too had links with Echigo, as her father had been prefect there and his family owned land in the region; this may well have contributed to alleviating the harshness of their living conditions.

Nevertheless, exile was certainly a shock for Shinran. For the first time, at the age of thirty-five, this intellectual who had benefitted from the refined education of an offspring of the nobility, found himself in a particularly inhospitable region of Japan's northern coast, isolated by mountain ranges from the capital where he had been raised. And without necessarily endorsing the views of some Japanese Marxist historians, we can concur that his discovery of the conditions in which the peasants lived profoundly transformed his vision of human nature. Shinran's period in Echigo was also one in which he experienced the joys and worries of fatherhood. Although the dates of birth of his first two children are unknown, the third child was born at the beginning of the summer of 1211, a few months before he received an imperial amnesty. [p. 59]

### **2. A new start in life**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> moon of 1211, an amnesty was proclaimed for the exiles. Three days later, Hōnen was back in Kyōto, where he was hosted by Kanezane's brother Jien; he

died two months later, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> moon of 1212. It seems that Shinran had no opportunity to make the trip to Kyōto to see his master again or even to attend the funeral ceremonies, which were held weekly during the seven weeks following Hōnen's death.

In any case, he did not rush to relocate to Kyōto with his family. On the contrary, Shinran remained for two more years in his place of exile, and when he finally left it, it was not to return to the capital, but to go to the opposite side of the Kantō plain, to the vicinity of present-day Tōkyō. The care of his young children might have prevented him from returning immediately to Kyōto, especially given that, as a defrocked monk, he would have been unwelcome there. However, this is not sufficient to explain his decision to enjoy this newly-recovered freedom as starting a new life in another rural environment, further from the capital. The reason for this somewhat surprising choice may be that Shinran was simply faithfully respecting Hōnen's wishes: as early as 1198, the master had drawn up a will in which he instructed his disciples not to try to meet together after his death, for fear of succession disputes<sup>81</sup>. Shinran may also have thought it would be easier for him to rebuild his life by moving closer to Kamakura, the new shogunal capital. It was there, in this [p. 60] city, which was a booming commercial, cultural, and religious centre, that a new Japan was "moving", one which, moreover, was open to the glorious culture of the Chinese Song dynasty (960-1279).

In 1214, Shinran finally left Echigo with his family for Kantō, or more precisely, the province of Hitachi 常陸 (now Ibaraki pref.). Nevertheless halfway there, he goes through a new experience that would prove decisive for the rest of his life. During a stop in Sanuki 佐貫 (Gumma pref.), he began to recite no less than a thousand times the *Sūtras of the Pure Land Trilogy* "for the benefit of all beings". As one can imagine, the task is no easy one, as these three sūtras amount to some 26,609 Chinese characters; reciting them by a thousand times over is quite a performance! Perhaps Shinran had accomplished this kind of feat while he was chaplain on Mount Hiei, but the context has changed dramatically in the meantime. After a few days, he himself came to question the validity of this practice, when he suddenly recalled this passage from the *Hymns in Praise of Birth in the Pure Land of Shandao*:

"Having faith yourself and teaching faith to others is always the most difficult of difficulties! But to teach everywhere by transmitting great compassion is really to recognize the benevolence of the Buddha!"<sup>82</sup>

This led Shinran to think:

"If I am convinced that the true tribute to the benevolence of the Buddha is to have faith myself and to teach others to have faith, what do I lack beside his name (*myōgō* 名號) so that I must absolutely read the sūtras? Having thought in [p. 61] this way, I stopped reading them."<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Shinran's *Saihō shinanshō* (see bibliography), vol. 2b: “右葬家之次第，頗有其採旨。有籠居之志遺弟同法等，全不可群會一所者也。其故何者，雖復似和合，集則起鬪諍。此言誠哉，甚可謹慎。若然者，我同法等，於我沒後，各住各居，不如不會。鬪諍基由，集會之故也。羨我弟子同法等，各閑住本在之草菴，苦可祈我新生之蓮臺。努努群居一所，莫致諍論起忿怨。有知恩志之人，毫末不可違者也” (T. 83, p. 875c / Jssz 3, p. 958). Also in Ryōe's *Kurodani Shōnin kangotōroku* 黒谷上人漢語燈録, vol. 10 (T. 83, p. 167a / Jssz 6, p. 257).

<sup>82</sup> Shandao, *Ōjō raisange* (see bibliography): “自信教人信，難中轉更難，大悲伝普化，眞成報佛恩” (T. 47, p. 442a / Jssz 1, p. 928).

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Eshinni's letter 5 (dated 1263): “みづから信じ，人を教へて信ぜしむること，まことの佛恩を報ひたてまつるものと信じながら，名號のほかにはなにごとの不足にて，かならず經をよまんとするやと，思ひかへしてよまざりしことの” (Jssz 2, p. 1036).

For Shinran, this was a revelation: he would now devote the rest of his life to spreading the teachings of the Pure Land, with this quote from Shandao as his motto. And it was also around this time that he adopted the name "Shinran" 親鸞 by which he would be known to posterity, at the same time giving himself the nickname "Gutoku" 愚秃, that is, "Bald the Imbecile". This name, according to his own words, was meant to express the new condition that had been his since his exile. Indeed, at the time of his ordination, he had lost his secular condition; but at the time of his conviction, he had also lost his clerical condition (*sōgi* 僧儀), so that he now considered himself "neither cleric nor layman" (*hisō hizoku* 非僧非俗), and this new awareness would mark his teaching in a very unique way<sup>84</sup>.

### 3. Preaching in the countryside

For nearly twenty years, Shinran preached in Kantō, residing mainly in the village of Inada 稲田, in Hitachi province (now Kasama 笠間, Ibaraki pref.), about 160 kilometres northeast of Kamakura. All we know about this period is that he attracted many followers. However, like Hōnen, Shinran neither founded a temple nor established a Jōdo-Shinshū "order". Instead of remaining at his side, those who adhered to his teachings returned to their villages of origin, where many communities of followers were formed, including clerics as well as lay people, peasants and low rural administrators. This [p. 62] is evidenced by Shinran's subsequent correspondence and by contemporary lists of his followers<sup>85</sup>.

These sources mention roughly eighty names in all, but these were only his direct disciples. As most of them passed on his teachings to their own followers, by a snowball effect the final count of Shinran's followers must finally have come to several tens of thousands of faithful, gathered in local congregations. One of the most important of these communities was that of Shimbutsu 眞佛 (1209-1258) and of his son-in-law Kenchi 顯智 (1226-1310) from Takada 高田 (Tochigi pref.), the fountainhead of the communities of Araki 荒木 (Saitama pref.), Asaka 安積 (Fukushima pref.) and Wada 和田 (Aichi pref.). This also occurs with many other communities, such as the one from Shōshin 性信 (1187-1275) in Yokosone 横曾根, or the one from Shinkai 信海 in Kashima 鹿嶋, both in Hitachi province.

The list would be long, but we need simply point out that these groups were very informal. In the absence of regular temples, the groups gathered in the *dōjō* 道場, or "places of the way", small buildings or simple private residences transformed into chapels. They would meet on the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month, the date commemorating Hōnen's death, and these meetings consisted mainly of nembutsu recitation, probably accompanied by the reading of sūtras and a sermon. As an object of worship (*gohonzon* 御本尊), they hung vertical scrolls on which the nembutsu formula was written in Chinese characters. This was obviously more economical than displaying the Buddha's image - either as a painting or a statue - and, in addition, the calligraphy could be written by the master himself, so that the transmission of the teaching was made tangible. Thus it is understandable that the few scrolls written by Shinran [p. 63] that have survived over the centuries are still preserved as particularly precious relics.

<sup>84</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 117: “或改僧儀賜姓名處遠流, 予其一也。爾者已非僧非俗, 是故以秃字爲姓” (T. 83, p. 642c / Jssz 2, p. 254).

<sup>85</sup> Three lists (*kyōmyō* 交名) are still preserved (Jssz 6, pp. 831-869)

## C. Old age in Kyōto

### 1. Retirement in the capital

At some undetermined point in the 1230s, Shinran returned to his hometown. Again, there is much discussion over the exact date, but two moments in particular may have motivated this return. The first was the year 1234 which marked the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Hōnen's death, an important date in the calendar of funerary Buddhist liturgy; and it is known that Shinran, on his return to Kyōto, invited religious experts in plainsong to celebrate the *Hymns in Praise of Birth in the Pure Land* of Shandao in memory of his master. His return to the capital was also an opportunity for him to meet his former surviving fellow disciples, such as Seikaku 聖覺 (1167-1235). An intimate friend of Hōnen and a Tendai cleric, he too was a father, but above all he was the author of the *Notes on Faith Alone* (*Yuishinshō* 唯信鈔), a simple and methodical introduction to Hōnen's teachings that Shinran much admired. Since the latter had made of copy of it from the original manuscript as early as 1230, we can deduce that the two companions had already reconnected by that date. Moreover, Seikaku was the brilliant representative of a tradition of Buddhist preaching specialists founded by his father Chōken 澄憲 (1126-1203), like him a Tendai cleric, and his eloquence had earned him the trust of the highest members of the imperial court, as well as of the new shōgunal oligarchy. In particular, Seikaku was invited to Kamakura in 1227 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of [p. 64] Masako 政子 (1156-1225), the powerful widow of the first Minamoto shōgun, and it cannot therefore be ruled out that he may have met Shinran again during this trip. If this was the case, the two men would certainly have discussed recent events in Kyōto: in the same year, the Mount Hiei community had relaunched hostilities against Hōnen's disciples, going so far as to destroy his grave and obtaining the exile of some of his important disciples, including Ryūkan 隆寬 (1148-1227), who died a few months later - all events that could not leave Shinran unmoved.

The second major date that awaited Shinran was the year 1233 when he would reach the age of 61. This anniversary was of particular symbolic importance. Since the Far East uses the Chinese calendar based on a sexagesimal cycle that combines twelve animals with five elements, an individual's 61<sup>st</sup> year is the only opportunity where he can hope to encounter once again during his lifetime the same astrological configuration as that of the year of his birth. Born in 1173, Shinran was from the year of the water-junior snake (*mizunoto mi* 癸巳), a combination that would reappear only in 1233. For him, this date marked his retirement. Moreover, he could consider that his preaching efforts in Kantō had been successful, and that enough time had elapsed since his exile for him to return to the capital. Besides, he was probably not insensitive to the prospect of seeing family members again, such as his brothers Jin'u 尋有 and Ken'u 兼有, or his cousin Hino Nobutsuna 日野信綱 and his son Hino Hirotuna 日野廣綱, who would all become his followers in Kyōto.

Finally, most of the six children Shinran had had with Eshinni, three boys and three girls, had grown up and were able to make their own way in life when they returned to Kyōto. However, times were difficult. The famines of 1230-1231 struck the capital itself, which also suffered from a great [p. 65] earthquake in 1245, as well as a terrible fire the following year. Shinran's wife had to retire to her family's lands in Echigo with four of their children, while the eldest son and the youngest daughter remained in Kyōto with their father. It is easy to imagine that he had a particular affection for the latter girl, Kakushinni 覺信尼, born late in 1224. It may also be assumed that Shinran had high hopes for his eldest son Zenran 善鸞, as evidenced by his name, which combines characters from his

father's two names, "Zenshin" 善信 and "Shinran" 親鸞. Indeed, when doctrinal deviations appeared in the provincial community in Kantō, Shinran sent his son there to bring back order. But, in a final ordeal, he learned that Zenran himself was distorting his teachings and abusing his status as eldest son, and eventually in 1256 he had to disinherit him.

In the capital, Shinran led a discreet and frugal life. Unlike Hōnen, we don't know of any will by which he would have left some property after his death. In fact, he lived thanks to the subsidies provided by the followers of the provinces, whom he thanks in his correspondence, his only luxury being to obtain paper to be able to write again and again. Not concerned about founding a temple, he knew different homes, but after one of them had burned, he definitively squatted the Zempōin 善法院, a Tendai temple whose prior was none other than his brother Jin'u. Finally, Shinran not only did not stop writing during this period, while receiving the disciples who came to him from the distant provinces, he also exercised the art of being a grandfather. For Zenran had had a son, Nyoshin 如信 (1235-1300), who grew up with Shinran and received his oral instruction. In addition, Kakushinni, placed in the service of aristocrats, married his cousin Hino Hirotsuna, the union from which Kakue 覺惠 (1239-1307) was born. Having become the disciple of his great uncle Jin'u at the Zempōin, Kakue began by successfully following the Tendai curriculum [p. 66] in the prestigious temple Shōren'in 青蓮院<sup>86</sup>. But after his grandfather Shinran's death, he became Nyoshin's disciple and the guardian of Shinran's grave.

## 2. Thirty years of literary production

The sheer size of Shinran's literary production during these years is astounding. It represents hundreds pages typed in English<sup>87</sup>, and a large part of it was composed when he was over eighty years old (see the list of titles in the bibliography). At the centre of this production is his *Kyōgyōshinshō*, which is the cornerstone of his doctrine and the act marking the founding of his school. This work, of which the first draft appears to have been completed in 1234, is a voluminous anthology. The nine-tenths of it consist of some 376 quotations from 63 varied sources, from the Buddha Śākyamuni's sermons translated in China in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to works composed by Chinese and Japanese masters during Shinran's lifetime. Nevertheless, this anthology is not a mere compilation but very much his own creation. Its originality is revealed in the skillful sequence of quotations, which Shinran reappropriates by punctuating them with personal comments. In this respect, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* constitutes a record of his spiritual journey leading to his redefinition of the doctrine of the Pure Land, the novelty of which he justified by traditional canonical sources.

This *magnum opus* also marks the doctrinal independence of Jōdo-Shinshū because it includes a double refutation. On the one hand, without naming them, Shinran responds to the most important detractors of Hōnen, such as Myōe 明惠 [p. 67] (1173-1232), the famous scholar of the Kegon School<sup>88</sup>, who, in 1212, had criticized the *Senjakushū* in his treatise *The Wheel which Crushes Errors* (*Zaijarin* 摧邪輪). Secondly, Shinran rejects the idealistic interpretation of the Pure Land that was then spreading in Japan, particularly in the wake of the travels of Shunjō 俊苒 to China (*infra* p. 46). The *Kyōgyōshinshō* also

<sup>86</sup> For details about the ties of Shinran, Jin'u and Kakue with Tendai, see my article "The Beginning of Jōdo-Shinshū and the Tendai School of Japanese Buddhism", in *The Pure Land*, N.S., No. 6 (1989), pp. 178-184.

<sup>87</sup> *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 2 vols (Kyoto, Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 1997).

<sup>88</sup> Girard, Frédéric: *Un moine de la secte Kegon à l'époque de Kamakura, Myōe* (Paris, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1990); Tanabe, George J., Jr.: *Myōe the Dreamkeeper* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992).



contains an original composition by Shinran, the *Poem of True Faith's Nembutsu* (*Shōshin-nembutsu-ge* 正信念佛偈), a summary of his teaching that is still recited daily in Jōdo-Shinshū temples and homes.

Entirely written in Chinese, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* addressed itself to the literate elite, though Shinran was also concerned about providing his provincial followers with more accessible texts written in Japanese. To do so he first copied works from his fellow disciples, such as Seikaku's *Notes on Faith Alone*, or compositions by Ryūkan. Similarly, he also composed his own *Hymns in Japanese* (*wasan* 和讃), almost 550 verses in all. Lovers of Japanese haiku-style poetry will probably be disappointed in reading these, however, as they are not works for light enjoyment, but didactic poetry, consisting in good part of an almost literal Japanese adaptation of the Chinese scriptures on which Shinran based himself.

Another part of his work includes short treatises in Chinese, as well as subtle explanations in Japanese of extracts from Chinese Buddhist texts quoted in the works of Seikaku and Ryūkan. These are not so much analytical comments, however, as digressions, in which the text commented on is mainly a pretext for Shinran's own personal developments. It should also be noted that the latter concludes his comments on the texts of Seikaku and Ryūkan by justifying his choice of the use [p. 68] of Japanese vernacular - rather than classical Chinese - by his aim of addressing "people in the countryside", concluding:

"Educated people will find this ridiculous and make fun of it. Nevertheless, without caring about the criticisms of the majority, I write only to assist the understanding of the ignorant."<sup>89</sup>

It should also be noted that Shinran's works do not include any full commentary on the great founding scriptures of the Pure Land. He probably considered that this enterprise had already been accomplished by Hōnen. Indeed, the founder of Jōdoshū had commented on the *Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras* during conferences of which transcriptions had been preserved, and these were included by Shinran in his *Compass for the Pure Land in the West* (*Saihō shinanshō* 西方指南抄), a vast compilation of texts and documents relating to his master.

Finally, Shinran's correspondence with his main followers, which represents some forty preserved letters, also provides an original insight into the life of the provincial communities and into his teachings. His answers to questions submitted by his correspondents, for example, give him with a chance to explain himself on subjects that are not much developed in his doctrinal treatises, and, in particular, on the ethics of nembutsu practitioners.

These hymns, treatises, and commentaries as well as the correspondence constitute distinct literary genres that present Shinran's doctrine in as many different facets, thus allowing a nuanced approach to his thinking. However, despite its breadth, one aspect is missing from this: Shinran's oral teachings. The [p. 69] latter kept him busy him for the second half of his life, both in Kantō and in Kyōto, where his followers went to see him. An important part of his thought would be entirely absent where it not for a major document, the now famous *Tannishō* 歎異抄 (*Notes Deploring Divergences*), a posthumous collection of his spoken word compiled by an anonymous follower from the

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<sup>89</sup> Shinran's conclusion to *Ichinen-tannen mon'i* and *Yuishinshō mon'i* (see bibliography): “こころあらんひとはをかしくおもふべし、あざけりをなすべし。しかれども、おほかたのそしりをかへりみず、ひとすぢに愚かなるものをこころえやすからんとてしるせるなり” (T. 83, pp. 699a, 704c / Jssz 2, pp. 678, 716-717).

provinces who once visited Kyōto<sup>90</sup>. Written in a simple and direct style, though not without using paradoxes, this booklet offers original answers to delicate questions, including those surrounding good and evil.

In conclusion to this overview of Shinran's works, it must be remembered that they are a testimony to the remarkable vigour of spirit shown by this elderly man who had lived such an eventful life. It should also be noted that in view of their diversity and size, an understanding of his thought requires a good dose of patience and circumspection if one wishes to discover both their unity and freshness.

### 3. Death and posterity

Having reached the canonical age of 90, Shinran died at the Zempōin temple, surrounded by some of his children and followers, on a day corresponding to January 16, 1263 in our calendar. It is with remarkable sobriety that his first biographer describes the end of his life:

“From the third ten-day period of 11<sup>th</sup> moon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year (water-senior dog) of Kōchō, His Holiness showed signs of a slight indisposition. From then on, his mouth no longer [p. 70] touched on any secular subject, and he only spoke of the benevolence of the Buddha. His voice did not utter any further words that would have interrupted his exclusive pronunciation of the name [of the Buddha Amida]. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the same ten-day period (horse hour), he lay on his right side, head to the north and facing west, and eventually expired in a last breath of nembutsu. He was 90 years old at the time.”<sup>91</sup>

Apart from the fact that Shinran died lying in the same position as the Buddha did when entering nirvāṇa, and that he faced the direction of the Pure Land, his death was not accompanied by any particular preparation, contrary to traditional custom. For in Buddhism, care is always taken to ensure that the dying person remains in the best possible frame of mind, as the last thought at the moment of death is usually said to determine the following birth. This was all the more true of the Pure Land tradition as it had developed in Japan from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. According to this tradition, an image was placed before the dying person representing the Buddha Amida coming down to welcome him (*raigō* 來迎), alongside a procession of Bodhisattvas. Care was also taken to record the visions which the dying person might have of the arrival of this procession, considered a guarantee of the success of his practice of nembutsu. This ritual was still respected at the time of Hōnen's death, as detailed in the *Compass for the Pure Land in the West* compiled by Shinran<sup>92</sup>. But nothing of the [p. 71] sort was organized for the latter, because, according to him, the rite of the Buddha's welcome is useless since birth in the Pure Land

<sup>90</sup> Authorship is now generally attributed to Yuien-bō 唯圓房; see my article: “Le *Tanni-shō* et la querelle de l'ère Jōō” (*Bukkyō-bunka-kenkyūsho kiyō*, 39; Kyōto, Ryūkoku University, Nov. 2000, p. 1-9.). Td. Fujiwara, Ryōsetsu 藤原凌雪: *The Tannishō* (Ryukoku Translation Series, II; Kyoto, 1962); Hirota, Dennis: *Tannishō, A Primer* (Kyoto, Ryukoku University, 1982); Fujimoto, Ryūkyō 藤本龍暁: *Shin Buddhism's Essence, The Tannishō* (Los Angeles, 1993), Ducor, Jérôme: *Le Tannishō* (Paris, Cerf, 2011); etc.

<sup>91</sup> Kakunyo, *Godenshō*, vol. 2, ch. 6: “聖人弘長二歳 (壬戌) 仲冬下旬の候より、いささか不例の気まします。それよりこのかた、口に世事をまじへず、ただ佛恩のふかきことをのぶ。聲に餘言をあらはさず、もつぱら稱名たゆることなし。しかうしておなじき第八日 (午時) 頭北面西右脇に臥したまひて、つひに念佛の息たえをはりぬ。ときに頹齡九旬にみちたまふ” (T. 83, pp. 754c-755a / Jssz 4, p. 103)

<sup>92</sup> Shinran's *Saihō shinanshō*, vol. 2a: *Hōnen Shōnin rinjū gyōgi* 法然聖人臨終行儀 (T. 83, pp. 869b-871a / Jssz 3, pp. 937-943).

is definitively ensured by faith alone, whatever the moment at which it arises during the course of one's existence. For the same reason, Shinran had not bothered with rituals for his funeral and had simply asked that his body be thrown into the Kamo River which flows through Kyōto, "in order to feed the fish"<sup>93</sup>. However, he was cremated by his disciples, and his ashes placed in Ōtani 大谷, not far from Hōnen's tomb, itself located within the precincts of the present Chion'in temple 知恩院.

Ten years later, in 1272, Shinran's tomb was transferred further west to land that his daughter Kakushinni had inherited from her second husband, Zennenbō 善念房 (?-1275), on the site of the present Sōtaiin temple 崇泰院. A chapel containing the statue of the Jōdo-Shinshū founder was built on the new tomb, and his followers gathered there every year to commemorate his death during a week-long liturgy (*Hōonkō* 報恩講), as they still do today. In a most original manner, in 1277, Kakushinni bequeathed the land to the community of provincial followers, on condition that they retain her children as guardians of the mausoleum.

Finally, at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the mausoleum was erected as a temple under the name "Honganji" 本願寺 with the descendants of Kakue as abbots, thus inaugurating a unique hereditary lineage in the history of Buddhism. Kakue's son, Kakunyo 覺如 (1270-1351), became Shinran's first biographer and left several texts based on the latter's oral teachings transmitted to him by Shinran's grandson Nyoshin 如信, while his own son Zonkaku 存覺 (1290-1373) composed [p. 72] several important doctrinal texts, including a first, voluminous, commentary of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*<sup>94</sup>. The contributions of these different masters attest to the fact that Shinran's teachings did not stand still with his death but continued to flourish after him. In the following century, the Hōganji asserted its hegemony over the provincial communities through the efforts of its 8<sup>th</sup> Patriarch, Rennyo 蓮如 (1415-1499), Shinran's most famous successor, who popularized his teaching through hundreds of Letters (*Ofumi* お文) addressed to provincial followers, and compiled in the *Gobunshō* 御文章<sup>95</sup>. The division of the Hōganji into two branches at the very beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century did not prevent Jōdo-Shinshū from becoming one of the largest Buddhist schools in Japan, a phenomenon that may also be explained by the government obligation imposed on each family to register with a Buddhist temple (*teraue* 寺請).

During the Edo period, with the intense development of academic studies in Japan, new scholastic studies (*shūgaku* 宗學) developed within Jōdo-Shinshū which consist in a systematic deepening of the doctrine through the cross study of Shinran's works with the sūtras and commentaries of Indian, Chinese and Japanese masters. Sometimes this method was taken to such a degree of sophistication that its literature - both technical and vast - is on the verge of giving an overly artificial image of Shinran's teaching.

<sup>93</sup> Shinran quoted in Kakunyo's *Gaijashō*, ch. 16: “某 (親鸞) 閉眼せば、賀茂河にいでて魚にあたふべし” (Jssz 4, p. 318).

<sup>94</sup> Ducor, Jérôme: *La vie de Zonkaku* (Paris, Collège de France / Maisonneuve & Larose, 1993).

<sup>95</sup> Collection of 80 letters (see bibliography). Td. Rogers, Minor Lee & Rogers, Ann T.: *Rennyo* (Berkeley, Asian Humanities Press, 1991); *id.*: *Rennyo Shōnin Ofumi* (BDK English Tripitaka, 106-1; Berkeley, Numata Center, 1996); Nagao, Gadjin M. 長尾雅人 (Gen. Ed.): *Letters of Rennyo* (Kyoto, Hongwanji International Center, 2000); Ōtani, Chōjun 大谷暢順: *Les problèmes de la foi et de la pratique chez Rennyo à travers ses lettres* (Paris, Collège de France, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1991); Satō, Kemmyō Taira 佐藤顕明平: *Living With Thanks, The Gojō Ofumi* (London, The Buddhist Society, 2018); Kakehashi Jitsuen 梯實圓: *Bearer of the Light, The Life and Thought of Rennyo* (Los Angeles, Pure Land Publications, 1999).

This was taken to such an extent that scholastic studies [p. 73] were eliminated from the Ōtani-ha branch in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when its students discovered Western ideologies and sciences. To understand the shock which these new ideas represented for some of them, it should be remembered that the very words "philosophy" and "religion" had been unknown until then in Japan and were only created in Japanese in 1864 (*tetsugaku* 哲学) and 1869 (*shūkyō* 宗教). The former seminary of the Ōtani-ha had in any case become an independent institution under the Japanese University Law of 1922, and took the name of "Ōtani University" (Ōtani Daigaku 大谷大學), while developing its own curriculum of "Shinshūology" (*Shinshūgaku* 眞宗學) within the Faculty of Letters. The same thing happened in the Honganji-ha branch, though there the situation was less dramatic. Its college, which had been founded in 1639, also became independent in 1922 under the name "Ryūkoku University" (Ryūkoku Daigaku 龍谷大學), with its own program of Shinshū studies. Nevertheless, scholasticism did not completely disappear, for the Honganji-ha created in 1925 its own "Scholastic Institute" (Shūgakuin 宗學院) to preserve and develop the achievements of this rich tradition.

In a very different vein are the testimonies of a diametrically opposed nature coming from the "wonderful people" (*myōkonin* 妙好人). They were mostly illiterate people of low social status who became known for the spontaneity with which they expressed the depth of their faith in Amida, during disconcerting, even burlesque episodes, which began to be collected in writing at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not surprisingly, these edifying anecdotes are, along with *Tannishō*, one of the sources that "speak" most to the Western mind today.

The advent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century liberalized classical studies through a return to the original sources, with a reassessment [p. 74] of Shinran's historical role. His thought aroused the interest of Japan's first modern philosophers, including Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870-1945). The rediscovery of Shinran by the Japanese public came about through the unexpected channel of a play, by Kurata Hyakuzō 倉田百三 (1891-1943) published in 1917, entitled *Shukke to sono deshi* 出家とその弟子, which was freely inspired by the *Tannishō*<sup>96</sup>. This dramatic work was a great success that reflected on Shinran himself, who was then recognized in Japan as one of the great Buddhist masters. [p. 75]

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<sup>96</sup> Translated by Glenn W. Shaw: "*The priest and his disciples*" (Tōkyō 1922).

## Chapter 2. The True Doctrine of the Pure Land

*"According to all main Scriptures that show the true doctrine of the Other Power, if we say the nembutsu by having faith in the Primal Vow, we become Buddha."<sup>97</sup>*

### A. The teachings of Hōnen and Shinran

By founding the Pure Land School (Jōdoshū), Hōnen declared he wanted to grant independence to Shandao's teachings, the Chinese master whose work he had rediscovered in Japan. Similarly, Shinran always claimed to follow Hōnen's doctrine, though he brought such original developments to it that his own teachings stood out as a doctrine in their own right, which he himself called "True Pure Land School" (Jōdo-Shinshū). The originality of Shinran's interpretation lies in his own rediscovery of the teachings of Tanluan, a forerunner of Shandao, as well as his re-reading of the earlier tradition in the [p. 76] light of his personal experience. To appreciate the specificity of Shinran's teachings, it is therefore necessary to present them as a continuation of those of his master Hōnen.

In analyzing Shandao's doctrine, Hōnen retained the following three fundamental points, which Shinran also inherited:

- i) birth in the Pure Land of Amida is an achievement of a high order, because it is a land of "retribution", as we shall see later;
- ii) ordinary beings, who do not master the methods leading to sanctity, can nevertheless be born there at the moment of death;
- iii) to this end, therefore, a means is needed that, to be effective, must combine two apparently contradictory qualities: excellence *and* ease. The solution lies in the sole practice of vocal nembutsu, the pronunciation of the name of the Buddha Amida, *easy* to practice and *excellent*, based on the merits of this Buddha synthesized in his name, in accordance with his vows.

### 1. The nature of the Buddha Amida and his Pure Land

The doctrine of the Shandao tradition, as well as that of Shinran, can not be fully appreciated without a precise idea of its interpretation of the nature of the Buddha Amida. It is from this interpretation that the practice and the very purpose of this spiritual path take on their true meaning, and are distinguished from other Chinese Pure Land traditions. This therefore deserves some attention, even though the subject is quite complex.

According to most schools of the Greater Vehicle, all Buddhas share the same realization and are provided with *three bodies*. [p. 77] These are the elementary body (*dharmakāya*), the body of retribution (*sambhogakāya*) and the body of transformation (*nirmāṇakāya*). These represent the various facets of the Buddhas' Awakening (*bodhi*), radiating within the boundaries of their corresponding Buddha-field. To understand what this is all about, we will follow Daochuo's comments here from his *Collection on the Land Peaceful-Happiness*<sup>98</sup>:

<sup>97</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 12: “他力眞實のむねをあかせるもろもろの正教は、本願を信じ念佛を申さば佛に成る” (T. 83, p. 730b / Jssz 2, p. 1061).

<sup>98</sup> Daochuo, *Anrakushū*, vol. 1, ch. 2-2 (T. 47, p. 7b / Jssz 1, p. 587).

a) According to Daochuo, the elementary body is "the essence of the Buddha Awakening" (*butsudō taihon* 佛道體本). As such, it is fused with the ultimate reality according to the Greater Vehicle, that is, the elementary nature (*dharmatā*), or suchness (*tathātā*), the latter term meaning that according to absolute truth, things are such as they are, no more and no less, void of self-existence. It is perfectly indescribable for an unawakened person and only Buddhas, by definition, perceive it.

b) Daochuo then speaks of the body of retribution as the "non-obstruction of full communication" (*enzū muge* 圓通無礙). Having obtained Awakening in retribution of their Bodhisattva practice, the Buddhas no longer have any obstacles between these two apparently opposite planes, namely, rebirths within the cycle of births and deaths (*saṃsāra*) and the extinction of these rebirths (*nirvāṇa*). As already stated in Tanluan's *Commentary*:

"Non-obstruction means to know that *saṃsāra* is nothing other than *nirvāṇa*."<sup>99</sup>

Paraphrasing today's computer vocabulary, one could therefore say that a Pure Land belonging to the body of retribution functions somewhat like an interface between absolute reality (*paramārtha-satya*) and relative reality [p. 78] (*saṃvṛti-satya*), those two essential notions of the Greater Vehicle. Under the aspect of the body of retribution, a Buddha and his Pure Land can be seen by a Bodhisattva who has reached the 8<sup>th</sup> of the ten stages of his path.

c) Finally, according to Daochuo, the body of transformation is "full communication for the benefit of beings" (*yakumotsu enzū* 益物圓通). Thanks to the perfect mastery of the powers conferred on them by their Awakening, Buddhas manifest themselves through different bodies of transformation or adaptation within the cycle of births and deaths, to establish affinities with beings and guide them towards deliverance. The Buddha Śākyamuni himself is thus considered as a body of transformation of the Buddha Amida.

Amida and his Pure Land are more specifically defined by Daochuo, Shandao and their successors as a Buddha and his land of *retribution*. Indeed, they both result from a cause which is Amida's vows and practice on the Bodhisattva path, as reported in the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*. The Pure Land of Amida therefore participates directly in the nature of his perfect Awakening. In the expression used by Vasubandhu in his *Treatise on the Pure Land*, it "surpasses in excellence the destinies within the Triple world"<sup>100</sup>. It can not therefore be a simple land of transformation in the cycle of births and deaths. And it is this very transcendence that is indicated by the sūtras when they evoke the distance separating our world from the domain of Amida, located "elsewhere" (*tahō* 他方), "beyond ten billion other Buddha lands"<sup>101</sup>, while urging the [p. 79] practitioner not simply to be born there, but to go (*ō* 往) to be born (*jō* 生) there (*ōjō*).

In the same vein, Shandao categorically rejects the idealistic interpretations conveyed notably by the Chan (Zen) tradition, according to which the Pure Land is only to be found in the practitioner's own mind and nothing more (*yuishin jōdo* 唯心淨土)<sup>102</sup>:

<sup>99</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 2, § 125: “無礙者，謂知生死即是涅槃” (T. 40, p. 843c / Jssz 1, p. 527).

<sup>100</sup> “Triple world” is a synonym for our world Sahā. Vasubandhu, *Jōdoron*, stanza 3: “勝過三界道” (T. 26, p. 230c / Jssz 1, p. 433).

<sup>101</sup> *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, vol. 1, § 10: “十萬億刹”; *Sūtra of Amida*: “十萬億佛土” (T. 12, pp. 270a, 346c / Jssz 1, pp. 32, 105).

<sup>102</sup> More details in my "Some remarks on Amida and his Pure Land" in *Kagaku jidai ni okeru ningen to shūkyō* 科学時代における人間と宗教 / *Humanity and Religion in an Age of Science* (武田龍精博士退職記念論集, Festschrift Prof. Takeda Ryūsei; Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 2010), pp. 217-231.

“Do not believe others who say: ‘If only we make our minds pure, our world here is purified in its entirety’. - For if they mean that our world here is the same as the Buddhas’ realms, why are we all born and do we all die in the six destinies?”<sup>103</sup>.

Shandao was not the only one to criticise the idealistic interpretation. Huiji, founder of the so-called Cimin tradition of the Pure Land (*sup.* p. 17), also did so:

“There is a category of monk and of lay person, both men and women, who has absolutely no faith in the existence of the Pure Land over there: ‘If only we make our mind pure, it is right here. Where else would you find the Pure Land of the West?’ - What a karmic fault! They have no faith in the Holy Scriptures! Or did the World-Honoured-One Buddha preach lies?”<sup>104</sup>.

Shandao's comments are more detailed however:

“There are also practitioners who take the meaning of this explicit method [of the *Sūtra of Contemplations*] and make [p. 80] it a contemplation of the elementary body of consciousness-only (*yuishiki hosshin* 唯識法身), or a contemplation of the pure Buddha nature of one’s own nature (*jishō shōjō busshō* 自性清淨佛性). Such interpretations are extremely wrong. They have absolutely no semblance of likelihood !”<sup>105</sup>

According to Shandao, a contemplation of Amida under the aspect of the elementary body (*dharmakāya*) is abstract, since based on the absence of characteristics, and ordinary beings would be perfectly incapable of achieving it, "like a man without magic sciences who would like to build a house in the sky". Moreover, he admits that the characteristics of the Pure Land, with its ornaments as described in the sūtras, are only conventions, beginning with its location in the west of our universe: while the Buddhas “manifest their reflection without being bound to any direction” (影現無方), the Western direction is a symbol of the afterlife, by analogy with the sun which "is born in the east and dies in the west". However, Shandao says, “assigning a direction and establishing characteristics” (*shihō rissō* 指方立相) are essential to preserving the Pure Land's soteriological efficiency, because ordinary beings need precise indications to fix their minds<sup>106</sup>. And yet, Shandao concludes, ordinary beings' minds prove incapable even of contemplation based on such characteristics, and it is for this very reason that instead of a contemplative nembutsu, with or without characteristics, the Buddha has provided them with the easy method of the verbal nembutsu.

Hōnen too clearly dismisses the idealistic interpretation of the Pure Land, which he links to esotericism, or Tantrism [p. 81] (*mikkyō* 密教):

<sup>103</sup> Shandao, *Hanjusan*: “不得信受他人語，但令心淨此皆淨。若道此同諸佛國，何因六道同生死” (T. 47, p. 452b / Jssz 1, p. 988).

<sup>104</sup> Huiji, *Ōjō-jōdoshū* (Ch. *Wangsheng-jingtuji*) 往生淨土集 (*Collection on the Birth in the Pure Land*): “或有一類男女道俗，於彼淨土，都不信有。但令心淨，此間即是。何處別有西方淨土。奇哉罪業，不信聖教。豈佛世尊虛妄說耶” (T. 85, 2826, pp. 1241b).

<sup>105</sup> Shandao, *Kangyōsho*, vol. 3: “或有行者，將此一門之義作唯識法身之觀，或作自性清淨佛性觀者，其意甚錯，絕無少分相似也” (T. 37, p. 267b / Jssz 1, p. 745).

<sup>106</sup> Shandao, *Kangyōsho*, vol. 3: “此觀門等唯指方立相，住心而取境。總不明無相離念也。如來懸知末代罪濁凡夫，立相住心尚不能得。何況離相而求事者，如似無術通人居空立舍也” (T. 37, p. 267b / Jssz 1, p. 745).

“According to Shingon teaching, Amida is the *tathāgata*<sup>107</sup> in our own mind (*koshin nyorai* 己心如來) and one should not seek him outside of it. According to our Pure [Land] teaching, the Buddha Amida is the Bhikṣu (monk) Dharmākara who became Buddha in accomplishment of the vows he had produced and he dwells in the western direction. This is a big difference in meaning.”<sup>108</sup>

No wonder that Shinran, as the faithful heir of both Shandao and Hōnen, himself denounces this idealistic or immanentist interpretation:

“Monks and laity [in the age] of the vanishing [of the Law] as well as masters of recent times drown themselves in [the idea of the Pure Land as] our own nature and mind only (*jishō yuishin* 自性唯心) and they belittle the true realization of the Pure Land.”<sup>109</sup>

Shinran does not specify who these "masters of recent times" are, but it is tempting to see here an allusion to his contemporary Shunjō 俊苧 (1166-1227) of the Sennyūji 泉涌寺 and his disciples. Following a twelve years stay in China, Shunjō had just transmitted to Japan the Pure Land teachings of Lingzhi Yuanzhao 靈芝元照 (1048-1116) whose idealistic interpretation was most explicit in his *Commentary on the [p. 82] Contemplations Sūtra*:

"This Pure Land is my own mind (*ga jishin* 我自心): it is not elsewhere (*hi tahō* 非他方). This 'Mida is my own nature (*ga jishō* 我自性): it is not a Buddha from elsewhere (*hi tabutsu* 非他佛)"<sup>110</sup>.

The Pure Land tradition of Yuanzhao, however, was not able to establish itself in Japan as an independent school in the face of the one founded by Hōnen<sup>111</sup>.

Shinran takes up Shandao's argument as transmitted by Hōnen: the Pure Land of Amida is indeed a land of retribution resulting from his vows when he was the Bodhisattva Dharmākara. However, for the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū, this is only one of two manners in which the Buddha manifests himself: it could be described as the *diachronic* way, and shows Amida achieving Awakening at the end of his long career as a Bodhisattva, ten cosmic periods ago, as the sūtras say<sup>112</sup>. Shinran particularly emphasizes the second way, which is *synchronic*: Amida is none other than the *immediate personification* of the ultimate and indescribable reality according to the Greater Vehicle, the Suchness (*tathātā*)

<sup>107</sup> *Tathāgata* (*nyorai* 如來) is one of the titles common to all Buddhas. It is understood in different ways, notably: "One who arrived (*āgata, rai* 來) at Awakening - or One who went (*gata, rai* 來) to nirvāṇa - such as (*tathā, nyo* 如) the previous Buddhas".

<sup>108</sup> Hōnen quoted in Genchi 源智 (1183-1238), *Jōdo zuimonki* 淨土隨聞記 (*Record of what I heard about the Pure Land*): “眞言教阿彌陀是己心如來，不可外覓者。淨教所謂阿彌陀佛，乃是法藏比丘發願成就佛體，在西方者。其意大異” (T. 83, p. 242ab; cf. Jssz 6, p. 385). Also in Ryōe, *Kurodani Shōnin wagotōroku* 黒谷上人和語燈録, vol. 5 (T. 83, 2611, p. 234a / Jssz 6, p. 598).

<sup>109</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinhō*, ch. 3, Preface: “然末代道俗近世宗師，沈自性唯心，貶淨土眞證” (T. 83, p. 600c / Jssz 2, p. 65).

<sup>110</sup> Yuanzhao, *Kan-Muryōju-Butsu-kyō Gisho* (*Guan-Wuliangshou-Fo-jing Yishu*) 觀無量壽佛經義疏, vol. 1: “彼淨土即我自心，非他方也。達彼彌陀即我自性，非他佛也” (T. 37, 1754, p. 280a).

<sup>111</sup> See my review of Mark Blum's *The Origins and Development of Pure Land Buddhism* in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 29-2 (University of Washington, Summer 2003), p. 393-397. More in my *Terre Pure, Zen et autorité: La Dispute de l'ère Jōdo et la Réfutation du Mémoire sur des contradictions de la foi par Ryōnyo du Honganji* (Collège de France; Paris, De Boccard, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, vol. 1, § 10: “成佛已來凡歷十劫” (T. 12, p. 270a / Jssz 1, p. 32); *Sūtra of Amida*: “阿彌陀佛成佛已來於今十劫” (T. 12, p. 347a / Jssz. 1, p. 107).



that is the elementary body (*dharmakāya*). To follow this crucial reasoning, it should be recalled that Buddhism defines a person as the combination of these two elements: a *name* and a *form* (*nāma-rūpa*, *myō-shiki* 名色). Here is what Shinran [p. 83] says about the origin of Amida:

"From the precious ocean of unique suchness a *form* manifested itself that took the *name* of 'Bodhisattva Dharmākara. With the production of his Unobstructed Vow as the seed, he became the Buddha Amida, and that is why he is named 'Comer-from-suchness as body of retribution (*hōjin nyorai* 報身如來)<sup>113</sup>. (...)

This Comer-from-suchness is also described as 'elementary body in adapted means' (*hōben hosshin* 方便法身). The 'adapted means' (*hōben* 方便, *upāya*) consist in manifesting a form and revealing his Name in order to make himself known to beings. It is the Buddha Amida. This Comer-from-suchness is light. This light is wisdom. Wisdom is the form of light. As wisdom has no form, he is called 'Buddha Inconceivable-Light'.<sup>114</sup>

Elsewhere, Shinran indicates similarly:

"The elementary body (*hosshin* 法身) has neither colour nor form. Therefore, it cannot be conceived of mentally nor expressed verbally. From this unique suchness a *form* manifested itself, which revealed itself in that noble appearance called 'elementary body in adapted means' (*hōben hosshin* 方便法身), took the *name* of 'Bhikṣu Dharmākara' and produced his inconceivable great Vow with its promise".<sup>115</sup> [p. 84]

The dual diachronic and synchronic dimension of the appearance of the Buddha was again inspired to Shinran by Tanluan, who quotes the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*<sup>116</sup>. According to the latter, the appearance of a Buddha in the world can also be seen in two ways. One is "by emergence from conditions", that is at the end of a Buddha's journey as a Bodhisattva with his vows and practices (*engi* 緣起). The other one is "by emergence of the nature of tathāgata" - or elementary nature, that personifies itself in a Buddha (*shōki* 性起)<sup>117</sup>.

As a result of his interpretation, Shinran favoured one of the two names of Amida, that of "Infinite-Light" (Amitābha). The classic translation of this name into Chinese is "Muryōkō" (無量光). However, Shinran more often than not prefers the variant with which Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land* opens: "Tathāgata Unobstructed-Light Filling the

<sup>113</sup> "Comer (*rai* 來) from-suchness (*nyo* 如)" is another translation of *tathāgata* (*nyorai* 如來).

<sup>114</sup> Shinran, *Ichinen-tannen mon'i*, § 18: "この一如寶海よりかたちをあらはして、法藏菩薩となのりたまひて、無礙のちかひをおこしたまふをたねとして、阿彌陀佛となりたまふがゆゑに、報身如來と申すなり。 (...) この如來を方便法身とは申すなり。方便と申すは、かたちをあらはし、御なをしめして、衆生にしらしめたまふを申すなり。すなはち阿彌陀佛なり。この如來は光明なり、光明は智慧なり、智慧はひかりのかたちなり、智慧またかたちなければ不可思議光佛と申すなり" (T. 83, p. 698a / Jssz 2, p. 674).

<sup>115</sup> Shinran, *Yuishinshō mon'i*, § 4: "法身はいろもなし、かたちもまします。しかれば、こころもおよばれず、ことばもたえたり。この一如よりかたちをあらはして、方便法身と申す御すがたをしめして、法藏比丘となのりたまひて、不可思議の大誓願をおこしてあらはれたまふ" (T. 83, pp. 702bc, 708b / Jssz 2, p. 702).

<sup>116</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 1, § 10: "此淨土隨順法性，不乖法本。事同華嚴經寶王如來性起義" (T. 40, p. 828b / Jssz 1, p. 458).

<sup>117</sup> *Kegongyō* 華嚴經 (\**Avatamsaka-sūtra*, td. Śikṣānanda), respectively ch. 36 and 37. Td. Thomas Cleary: *The Flower Ornament Scripture* (Boston & London, Shambala, 1993), pp. 952-969 and 970-1021 (T. 10, 279, pp. 257c-262a and 262a-278c).

Ten Directions"<sup>118</sup>. On the one hand, "Unobstructed" (*muge* 無礙) in "Unobstructed-Light" (*Mugekō* 無礙光) refers to the *body of retribution*, which has been defined by Daochuo as the "non-obstruction of full communication" (*enzū muge* 圓通無礙). In other words, the unobstructed light is the light of Amida's wisdom, which does not distinguish between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* but communicates completely between the two. On the other hand, Vasubandhu applies the title "Tathāgata" (*nyorai* 如來) to Amida, rather than the more common "Buddha" (*butsu* 佛). This choice reminds us how Amida is related to the *elementary body*, as shown by the etymology of the title "Tathāgata" ("Comer-from-suchness") mentioned by [p. 85] Shinran:

“The Tathāgata (*nyorai* 如來) ‘Mida comes (*rai* 來) into existence from suchness (*nyo* 如) and he reveals himself by manifesting all kinds of bodies of retribution, adaptation and transformation”<sup>119</sup>.

This definition of the Buddha Amida as the modal personification of the absolute, without confusing him with the absolute itself but without subordinating him to it either, is a unique contribution of Shinran's. Never in the history of the Pure Land tradition had the nature of this Buddha been presented with such precision and originality.

## 2. The nembutsu

Based on Amida's 18<sup>th</sup> vow, Shandao favoured the practice of vocal nembutsu over contemplative nembutsu: at the very least, it is sufficient for the worst criminal to say the nembutsu once at the very moment of death to be born in the Pure Land of Amida. This is due to the merits of this Buddha synthesized in his name, according to the nembutsu formula provided by the *Sūtra of Contemplations*, that is “Namo Amida Butsu” 南無阿彌陀佛 (“Reverence to the Buddha Amida!”). This synthesis of merits goes back to an ancient conception of the nature of a Buddha's name, which Tanluan recalls in his *Commentary*:

“There are names that are nothing else than their object, and there are names that are different from their object. The names that are nothing else than their object are the names of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas (...). As for the names that differ from their object, they are like the finger that [p. 86] points to the moon.”<sup>120</sup>

Through his name, it is therefore all the merits of Amida, of a perfectly accomplished Buddha, that are transferred to the most ordinary beings who pronounce it. Hōnen explains that this practice, which could not be easier and more immediate, is comparable to a man who finds himself perfumed by putting on the cloak of another who was already perfumed: through the vocal nembutsu, the simplest of beings finds himself perfumed by the merits accumulated to perfection by a Buddha like Amida by virtue of his primordial Vow<sup>121</sup>.

<sup>118</sup> Vasubandhu, *Jōdoron*: “Jin jippō Mugekō Nyorai” 盡十方無礙光如來 (T. 26, p. 230c / Jssz 1, p. 433).

<sup>119</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 4, § 1: “彌陀如來從如來生, 示現報應化種種身也” (T. 83, p. 616b / Jssz 2, p. 133).

<sup>120</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 2, § 52: “有名即法, 有名異法。名即法者, 諸佛菩薩名號 (...) 名異法者, 如指指月等名也” (T. 40, p. 835c / Jssz 1, pp. 490-491).

<sup>121</sup> Hōnen as quoted in Shinran's *Saihō shinanshō*, vol. 2b: “本願薰力のたきものの匂は, 名號の衣に薰し, またこの名號の衣を一度南無阿彌陀佛とひききてむものは, 名號の衣の匂, 身に薰するがゆえに, 決定往生すべき人なり” (T. 83, p. 883a / Jssz 3, pp. 983-984).

The notion of the transfer of merits (*ekō* 廻向, *pariṇāmanā*), the importance of which Shinran discovered through Tanluan, must be understood if we do not want to delude ourselves about its true nature. The transfer of merits is indeed essential for the Greater Vehicle since it lies at the heart of the ideal of benevolence and compassion that animates Buddhas and Bodhisattvas: it leads them not to keep for themselves the merits obtained at the end of their practice, but to dedicate them - or transfer them - to all beings according to their affinity. This dedication is made through the vows produced by the Bodhisattvas to guide their practice during their journey along the path. For, according to a famous comparison by Nāgārjuna, vows are like the herdsman who guides the efforts of the ox pulling a cart<sup>122</sup>. [p. 87]

More precisely, according to most classical Buddhist teachings, vows are part of volition (*cetanā*), i.e. the intention that governs acts (*karma*), which it forms and qualifies: acts will be good, bad, or pure depending on whether this prior intention is good, bad, or pure. It is not therefore that the intention is equal to the action, but that intention itself *is* action. We are here at the heart of the most fundamental Buddhist doctrine on karma. And since the synthesis of Amida's merits in his name was itself intended by his vows, the nembutsu is not an accumulative recitation of merits of the practitioner's own power, of the tantric mantra type, neither a verbal formula whose "vibrations" produce wonderful effects, nor any other form of magic operating mechanically.

However, the pronunciation of Amida's name is only one aspect of the vocal nembutsu, the one Shandao calls "putting into practice" (*kigyō* 起行). The very word *nembutsu* also covers a second aspect, which the Chinese master calls "insurance" (*anjin* 安心). This is none other than faith (*shinjin* 信心), which for practitioners takes the form of a double deep conviction (*nishu jinshin* 二種深信):

a) "to be deeply and resolutely convinced that in fact we are ourselves ordinary beings with the evil of our faults and remaining in the cycle of births and deaths, where we have always drowned and have always transmigrated for long cosmic periods, without any affinity for emancipation";

b) "to be deeply and resolutely convinced that the forty-eight vows of this Buddha Amida embrace beings, and that, if we do not doubt or hesitate, we will certainly go to be born in his Pure Land, conveyed by the power of [p. 88] his vows"<sup>123</sup>.

This faith does not therefore consist at all in "believing in Amida". Rather, it is part of this double realization that, on the one hand, ordinary beings are not awakened, and, on the other hand, that an accessible path is offered to them by a perfectly accomplished Buddha, insofar as they surrender themselves to the effectiveness of those vows that have led Him to Awakening. Finally, it should be noted that, for Hōnen, the implementation of the vocal nembutsu naturally (*jinen* 自然) implies the insurance that is faith in Amida's vows<sup>124</sup>. In passing, it is worth recalling that faith, in general, is an integral component of any Buddhist practice. It is reflected, in particular, in the "taking of refuges" in the Three

<sup>122</sup> Nāgārjuna, *Daichidoron*, vol. 7: "譬如牛力雖能挽車, 要須御者能有所至。淨世界願亦復如是, 福德如牛, 願如御者" (T. 25, 1509, p. 108bc).

<sup>123</sup> Shandao, *Kangyōsho*, vol. 4: "一者決定深信自身現是罪惡生死凡夫, 曠劫已來常沒常流轉, 無有出離之緣。二者決定深信彼阿彌陀佛四十八願攝受衆生, 無疑無慮, 乘彼願力定得往生" (T. 37, p. 271ab / Jssz 1, pp. 762-763.).

<sup>124</sup> See for example, Hōnen quoted in Shinran's *Saihō shinanshō*, vol. 3a: "まめやかに往生せむとおもひて念佛申さむ人は, 自然に具足しぬべき" (T. 83, p. 886a / Jssz 3, p. 994).

Jewels that are the Buddha, his Law and his Community, an indispensable act to entering on the path.

It is certainly not a question of blind faith, but rather of a lucid trust, comparable to that which is placed in one's doctor: the therapy proposed by the latter will be accepted with confidence providing the diagnosis made appears to the patient to be consistent with the suffering he is himself experiencing directly, even if it means strengthening this trust by confirmation from other doctors. Similarly, as Shandao points out, faith in the Buddha Amida's vows preached by the Buddha Śākyamuni is based on the coherence of all of his teachings, as well as on the unanimous testimonies of confirmation proclaimed by all Buddhas of the Ten Directions. It is therefore not surprising that Shinran himself uses the [p. 89] expression "medicine of the Buddha Amida" (*Amida butsu no kusuri* 阿彌陀佛のくすり)<sup>125</sup>.

In his interpretation of nembutsu, Shinran placed particular emphasis on faith in the "Other Power" (*tariki* 他力), which he defined as the effectiveness of Amida's vows. Undoubtedly linked to Shinran's doctrine, the somewhat confusing expression "Other Power" has no Indian equivalent. In fact, it dates back to the Chinese translation of Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Sūtra of the Ten Stages* by Bodhiruci and Ratnamati in the years 508-511 A.D., where it appears as a synonym for the "sublime powers" (*jinzū* 神通, *abhijñā*) that every Buddha exercises, in contrast to the practitioner's own strength, or "personal power" (*jiriki* 自力)<sup>126</sup>. It was Tanluan - who personally met Bodhiruci - who specifically applied the expression "Other Power" to the effectiveness of Amida's vows, an innovation that Shinran would take up after his discovery of Tanluan's work. As the double conviction of faith defined by Shandao shows, this effectiveness of Amida's vows stands in opposition to the ineffectiveness of the personal power of beings, of which Shinran gives these two particularly eloquent definitions:

"Personal power is believing in myself, believing in my own will, striving through my own strength, and believing in my own various roots of goodness".<sup>127</sup>

"Personal power (...) is believing in myself and thinking of being born beautifully in the Pure Land by amending the disorder of my physical, verbal, and mental acts by the will [p. 90] of my own calculations (*hakarai*)."<sup>128</sup>

Shinran's true revolution was to establish, on the one hand, that faith in the Other Power is the true and only cause of birth in the Pure Land, and, on the other hand, that this faith is not produced through the efforts of beings themselves. He identifies this faith as "good faith", that is, the absolute sincerity invested by Amida in the production and fulfilment of his vows. To be more precise, we are no longer dealing with faith in the *subjective* sense of the term, where the practitioner pronounces the name of Amida by abandoning himself to his Vow (*tanomu no kokoro* たのむの心, "entrusting heart"), but rather, faith in the *objective* sense of the very *sincerity* (*makoto no kokoro* まことの心, "true heart")

<sup>125</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 20, dated 1252 (T. 83, p. 720c / Jssz 2, p. 811).

<sup>126</sup> Vasubandhu, *Jūjikyōron* (Ch. *Shidijinglun*) 十地經論 (\**Daśabhūmika śāstra*): "他力辯才者, 承佛神力故。云何承佛神力, 如來智力不闍加故" (T. 26, 1522, p. 125b).

<sup>127</sup> Shinran, *Ichinen-tannen mon'i*, § 16: "自力といふは, わが身をたのみ, わがこころをたのみ, わが力をはげみ, わがさまざまの善根をたのみひとなり" (T. 83, p. 697b / Jssz 2, p. 672).

<sup>128</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 2 (dated 1255): "自力と申すことは (...) わが身をたのみ, わがはからひのこころをもつて身口意のみだれごころをつくろひ, めでたうしなして浄土へ往生せんとおもふを自力と申すなり" (T. 83, p. 711c / Jssz 2, pp. 779-780).

presiding over the great purpose of the Buddha Amida which is to deliver beings through his vows.

These vows having been conceived by Amida's perfect wisdom, out of his great benevolence and compassion, one who follows them and who pronounces his name therefore finds himself matching the wisdom of the Buddha. Compared by Tanluan to the adjustment of a box and its lid<sup>129</sup>, this "match" (*sōō* 相應, original meaning of the word *yoga*) therefore represents nothing else than the very intention of the Buddha Amida himself which is paradoxically accomplished in the hearts of practitioners, even though their own calculations (*hakarai*) are unable to make them progress on the path. And it is indeed in this lived paradox that the acme of the real religious experience of Jōdo-Shinshū lies, as this letter from [p. 91] Shinran relates:

"His Holiness the Grand Master [Hōnen] taught: 'As soon as you have faith in 'Mida's Primal Vow, nonsense makes sense.' So I learned that 'As long as there is sense, there is no Other Power: it is personal power'.

'Other Power' means that at the moment when they find themselves in the inconceivable wisdom of the Buddha, ordinary beings barded with passions obtain the realization of unsurpassable Awakening: this is Calculation (*on-hakarai*) from Buddha to Buddha only; it is therefore not part of the practitioner's calculation. That is why it is said that nonsense makes sense. 'Sense' is a word designating man's calculation of personal power. So, for the Other Power, nonsense is sense."<sup>130</sup>

With faith, it is therefore the very wisdom of the Buddha that is transferred to beings through the embrace of his light, and Shinran notes in one of his hymns:

"Obtaining the nembutsu of wisdom,  
Is the fulfillment of the power of Dharmākara's Vow.  
Without the wisdom of the heart of faith,  
How would we realize nirvāṇa?"<sup>131</sup>

The same hymns also define faith as the absence of doubt (*gi* 疑), a very human feeling that consists in attempting to [p. 92] calculate the wisdom of the Buddha, as illustrated by this passage from the *Tannishō*

"From the tip of their lips, some say: 'We trust in the power of the Vow'. But in their hearts, they think: 'Of course, the vow of supposedly rescuing the bad is said to be inconceivable, but it is still the good who will finally be rescued!' In this way, they doubt the power of the Vow and do not have the heart to entrust themselves to the Other Power"<sup>132</sup>.

<sup>129</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 1, § 7: "相應者, 譬如函蓋相稱也" (T. 40, 827c / Jssz 1, 456).

<sup>130</sup> Shinran's letter, *Shinran Shōnin goshōsoku-shū*, 10: "また彌陀の本願を信じ候ひぬるうへには, 義なきを義とすところそ大師聖人の仰せにて候へ。かやうに義の候ふらんかぎりには, 他力にはあらず, 自力なりときこえて候ふ。また他力と申すは, 佛智不思議にて候ふなるときに, 煩惱具足の凡夫の無上覺のさとりを得候ふなることをば, 佛と佛のみ御はからひなり, さらに行者のはからひにあらず候ふ。しかれば, 義なきを義とす候ふなり。義と申すことは自力のひとはからひを申すなり。他力には, しかれば, 義なきを義とす候ふなり" (T. 83, pp. 727c-728a / Jssz 2, pp. 849-850).

<sup>131</sup> Shinran, *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 35: "智慧の念佛うることは, 法藏願力のなせるなり, 信心の智慧なかりせば, いかでか涅槃をさとらまし" (T. 83, p. 66 6a / Jssz 2, pp. 486).

<sup>132</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 16: "口には願力をたのみたてまつるといひて, こころにはさこそ悪人をたすけんといふ願, 不思議にましますといふとも, さすがよからんものをこそたすけたまはんずれとおもふほどに, 願力を疑ひ, 他力をたのみまらするところかけて" (T. 83, p. 733b / Jssz 2, pp. 1070).

Jōdo-Shinshū is thus characterized by a complete surrender of the personal power of the practitioner to the Other Power of Buddha Amida's vows. All in all, this method results in the complete removal of the illusionary ego, which is indeed the heart of the Buddhist path. Taking this to its logical end, Shinran deduced that the pronunciation of the name of the Buddha Amida is no more than a spontaneous, natural expression of gratitude towards the latter's benevolence. And he came to the following conclusion:

"True faith is necessarily accompanied by the name (*myōgō* 名號). The name is not necessarily accompanied by faith [transferred by] the power of the Vow."<sup>133</sup>

Thus, practice is no longer a practice in the classic sense of the term. The practitioner's gratitude responds naturally (*jinen* 自然) to the free rescue offered by Amida's vows:

"In everything we do, let us not have intelligent thoughts about birth in the Pure Land; but, with delight, let us always remember that 'Mida's Benevolence is profound! Then, the [p. 93] nembutsu will also be said. This is natural (*jinen* 自然). Our lack of calculations is what is meant by 'natural'. It is a matter for the Other Power."<sup>134</sup>

In short, the pronunciation of the Buddha's name through the formula "Namo Amida Butsu" no longer aims at an accumulation of personal merit on the part of the practitioner and therefore constitutes a "non-practice" (*higyō* 非行). This somewhat confusing principle is clear from Shinran's comments:

"The nembutsu is non-practice and non-good for the practitioner. As it is not practiced through personal calculation, it is qualified as 'non-practice'. Since it is not a good deed done by personal calculation either, it is qualified as 'non-good'. Because it is entirely a matter of Other Power and is cut off from personal power, it is non-practice and non-good for the practitioner."<sup>135</sup>

And while the liturgical psalmody of the Scriptures continues today to punctuate the life of temples and homes of the followers of Jōdo-Shinshū, it is not recognized for its merit but only for the gratitude it shows.

### 3. Birth in the Pure Land

The whole Shandao tradition, down to Hōnen, interprets birth in the Pure Land in the light of Amida's 11<sup>th</sup> vow, that is [p. 94] direct access to the "irreversible" (*futaiten* 不退轉, *avaivartika*) - which is the 8<sup>th</sup> of the ten stages of the traditional Bodhisattva curriculum. Also called "entry into the group of those fixed in the true" (*nyū shōjōju* 入正定聚), this stage is crucial since the realization of Awakening then becomes inevitable as well as effortless (*mukuyū* 無功用, *anābhoga*). The Bodhisattva now progresses towards Awakening in an irreversible and natural way, in accordance with the nature of things, and

<sup>133</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 50: "眞實信心必具名號。名號必不具願力信心也" (T. 83, p. 606b / Jssz 2, p. 90).

<sup>134</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 16: "すべてよろづのことにつけて、往生にはかしこきおもひを具せずして、ただほれぼれと彌陀の御恩の深重なること、つねはおもひいだしまゐらすべし。しかれば念佛も申され候ふ。これ自然なり。わがはからはざるを、自然と申すなり。これすなはち他力にてまします" (T. 83, p. 733b / Jssz 2, p. 1070).

<sup>135</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 8: "念佛は行者のために非行非善なり。わがはからひにて行ずるにあらざれば非行といふ。わがはからひにてつくる善にもあらざれば非善といふ。ひとへに他力にして自力をはなれたるゆゑに、行者のためには非行非善なり" (T. 83, p. 729b / Jssz 2, p. 1058).

without having to make any further effort. It is from this stage also that the Bodhisattva frees himself from his carnal body to obtain an “elementary body” (*dharmakāya*), that is a set of pure elements only. He also obtains the faculty to manifest himself in various forms to guide others towards deliverance. In this perspective, the Pure Land of Amida could then be considered as the privileged sphere in which the final phase of this maturation is accomplished, which opens onto perfect Awakening.

However, according to Shinran's unique interpretation, the awakening of faith constitutes a true revolution, a *metanoia* or a “turnaround of the heart” (*eshin* 廻心)<sup>136</sup>, in short a conversion, which occurs in this very life, as follows:

“For those in the exclusive and unidirectional practice [of nembutsu], there will be turnaround of the heart only once. Here is what it consists of. One who has never known the true doctrine of the Other Power of the Primal Vow but who is gratified by ‘Mida's wisdom realizes that birth in the Pure Land is impossible with his ordinary state of mind; he then turns around his original state of mind to entrust himself to the Primal Vow. That is what we call the ‘turn-around of the [p. 95] heart’.”<sup>137</sup>

This radical event is irreversible, and access to the eponymous stage through Amida's 11<sup>th</sup> vow therefore does not take place in the Pure Land but already in this life, at the very moment when the simple thought of wanting to say Amida's name at the hearing of his vow is born:

“At the very moment when the thought of saying the nembutsu in the faith that we will finally obtain birth in the Pure Land saved by the inconceivable Vow of ‘Mida, he immediately makes us share in the benefit of his unfailing embrace.”<sup>138</sup>

This is what Shinran's successors such as Kakunyo, Zonkaku and Rennyō would call “the realization of karma in the midst of this life” (*heizei gōjō* 平生業成)<sup>139</sup>.

As for birth in the Pure Land itself, it leads to nothing less than the realization of the state of a perfectly accomplished Buddha, as Shinran unhesitatingly affirms:

“As we are embraced in the Heart of the light of the Buddha Unobstructed-Light, we will necessarily reach the Pure Land ‘Peaceful-Happiness’. Then, just as the Tathāgata ‘Mida, we will be born by transformation in the flower of his perfect Awakening and the realization of the great final nirvāṇa will [p. 96] be opened.”<sup>140</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Gira, Dennis: *Le sens de la conversion dans l'enseignement de Shinran* (Paris, Collège de France / Maisonneuve & Larose, 1985).

<sup>137</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 16: “一向専修のひとにおいては、廻心といふこと、ただひとたびあるべし。その廻心は、日ごろ本願他力眞宗をしらざるひと、彌陀の智慧をたまはりて、日ごろのころにては往生かなふべからずとおもひて、もとのころをひきかへて、本願をたのみまゐらすをこそ、廻心とは申し候へ” (T. 83, p. 733ab / Jssz 2, p. 1069).

<sup>138</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 1: “彌陀の誓願不思議にたすけられまゐらせて、往生をばとぐるなりと信じて念佛まふさんとおもひたつところのおこるとき、すなはち攝取不捨の利益にあづけしめたまふなり” (T. 83, p. 728a / Jssz 2, p. 1053).

<sup>139</sup> Kakunyo, *Gaijashō*, § 1 (Jssz 4, pp. 299-300); Zonkaku, *Jōdo shin'yōshō*, § 2 (T. 83, p. 759b / Jssz 4, p. 487), and *Tandokumon*, § 2 (T. 83, p. 757a / Jssz 4, p. 868); Rennyō, *Gobunshō*, I-2, 4 (T. 83, pp. 771c, 772a / Jssz 6, pp. 71, 73), etc.

<sup>140</sup> Shinran, *Ichinen-tannen mon'i*, § 20: “無礙光佛のひかりの御ころにをさめとりたまふがゆゑに、かならず安樂淨土へいたれば、彌陀如來とおなじく、かの正覺の華に化生して大般涅槃のさとりをひらかしむるをむねとせしむべしとなり” (T. 83, p. 698c / Jssz 2, pp. 676-677).

We notice here the expression "just as the Tathāgata 'Mida' (*Mida Nyorai to onajiku* 彌陀如來とおなじく) : there is similarity between the Awakening of beings and that of Amida, but not fusion. Thus the method of Jōdo-Shinshū does not aim to "merge into Amida" in order to become one with him, as a movement based on devotion such as the Indian *bhakti* would propose, in which the faithful and the divinity absorb each other through an act of mutual love.

Shinran also gives an extraordinary analysis of the current condition of the nembutsu practitioner. Indeed, the attainment of the irreversible stage in this present life implies that the practitioner is now separated from the realization of perfect Awakening by only a single birth, the one that will lead him to the Pure Land as soon as his present existence ends. Practically, according to Shinran, the faithful therefore stands in nothing less than the same position as the Bodhisattva Maitreya. In fact, the latter has reached the end of his journey and is only waiting in Tuṣita paradise until the deadline following the disappearance of Śākyamuni to take his place by being reborn one last time among men in order to preach the Law to them in his turn (*sup.* p. 15). Shinran therefore claims that the nembutsu practitioner is the same as Maitreya (*Miroku ni onaji* 彌勒におなじ)<sup>141</sup>. And since the latter is almost a Buddha, Shinran comes to the conclusion that the nembutsu practitioner is himself similar to a Buddha, or more precisely, "on an equal footing with a Tathāgata" (*nyorai to hitoshi* 如來 [p. 97] とひとし)<sup>142</sup>. Still, it is not a question of "becoming a Buddha in this very life" (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛), as the Esoteric or Tantric teachings of Buddhism propose (*mikkyō* 密教). Shinran is very explicit about this:

"I have learned that, according to the true doctrine of the Pure Land, we have faith in the Primal Vow during this present life and we will open to Awakening (*satori*) in that [Pure] Land."<sup>143</sup>

This means that to be equal to a Buddha is a kind of virtuality that will only be actualized by being born in the Pure Land after death:

"Sullied beings cannot see their own nature here, because it is covered by passions. (...) But when they reach the Buddha Realm 'Peaceful-Happiness', their Buddha nature (*bushō* 佛性) will necessarily immediately be revealed, as it will be based on the transfer of the Primal Vow's power."<sup>144</sup>

"The Tathāgata is nirvāṇa.

Nirvāṇa is called 'Buddha nature'.

It cannot be realized at the stage of ordinary beings:

It will be realized by reaching [the Pure Land] Peaceful-Sustenance"<sup>145</sup>.

In short, for Shinran, birth in the Pure Land is the highlight of the Buddhist life, and this realization is fully within the altruistic framework of the Greater Vehicle: [p. 98]

<sup>141</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 3, dated 1257 (T. 83, p. 712c / Jssz 2, p. 783).

<sup>142</sup> Shinran's letters, *Mattōshō* 3, 4, 14 (T. 83, pp. 712c, 713a, 718b / Jssz 2, pp. 783, 784, 797), etc.

<sup>143</sup> Shinran quoted in *Tannishō*, ch. 15: "浄土真宗には、今生に本願を信じて、かの土にしてさとりをばひらくとならひ候ふぞ" (T. 83, p. 733 / Jssz 2, p. 1069).

<sup>144</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 5, § 37: "惑染衆生於此不能見性，所覆煩惱故 (...) 到安樂佛國即必顯佛性，由本願力回向故" (T. 83, p. 626b / Jssz 2, p. 179).

<sup>145</sup> Shinran, *Jōdo wasan*, 93: "如來すなはち涅槃なり，涅槃を佛性となづけたり，凡地にしてはさとられず，安養にいたりて證すべし" (T. 83, p. 659a / Jssz 2, p. 385).



"He who obtains this Awakening (*satori*) immediately reaches the height of the great benevolence and compassion and returns to the ocean of births and deaths in order to rescue all sentient beings by following the virtues of Samantabhadra".<sup>146</sup>

This last point deserves a special mention: the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (*Fugen* 普賢) represents the paragon of the Bodhisattva's career, and his virtues condense in themselves all the merits cultivated in the Greater Vehicle, which amount to: 1° revere all the Buddhas, 2° sing the praises of all the Tathāgatas, 3° make offerings to all the Buddhas, 4° confess one's faults, 5° rejoice in others' merits, 6° invite the Buddhas to turn the wheel of the Law, 7° invite the Buddhas to remain in the world, 8° constantly follow the example of the Buddha, 9° help all beings, 10° universally transfer all these merits to the latter<sup>147</sup>.

For Shinran, in the end, the essential result of faith in this life is that we are already numbered among those who are "fixed in the true", that is, in a situation where no further retrogression is possible with regard to supreme Awakening. Admittedly, this may all seem rather abstract, but Shinran includes "entry into the group of those fixed in the true" at the end of a broader set of results likely to stimulate the practitioner, that he calls the "Ten Benefits in the Present Life":

- 1° protection by the crowd of invisible beings, i.e. divinities and great Bodhisattvas;
- 2° endowment of the supreme merits of the Buddha Amida; [p. 99]
- 3° transformation of evil into good;
- 4° protection by all the Buddhas;
- 5° praise by all the Buddhas;
- 6° constant protection by the spiritual light of the Buddha Amida;
- 7° multiplication of joy in the heart;
- 8° recognition of and tribute to the benevolence of the Buddha;
- 9° practice of the great compassion;
- 10° entry into the group of those fixed in the true<sup>148</sup>.

The purely spiritual dimension of these benefits, none of which concern material results, are clear. Moreover, Shinran devotes long passages in chapter 6 of his *Kyōgyōshinshō* to denouncing the practices of divination and astrology, as well as the cult of various deities and other spirits, present everywhere in Asia including Japan. Shinran does not deny the influence of these deities, whose protection is assured to the practitioner by the first of the Ten Benefits. However, this is only a natural consequence of faith, as he expresses it in a more developed way in the "Hymns on the Benefits in the Present Time" (*Genze-riyaku wasan* 現世利益和讃), which are included in his *Japanese Hymns on the Pure Land*<sup>149</sup>.

<sup>146</sup> Shinran, *Yuishinshō mon'i*, § 2: "このさとりをうれば、すなはち大慈大悲きはまりて生死海にかへり入りてよろづの有情をたすくるを普賢の徳に歸せしむと" (T. 83, 2658, p. 700b / Jssz 2, p. 689).

<sup>147</sup> According to the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*: 1° *raikyō shobutsu* 禮敬諸佛, 2° *shōsan nyorai* 稱讚如來, 3° *kōshu kuyō* 廣修供養, 4° *sange gōshō* 懺悔業障, 5° *zuiki kudoku* 隨喜功德, 6° *shō ten bōrin* 請轉法輪, 7° *sho butsu jūse* 請佛住世, 8° *jō zui butsu gaku* 常隨佛學, 9° *gōjun shujō* 恒順衆生, 10° *fukai ekō* 普皆回向 (*Kegongyō* 華嚴經 :T. 10, 293, vol. 40, pp. 844b-846b).

<sup>148</sup> "Ten Benefits in the Present Life" (*genshō jissu yaku* 現生十種益): "1° *myōshu goji* 冥衆護持; 2° *shitoku gusoku* 至徳具足; 3° *temmaku jōzen* 轉惡成善; 4° *shobutsu gonen* 諸佛護念; 5° *shobutsu shōsan* 諸佛稱讚; 6° 心光常護; 7° *shin ta kangī* 心多歡喜; 8° *chion hōtoku* 智恩報徳; 9° *jōgyō daihi* 常行大悲; 10° *nyū shōjōju* 入正定聚". In Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 65 (T. 83, p. 607b / Jssz 2, p. 95).

<sup>149</sup> Shinran, *Jōdo wasan* 96-110 (T. 83, p. 659ac / Jssz 2, pp. 386-394).

#### 4. How does it work?

In general, the Buddhist method of deliverance - all traditions combined - consists in eliminating two groups of obstacles: the [p. 100] obstacles of passions and the obstacles of the knowable (*kleśa-jñeyāvaraṇa*). The former are eliminated by acquiring merit and erasing faults, while the latter are eliminated through obtaining wisdom. This is known as the double “accumulation of merit and wisdom” (*punya-jñāna-sambhāra*). Shandao's tradition is no exception to this rule. Indeed, we have seen above how all of Amida's merits are transferred to ordinary beings through his name, so as to erase their faults through the vocal nembutsu (*sup.* p. 48).

For Shinran, to want birth in the Pure Land by erasing faults is only a secondary and temporary path. Such a practice is based on a distinction between good and evil established by the calculation of ordinary beings; as such, this distinction is merely a “belief in faults and merit” (*shin zaifuku* 信罪福). Moreover, this belief is nothing less than doubting the inconceivable wisdom of the Buddha: at best, it gives birth in the Border region of the Pure Land (*henji* 邊地), where beings, for a long time, cannot hear Amida preach. In fact, according to Shinran, the true doctrine of the Pure Land consists in the transformation of evil into good (*temmaku jōzen* 轉惡成善), which constitutes the third of the Ten Benefits in the Present Life. Another revolution, this interpretation refers to some of the most subtle notions of the Greater Vehicle. It takes its roots in the passage of the *Sūtra of Contemplations* about the unfailing embrace by the light of Amida:

“His light fully illuminates the universes of the Ten Directions and embraces the beings of nembutsu without abandoning them.”<sup>150</sup>

Now, as we have seen, the unobstructed light of Amida, as [p. 101] elementary body in adapted means (*sup.* p. 47), is none other than that perfection of wisdom which knows no limitations between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and even less between good and evil produced in the cycle of births and deaths. This is what had already led Genshin to declare in his *Essentials on Birth in the Pure Land*:

“The eighty-four thousand passions with which my corrupt heart is endowed and the eighty-four thousand perfections with which this Buddha Amida is endowed are originally empty and appeased: they are therefore consubstantial and unobstructed. Desire is nothing other than Awakening; the same is true of hatred and aberration. It is like the nature of ice and water: they are not in different places. That is why it is stated in the Canon:

‘Passions and bodhi are not two in substance,  
Saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are not in different places’<sup>151</sup>.

But I, at present, do not yet have my share of the fire of wisdom: that is why I cannot melt the ice of my passions so that it becomes the water of merits.”<sup>152</sup>

And Shinran will repeat this theme in his own hymns:

<sup>150</sup> *Sūtra of Contemplations*, 9<sup>th</sup> contemplation: “光明徧照十方世界，念佛衆生攝取不捨” (T. 12, p. 343b / Jssz 1, 87).

<sup>151</sup> Myōnghyo (aka. Myeonghyo) 明晞 (Silla dyn. 7<sup>th</sup> ~ 10<sup>th</sup> c.), *Treatise on the Ocean-Seal Samādhi* (*Kaiin zammai ron* 海印三昧論, Kor. *Haein sammaeron*): “生死涅槃非異處，煩惱菩提體無二” (T. 45, 1889, p. 774b).

<sup>152</sup> Genshin, *Ōjō-yōshū*, vol. 2b, ch. 5-4: “今我惑心具足八萬四千塵勞門，彼彌陀佛具足八萬四千波羅蜜門，本來空寂一體無礙。貪欲即是道，恚癡亦如是，如水與冰性非異處。故經云。煩惱菩提體無二，生死涅槃非異處云云。我今未有智火分故，不能解煩惱冰成功德水” (T.84, p. 65a / Jssz 1, p. 1144).

"From the benefits of the [Buddha] Unobstructed-Light,  
 We receive the magnificent and immense faith and  
 Necessarily, the ice of our passions melts  
 And immediately becomes the water of *bodhi*.  
 The obstacles of our faults become the substance of His merits. [p. 102]  
 It is like ice and water:  
 The more ice, the more water;  
 The more obstacles, the more merits."<sup>153</sup>

More precisely, the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū declares elsewhere:

"Without the practitioner having calculated it in any way, all his faults of the past, present, and future are transformed into good. 'Transformed' means 'to be brought back to good'. Without having asked, those who have faith in the Buddha's vow are led to obtain roots of good from all His merits. (...) Since those who have obtained the true faith of the Vow are included and protected by the Vow of embracing without abandoning them, this is not the calculation on the part of the practitioner."<sup>154</sup>

In short, the obstacles of passions and the obstacles of the knowable are eliminated respectively by the merits of the name of the Buddha Amida and by the wisdom of faith, transferred by His Primal Vow:

"Obtaining the nembutsu of wisdom  
 Is the fulfilment of the power of Dharmākara's Vow.  
 Without the wisdom of faith,  
 How would we realize nirvāṇa?  
 Here is the beacon in the long night of ignorance!  
 Do not regret any more the darkening of your wisdom eye! [p. 103]  
 Here is the ship that carries across the ocean of births and deaths!  
 Do not cry any more over the seriousness of your faults!  
 Since the power of the Vow is inexhaustible,  
 The very heaviness of our wrongful acts no longer weighs!  
 Since the wisdom of the Buddha is boundless,  
 Even the debauched and the dissipated are not abandoned!"<sup>155</sup>

To summarize the whole process of deliverance, Shinran finally uses the metaphor of the conception of a child. According to Buddhism, procreation requires not only the union of the two external conditions of mother and father, but also the conjunction of the inner cause of karmic consciousness of the new being to be conceived. According to Shinran,

<sup>153</sup> Shinran, *Kōsō wasan* (Tanluan), 39-40: “無礙光の利益より、威徳広大の信をえて、かならず煩惱のこほりとけ、すなはち菩提のみづとなる。罪障功徳の體となる、こほりとみづのごとくにて、こほりおほきにみづおほし、さはりおほきに徳おほし” (T. 83, p. 661c / Jssz 2, pp. 423-424).

<sup>154</sup> Shinran, *Yuishinshō mon'i*, § 2: “行者のはじめてともかくもはからはざるに、過去今生未來の一切の罪を轉ず。轉ずといふは、善とかへなすをいふなり。もとめざるに一切の功徳善根を佛のちかひを信ずる人に得しむるがゆゑにしからしむといふ。(...) 誓願眞實の信心をえたるひとは、攝取不捨の御ちかひにをさめとりてまもらせたまふによりて、行人のはからひにあらず” (T. 83, p. 700a / Jssz 2, pp. 687-688).

<sup>155</sup> Shinran, *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 35-37: “智慧の念佛うることは、法藏願力のなせるなり、信心の智慧なかりせば、いかでか涅槃をさとらまし。無明長夜の燈炬なり、智眼くらしとかなしむな、生死大海の船筏なり、罪障おもしろとなげかざれ。願力無窮にましませば、罪業深重もおもからず、佛智無邊にましませば、散亂放逸もすてられず” (T. 83, p. 66 6a / Jssz 2, p. 486).

Amida's Light of wisdom and his meritorious Name are, respectively, the mother and father united by their great benevolence and compassion, while true faith constitutes the karmic consciousness. And it is through the combination of these three that the "true body of the land of retribution" is realized<sup>156</sup>. [p. 104]

## B. Shinran's dogmatics

Until the very end of his life, Shinran presented himself as a modest and faithful disciple of Hōnen, to whom he paid a strong tribute in his works and his words, declaring himself ready to follow his master to hell if that was his lot<sup>157</sup>. We have seen, however, that he developed his own interpretations on several points, and since these are different from the interpretations of other disciples of Hōnen, Shinran's teaching was eventually perceived as a school distinct from that founded by his master. While Shinran never presented himself as either a founder or a reformer, he could not fail to be aware of the novelty of his own thought, and he did indeed develop a complete and original system, which respects even the most formal criteria for the definition of a doctrinally-independent Buddhist school.

### 1. The criteria for a new school

According to the Sino-Japanese Buddhist tradition, a school (*shū* 宗) must meet certain original criteria to justify its independence: 1° a canon of Scripture (*shōgyō* 聖教), 2° a lineage of masters (*shishō* 師承), 3° a classification of all Buddhist teachings that makes it possible to situate this school among them (*hangyō* 判教) and 4° a name (*shūmyō* 宗名).

The Shandao Pure Land tradition is characterized first of all by being founded on the "Three Sūtras". In China, Tanluan was the first to use these together in his *Commentary*. Shandao then gave them the collective name "Sūtras of Birth in the Pure Land" (*Ōjōkyō* 往生經), because, in his eyes, they all shared [p. 105] the same doctrine, "obtaining birth in the Pure Land through the exclusive commemoration of 'Mida's Name'<sup>158</sup>. In Japan, Hōnen renamed them "Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras" (*Jōdo-sambukyō* 淨土三部經). For him in the end, the proper canon is constituted by "Three Sūtras and One Treatise" (*Sangyō Ichiron* 三經一論), that is the *Pure Land Trilogy* plus the *Treatise on the Pure Land* by Vasubandhu. Hōnen's magistral lineage is purely Chinese and includes five masters from Shandao's tradition: Tanluan 曇鸞, Daochuo 道綽, Shandao 善導, Huaigan 懷感 and Shaokang 少康. His classification of teachings is based on that formulated by Daochuo, who divides them all into only two groups: the Method of the Way of the Saints (*Shōdōmon* 聖道門) and the Method of the Pure Land (*Jōdomon* 淨土門) (*sup.* p. 18). It is this second, fully-fledged method, that gives its name to the Pure Land School (*Jōdoshū* 淨土宗)<sup>159</sup>.

<sup>156</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 2, § 72: "無徳號慈父, 能生因闕。無光明悲母, 所生緣乖。能所因緣雖可和合, 非信心業識, 無到光明土。眞實信業識, 斯則爲內因。光明名父母, 斯則爲外緣。內外因緣和合, 得證報土眞身" (T. 83, p. 597b / Jssz 2, p. 79).

<sup>157</sup> Eshinni's letter 3, dated 1263: "上人のわたらせたまはんところには, 人はいかにも申せ, たとひ悪道にわたらせたまふべしと申すとも, 世々生々にも迷ひければこそありけめとまで思ひまゐらす身なればと" (Jssz 2, p. 1031); *Tannishō*, ch. 2 (T. 83, p. 728bc / Jssz. 2, p. 1054).

<sup>158</sup> Shandao, *Kangyōsho*: "往生經", "如無量壽經四十八願中, 唯明專念彌陀名號得生。又如彌陀經中, 一日七日專念彌陀名號得生 (...). 又此經定散文中, 唯標專念名號得生" (T. 37, 1753, pp. 272b, 268a / Jssz 1, pp. 767, 748).

<sup>159</sup> Hōnen, *Senjakushū*, ch. 1 (T. 83, pp. 1c-2c / Jssz 1, pp. 1254-1258).

Shinran's criteria differ however significantly.

1) He takes as his canon the sole *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, which he extracts from the corpus of the *Pure Land Trilogy*, because this text is the only one that presents the details of Amida's vows. While Shinran does not reject the other two sūtras, he applies two levels of reading to them. Thus, from an explicit point of view (*kengi* 顯義), these two texts still belong to personal power: the *Sūtra of Contemplations* by exposing meditative practices and meritorious good deeds, and the *Sūtra of Amida* by advocating the vocal nembutsu - which Shinran sees as corresponding respectively to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of the 48 vows listed in the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*. But from an implicit point of view (*shōgi* 彰義), the first two [p. 106] sūtras also reveal the true doctrine of faith according to the 18<sup>th</sup> vow: the *Sūtra of Contemplations* by exposing the principle of the unfailing embrace of beings by the light of Amida, and the *Sūtra of Amida* by relating the exhortations and testimonies of the Buddhas from all directions. According to Shinran, in summary, it is not only the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, but all the three sūtras of the *Pure Land Trilogy* which have “the selected Primal Vow for doctrine (*shū* 宗)”, all of them revealing that “it is the heart of faith that brings into” the Pure Land<sup>160</sup>.

2) Shinran defines a very original lineage to link Japan to India, which includes the two Indian patriarchs of the Greater Vehicle, Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, the three main masters of Shandao's Chinese tradition, Tanluan 曇鸞, Daochuo 道綽, and Shandao 善導, and the Japanese monks who made Shandao's work known in Japan before establishing it in an independent school, Genshin 源信 and Hōnen 法然<sup>161</sup>.

3) Shinran gives his own classification of Buddhist teachings, which is known to posterity as “the four kinds in two pairs” (*nisō shijū* 二雙四重):

- vertical exit (*shushutsu* 豎出): the gradual teachings of the Way of the Saints, such as those of the Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda Schools, as well as the Smaller Vehicle;

- vertical jump (*shuchō* 豎超): the abrupt teachings of the Way of the Saints, including Tendai, Zen, and Shingon; [p. 107]

- horizontal exit (*ōshutsu* 橫出): the gradual teachings of the Pure Land, aiming at birth in the Pure Land through personal merit;

- horizontal jump (*ōchō* 橫超): the abrupt teaching of the Pure Land, i.e. the Jōdo-Shinshū, based on faith in the Other Power<sup>162</sup>.

In summary, we see that though Shinran takes up the classification of the two Methods of the Way of the Saints and of the Pure Land retained by Hōnen, he splits them according to whether their aim is *abrupt*, i. e. achievable in this very lifetime, or *gradual*, the latter option involving a journey traditionally extending over no less than “three incalculable cosmic periods and one hundred additional cosmic periods”, according to general Greater Vehicle doctrine. Moreover, by defining the teachings of the Method of the Way of the Saints as *vertical* and those of the Method of the Pure Land as *horizontal*, his classification bestows them a double dimension, respectively diachronic and synchronic. The former

<sup>160</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 33: “是以三經真實, 撰擇本願爲宗也”; § 37: “三經大綱雖有顯彰隱密之義, 彰信心爲能入” (T. 83, pp. 629b, 630b / Jssz 2, pp. 195, 200).

<sup>161</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 2, § 102 (*Shōshinge*); *Jōdo-monruijushō*, § 20 (*Nembutsu-shōshin ge*); *Kōsō wasan*.

<sup>162</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 73: “豎超者, 大乘真實之教也。豎出者, 大乘權方便之教, 二乘三乘迂迴之教也。橫超者, 即願成就一實圓滿之真教真宗是也。亦復有橫出, 即三輩九品定散之教, 化土懈慢迂迴之善也” (T. 83, p. 607c / Jssz 2, pp. 96-97).

implies ascending through a precise curriculum of merit, as proposed by the ten-stages path of the bodhisattva; the latter is addressed to all beings as they stand.

In fact, the abruptness of the realization which allows skipping some of the stages - as opposed to the gradualism of the traditional progression - refers to a doctrine common to the Greater Vehicle (*chōotsushō* 超越證, *vyutkrāntaka*). However, in the Method of the Way of the Saints based on personal power, this realization by jumps is only possible from the 8<sup>th</sup> of the ten stages; in Jōdo-Shinshū, on the other hand, it is accessible to anyone based on the practice and faith of [p. 108] the nembutsu, which instantly, in Shinran's words, make him "realize by jumps the great final nirvāṇa in the twilight of the very instant of death"<sup>163</sup>. In the case of ordinary people, this quite remarkable achievement is made possible, however, by the effectiveness of Amida's vows:

"Vehicled by the ship of karmic power of the Buddha's great Vow, they jump transversely over the ocean of births and deaths and reach the shore of the true Pure Land of retribution."<sup>164</sup>

Finally, Shinran concludes that the true disciples of Śākyamuni and all other Buddhas are those who follow the true doctrine of the Pure Land. Those who prefer a different Buddhist method are 'the provisional disciples'. As for the followers of all teachings other than Buddhism, they are called "false disciples". False disciples, but disciples nevertheless!<sup>165</sup>

4) To this doctrinal set defined by the three previous criteria, Shinran applies the new name of "True Pure Land School" (*Jōdo-Shinshū* 浄土真宗), which he understands in the following two ways. On the one hand, the Method of the Pure Land is the *true teaching of the Buddhas*, the very reason for their coming into this world, because this method is accessible to everyone, at all times and in all places. On the other hand, Shinran's own teaching is nothing else than the *true teaching within the various teachings of the Pure Land*, that of the "horizontal jump" based on the 18<sup>th</sup> vow, as opposed to [p. 109] the provisional teachings of the "horizontal exit" of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> vows. In this second sense, Shinran claims to stand as the continuation of the *true school of Hōnen*, rather than the divergent interpretations of some of his master's other disciples. This point is worth noting, as it sheds light on one of the important motivations of Shinran's work: to defend the tradition of his late master.

This aspect is rarely mentioned because the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū himself remains rather discreet on the subject. He was genuinely concerned about it, though, as can be seen in one of his letters where he praised his deceased fellow disciples, Seikaku and Ryūkan. Describing them as "good teachers for our times", he notes that nothing surpasses their writings "because they have already been born in the Pure Land", which was possible for them "because they had understood well the Teachings of His Holiness Hōnen"<sup>166</sup>. And Shinran continues with this observation:

<sup>163</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 103: "念佛衆生窮横超金剛心故, 臨終一念之夕, 超證大般涅槃" (T. 83, p. 609b / Jssz 2, p. 103).

<sup>164</sup> Shinran, *Ichinen-tannen mon'i*, § 4: "これは佛の大願業力の船に乗りぬれば、生死の大海をよこさまにこえて眞實報土の岸につくなり" (T. 83, p. 695a / Jssz 2, p. 664).

<sup>165</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 84: "釋迦諸佛之弟子, 金剛心行人也。由斯信行必可超證大涅槃故, 曰眞佛弟子"; § 106: "言假者, 即是聖道諸機, 浄土定散機也"; § 110: "言偽者, 則六十二見, 九十五種之邪道是也" (T. 83, pp. 608b, 609c / Jssz 2, pp. 98, 104).

<sup>166</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō*, 19: "それこそ、この世にとりてはよきひとびとにておはします。すでに往生をもしておはしますひとびとにて候へば、そのふみどもにかかれて候ふには、なにごともなにごともすぐべくも候はず。法然聖人の御をしへをよくよく御こころえたるひとびとにておはしますに候ひき。さればこそ往生もめでたくしておはしまし候へ" (T. 83, p. 719b / Jssz 2, p. 806).

"At present, the doctrine of nembutsu is undergoing all kinds of alterations that are not worth mentioning. However, for all those who have carefully received the Teachings of His late Holiness, its original form has not been altered until now. (...) Certainly all those who alter the doctrine of the Pure Land School (*Jōdoshū*) were also His Holiness' Disciples, but they transform it in such ways that they deceive themselves while deceiving others. How miserable that is! Even in the capital, there are many deceivers, so that I can't imagine [p. 110] what it is like in the countryside!"<sup>167</sup>

Shinran does not specify what these "alterations" are, nor does he mention the names of Hōnen's disciples referred to by these lines. Nevertheless, this quote provides a better understanding of why Shinran not only formulated his teachings in simple terms but also set about building as complete a system as possible.

## 2. The system

As the title of his main work, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, indicates, Shinran articulated his system according to the following four poles: teaching (*kyō* 教), practice (*gyō* 行), faith (*shin* 信), and realization (*shō* 證). Three of these are part of classical Buddhist dogmatics, according to which teaching is the basis of the practice that leads to realization. In Shinran's system, these three tenets are transposed as follows: the *teaching*, or scripture, that is the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life* establishes the *practice* of nembutsu, which leads to the *realization* of birth in the Pure Land. However, Shinran specifically adds the fourth element of *faith* to this in order to reveal the true dimension of nembutsu, which is not limited to the recitation of the name of the Buddha Amida, but embodies the sincerity of the latter working mysteriously in the heart of the practitioner.

In addition, Shinran bases his system entirely on the transfer of merits, the crucial role of which we have seen in the Greater [p. 111] Vehicle. The transfer of merits implies a double movement in the traditional path of a Bodhisattva. On the one hand, through the "transfer of merits in the going forth direction" (*ōsō-ekō* 往相廻向), he dedicates them to the realization of his own Awakening. On the other hand, through the "transfer of merits in the returning direction" (*gensō-ekō* 還相廻向), he devotes them to his return into the cycle of births and deaths in order to work towards the deliverance of beings according to his altruistic ideal. However, Shinran's real originality is to attribute this double transfer not to the nembutsu practitioner, but to the Buddha Amida only: it is through the transfer of merits accomplished by the Other Power of the Buddha's vows that the practitioner can go to be born in the Pure Land, whereas his own personal power would be incapable of it; and it is also through the transfer of Amida's merits that the practitioner can return without effort into the cycle of births and deaths to work for the deliverance of others.

According to Shinran, the transfer of Amida's merits in the going forth direction thus applies to the three elements of practice, faith and realization, according to the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> vows respectively; while the transfer of his merits in the returning direction constitutes the second phase of realization according to Amida's 22<sup>nd</sup> vow. In this way,

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<sup>167</sup> Shinran's letter, *ibid.*: “この世の念佛の義はやうやうにかはりあうて候ふめれば、とかく申すにおよばず候へども、故聖人の御をしへをよくよくうけたまはりておはしますひとびとは、いまもとのやうにかはらせたまふこと候はず。(…) 浄土宗の義、みなかはりておはしましあうて候ふひとびとも、聖人の御弟子にて候へども、やうやうに義をもちかへなどして、身もまどひ、ひとをもまどはかしあうて候ふめり。京にもおほくまどひあうて候ふめり。まして、みなかはさこそ候ふらめと、こころにくくも候はず” (T. 83, pp. 719c-720a / Jssz 2, p. 808).

Shinran "settles" his doctrine of deliverance by the only and absolute effective deliverance of Amida's vows:

"The teaching, practice, faith, and realization of the true Doctrine (*Shinshū* 眞宗) are the benefits transferred by the great compassion of the Tathāgata. Therefore, whether it is the cause or the fruit, there is nothing that is not the accomplishment of the transfer of the pure heart of the Vow of the Tathāgata Amida. Since the cause is pure, the fruit is [p. 112] pure too."<sup>168</sup>

### 3. Hermeneutics

As innovative as it is, Shinran's interpretation nevertheless follows the rules of the most classical Buddhist hermeneutics, and in particular that of the "four recourses" (*shie* 四依), which he takes care to recall in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. This method consists of using:

i) recourse to the Scriptures (*hō* 法), rather than individuals (*nin* 人), even the Buddha himself;

ii) recourse to the spirit - or meaning (*gi* 義) of the Scriptures, rather than their words (*go* 語);

(iii) recourse to direct knowledge (*chi* 智) issued from practice, rather than mere discursive knowledge (*shiki* 識) from hearing and reflection.

(iv) recourse to explicit sūtras (*ryōgi kyō* 了義經), rather than sūtras to be interpreted (*furyōgi kyō* 不了義經)<sup>169</sup>.

Of course, such a method offers a very wide range of interpretation, which explains the sheer volume of Buddhist exegesis accumulated over the ages, all traditions combined. To stick to the Pure Land, it is this hermeneutics that allows a master as renowned as Shandao to freely paraphrase even the most essential passages of the sūtras, instead of quoting them literally. Here, for example, is the text of the 18<sup>th</sup> vow, the keystone of the Pure Land tradition, as it appears in the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*: [p. 113]

"If I should attain Buddhahood, and beings of the Ten Directions desire *with sincere heart and joyful faith* to be born in my realm in but ten nembutsu, and should they not be born there, I would not take the perfect Awakening. With the exception only of [those who are perpetrating] the five perversions and slandering the correct Law."<sup>170</sup>

And here is the paraphrase given by Shandao in his *Commentary*:

"If I should attain Buddhahood, and beings of the Ten Directions wishing to be born in my realm *pronounce my name* down to ten nembutsu, and should they not be born there, I would not take the perfect Awakening."<sup>171</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 4, § 13: “夫案眞宗教行信證者, 如來大悲回向之利益。故若因果, 無有一事非阿彌陀如來清淨願心之所回向成就。因淨因果亦淨也”(T. 83, p. 617a / Jssz 2, p. 137).

<sup>169</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 71 (T. 83, p. 633a / Jssz 2, pp. 210-211), quoting Nāgārjuna's *Daichidoron*, vol. 9: “佛欲入涅槃時, 語諸比丘從。今日應依法不依人, 應依義不依語, 應依智不依識, 應依了義經不依未了義”(T. 25, 1509, p. 125a).

<sup>170</sup> *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, vol. 1: “設我得佛, 十方衆生至心信樂, 欲生我國, 乃至十念, 若不生者不取正覺。唯除五逆誹謗正法”(T. 12, p. 268a / Jssz 1, p. 25).

<sup>171</sup> Shandao, *Kangyōsho*, vol. 1: “若我得佛, 十方衆生稱我名號, 願生我國, 下至十念, 若不生者不取正覺”(T. 37, p. 250b / Jssz 1, p. 674). Quoted in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 5, § 30 (T. 83, p. 625b / Jssz 2, p. 175).



Let's face it, the difference is significant! While it is not necessary to explain it further here, it should be noted that the legitimacy of such an interpretation cannot be called into question since it can rightly claim to be based on the orthodox rules of Buddhist hermeneutics, and, in particular, the second of them, which privileges meaning over letter. Moreover, Shandao could claim an antecedent: his own master Daochuo had already formulated a paraphrase of the 18<sup>th</sup> vow:

"If there are beings who, even if they have committed evil throughout their lives, as they approach the end of their lives, *pronounce my name* in a succession of ten nembustu, should they not be born there, I would not take the perfect Awakening".<sup>172</sup>

[p. 114]

Again, by claiming to be from the lineage of Daochuo and Shandao, Hōnen - Shinran's master - would also formulate his own paraphrase, in his *Summary of the Pure Land School*, written for Masako, the widow of shōgun Minamoto Yoritomo:

"If I become a Buddha and beings of the Ten Directions who wish to be born in my realm by *pronouncing my name, conveyed by the power of my Vow*, down to ten exclamations, are not born there, I vow not to become a Buddha."<sup>173</sup>

These quotations clearly show how Shandao's tradition increasingly insists on the vocal dimension of the nembutsu as the pronunciation of the Buddha Amida's name as against a meditative dimension through the contemplation of his marks, while Hōnen also makes explicit the link that conditions this interpretation with the Primal Vow of the Buddha.

It is precisely by insisting even more on this vow that Shinran stands out from his predecessors. Actually, when he mentions the Primal Vow (*hongan* 本願), it is not simply the vow as such, as it could then be just as much an empty promise. When Shinran mentions it, it is always in the perspective of the efficiency or power of this vow (*ganriki* 願力), in the sense that the Bodhisattva Dharmākara has indeed already brought it to accomplishment, as shown by his own realization of Awakening under the name of 'Buddha Amida'. This original approach of Shinran's was notably inspired by Tanluan's analysis of the word "accomplishment" (*jōju* 成就):

"Today, the Tathāgata Amida masters his sublime power based on the forty-eight vows [he produced when he was] [p. 115] the Bodhisattva Dharmākara in his original stage. By his vows, he realized (*jō* 成) his power; and by his power, he fulfilled (*ju* 就) his vows. His vows were not useless, and his power was not installed in vain. His power and his vows are consistent, and ultimately they do not differ from each other"<sup>174</sup>.

So much so that it is not on the text of the vow as it appears in the first volume of the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life* on which Shinran will concentrate his comments, but on the one describing the fulfillment of the vow (*ganjōju* 願成就), which is found in the second

<sup>172</sup> Daochuo, *Anrakushū*, vol. 1, ch. 3: “若有衆生，縱令一生造惡，臨命終時，十念相續稱我名字，若不生者，不取正覺” (T. 47, p. 13c / Jssz 1, p. 613).

<sup>173</sup> Hōnen, *Jōdoshū ryakushō* 淨土宗略抄: “もしわれほとけにならんに，十方の衆生，わがくににむまれんとねがひて，わが名號をとふ事，下十聲にいたるまでわが願力に乗して，もしむまれずば，われほとけにならじとちがひ給ひて”; in Ryōe, *Kurodani Shōnin wagotōroku*, vol. 2 (T. 83, 2611, p. 195bc / Jssz 6, pp. 482-483). In Hōnen's quotation, the italicized passages can be traced back to the Preface of Shandao's *Ōjō raisange* (T. 47, p. 439b / Jssz 1, p. 915).

<sup>174</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 2, § 89: “依本法藏菩薩四十八願，今日阿彌陀如來自在神力。願以成力，力以就願。願不徒然，力不虛設。力願相符，畢竟不差” (T. 40, p. 840a / Jssz 1, p. 510). Quoted twice by Shinran in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*: ch. 2, § 93, and ch. 5, § 28 (T. 83, pp. 599a & 624c / Jssz 2, pp. 56 & 172-173).

volume of the sūtra. It is here that the originality of Shinran's interpretation appears. At first glance, the original text of this passage reads as follows:

“All beings who hear his name have faith in it and rejoice in it, in but a single nembutsu [of faith]: transferring their merits with a sincere heart, they vow to be born in his realm, immediately obtain to go to be born there, and remain in the irreversible”.<sup>175</sup>

Let us now focus on the expression "transferring their merits" in Japanese. The Chinese original, without conjugation and declination, contains only two characters that can literally be read as "transfer [of merits]" (*ekō* 廻向). It is therefore up to the reader to restore them within the framework of Japanese grammar, by adding the necessary verbal ending, i.e. "*ekō-shite*" (廻向して), which means "transferring their merits". This reading follows the internal logic of the text: beings who have [p. 116] obtained faith transfer their own merits to be born in the Pure Land. However, Shinran chooses the verbal ending of a form of politeness (*ekō-seshimetamaeri* 廻向せしめたまへり), in order to attribute this transfer of merits solely to the Buddha Amida, which gives the following reading:

"All beings who hear his name have faith and rejoice in it, in but a single nembutsu while by His sincere heart He transfers His merits, and they vow to be born in his land, immediately obtain to be born there, and remain in the irreversible."<sup>176</sup>

Shinran makes this reading explicit in one of his other comments on the same passage:

"The transfer of merits is the Principle by which he gives His name to the beings of the ten directions."<sup>177</sup>

While Amida's name is indeed the vector for the transfer of his merits, as Hōnen already established (*sup.* p. 48), Shinran identifies it more specifically with the very concretization of the sincere heart of the Buddha:

"The Tathāgata with his pure and true heart accomplished the supreme merits of non-obstruction of full communication, which are inconceivable, inexpressible, and inexplicable. The sincere heart of the Tathāgata, He transfers it to the sea of all the multitudes with their passions, evil acts, and false wisdom. This reveals his true heart in favor of others. (...) *This sincere heart has as its substantial core (tai 髓) the [p. 117] venerable name with supreme merits*".<sup>178</sup>

In so far as the sincere heart is no longer a required quality of the practitioner, but rather the manifestation in the latter of the virtues of Amida, the same is logically true of the two other spiritual dispositions mentioned by the 18<sup>th</sup> vow, namely rejoiced faith and the desire for birth in the Pure Land:

<sup>175</sup> *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, vol. 2, § 22: “諸有衆生聞其名號, 信心歡喜乃至一念, 至心迴向願生彼國, 即得往生住不退轉” (T. 12, p. 272b / Jssz 1, p. 43).

<sup>176</sup> Shinran: *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 4 (T. 83, p. 601a / Jssz 2, p. 68); in Japanese: “あらゆる衆生, その名號を聞きて, 信心歡喜せんこと, 乃至一念せん。至心に迴向せしめたまへり。かの國に生ぜん願ぜば, すなはち往生を得, 不退轉に住”。

<sup>177</sup> Shinran: *Ichinen-tannen mon'i*, § 2: “迴向は, 本願の名號をもつて十方の衆生にあたへたまふ御のりなり” (T. 83, p. 694b / Jssz 2, p. 662).

<sup>178</sup> Shinran: *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 21: “如來以清淨真心成就圓融無礙不可思議不可稱不可說至德。以如來至心, 回施諸有一切煩惱惡業邪智群生海。則是彰利他真心。 (...) 斯至心則是至德尊號爲其體也” (T. 83, p. 604ab / Jssz 2, pp. 80-81).

"Rejoiced faith is the great perfect compassion of the Tathāgata, the sea of faith of unobstruction of full communication. (...) It is the *sincere heart* transferred in favour of others that is the substantial core of rejoiced faith."<sup>179</sup>

"The desire for birth is the decree of the Primal Vow that calls out to the multitude of beings. It is *true rejoiced faith* that is the essential core of desire for birth in the Pure Land".<sup>180</sup>

These few quotes only shed some light on Shinran's subtle analyses, but they should be enough to demonstrate that his doctrine represents much more than a simple "fideism" or "pietism" within Buddhism, as it is most often presented in Western sources.

Shinran's original interpretation of the passage on the fulfilment of the 18<sup>th</sup> vow stands at the heart of his doctrine, and he supports it by applying his method of interpretation to other passages of the Scriptures also. Admittedly, this reading is not the first to come to mind in view of the original Chinese text; however, neither is it a forced reading of the text as, in accordance with traditional usage, Japanese [p. 118] grammatical indications are noted in the margins beside the Chinese characters, without altering them, in small Japanese letters (*okurigana*). Nevertheless, the audacity of Shinran's interpretation is worthy of that of the earlier paraphrases of the 18<sup>th</sup> vow by Daochuo, Shandao, and Hōnen. Shandao in particular was conscious of his own originality, and he sought confirmation of his intuition by invoking the testimony of "all the Buddhas of the Three Times", a confirmation which he actually obtained through visions received in *samādhi* meditation. In the end, Shandao concludes:

"Since my interpretation has indeed been certified by the testimony I requested, not a single sentence, not a single word should be added or removed from it! Whoever wants to copy it should do so whole-heartedly as he would for a sūtra!"<sup>181</sup>

Shinran however does not bother with such precautions. For him, his own experience of nembutsu faith is a sufficient guarantor, which corresponds well to the third of the four hermeneutical recourses: direct knowledge coming from practice. This is what finally allows him to affirm with no ambiguity:

"After all, such is the heart of faith of an imbecile like me! On this point, whether you accept the nembutsu with faith or reject it, it depends only on the calculation (*hakarai*) of each one of you."<sup>182</sup>

Although this overview of Shinran's doctrine is necessarily [p. 119] brief in relation to the volume of available sources, it is hoped that it nevertheless presents the essential elements for understanding some of the characteristic implications of his teachings. And it is to some of them that we will now turn.

<sup>179</sup> Shinran: *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 28: "信樂者, 則是如來滿足大悲圓融無礙信心海。 (...) 即以利他回向之至心, 爲信樂體也" (T. 83, p. 604c / Jssz 2, p. 83).

<sup>180</sup> Shinran: *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 39: "言欲生者, 則是如來招喚, 諸有群生之勅命。即以眞實信樂爲欲生體也" (T. 83, p. 605c / Jssz 2, p. 87).

<sup>181</sup> Shandao: *Kangyōsho*, vol. 4: "某, 今欲出此觀經要義楷定古今, 若稱三世諸佛釋迦佛阿彌陀佛等大悲願意者, 願於夢中, 得見如上所願一切境界諸相。 (...) 此義已請證定竟, 一句一字不可加減。欲寫者一如經法" (T. 37, p. 278bc / Jssz 1, pp. 793-794). Fully quoted in Hōnen's *Senjakushū*, ch. 16 (T. 83, p. 19bc / Jssz 1, pp. 1326-1327).

<sup>182</sup> Shinran quoted in *Tannishō*, ch. 2: "詮ずるところ, 愚身の信心におきてはかくのごとし。このうへは、念佛をとりて信じたてまつらんとも, またすてんとも, 面々の御はからひなり" (T. 83, p. 728c / Jssz 2, p. 1055).

[p. 121]

### Chapter 3. The spiritual dimension of Shinran

More than through a true comprehension of his doctrine, it is above all through its concrete consequences that the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū is usually mentioned in the West, as shown by the quote from Albert Schweitzer cited at the beginning of this work. This approach is rather restrictive as it overlooks Shinran's true spiritual dimension. Before discussing the latter, let us however try to place the moral implications of nembutsu's faith within their proper doctrinal framework.

#### 1. Ethics

We have seen that both the unlimited compassion of the Buddha Amida and the principle of transforming evil into good (*sup.* p. 56) mean that, in absolute terms, the method of Jōdo-Shinshū transcends the notions of good and evil, as Shinran states unequivocally:

"Know that Amida's Primal Vow does not choose between [p. 122] young and old, or between good and bad, and that faith alone matters! The reason for this is that it is his Vow to relieve beings overwhelmed by evil from their faults and inflamed by their passions."<sup>183</sup>

However, according to a constant principle of Buddhism, the “work of a Buddha” after his Awakening (*buddhakārya*, *butsuji* 佛事) is not so ethereal that it does not concretely adapt to the conditions of those beings to be delivered, as Shinran also understood when he wrote:

"Let us examine how the Tathāgata made his Vow:  
Instead of abandoning sentient beings in their torments,  
He placed them at the head of the transfer of his merits  
So that his great compassion might be accomplished."<sup>184</sup>

And this is how the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū came to formulate this axiom that earned him fame:

"[The Buddha Amida] made his Vow out of compassion for us who are full of passions and cannot free ourselves from the cycle of births and deaths by any practice whatsoever. Since its *raison d'être* is that the bad become Buddha (*akunin jōbutsu* 悪人成佛), the bad who have faith in the Other Power are therefore par excellence the true motive of [the vow of] birth in the Pure Land. Therefore, even the good will be born in the Pure Land, let alone the bad!"<sup>185</sup> [p. 123]

This famous formula is therefore not a joke, but part of a spiritual reflection that gives it its originality, and which leads to this logical conclusion:

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<sup>183</sup> Shinran quoted in *Tannishō*, ch. 1: “彌陀の本願には、老少善悪のひとをえらばれず、ただ信心を要とすとするべし。そのゆゑは、罪悪深重煩惱熾盛の衆生をたすけんがための願にまします” (T. 83, p. 728ab / Jssz 2, p. 1053).

<sup>184</sup> Shinran, *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 38: “如來の作願をたづぬれば、苦惱の有情をすてずして、廻向を首としたまひて、大悲心をば成就せり” (T. 83, p. 66 6a / Jssz 2, p. 487).

<sup>185</sup> Shinran quoted in *Tannishō*, ch. 3: “煩惱具足のわれらは、いづれの行にても生死をはなるることあるべからざるを、あはれみたまひて願をおこしたまふ本意、悪人成佛のためなれば、他力をたのみたてまつる悪人、もつとも往生の正因なり。よつて善人だにこそ往生すれ、まして悪人はと、仰せ候ひき” (T. 83, pp. 728c-729a / Jssz 2, p. 1055).

"Even those who admirably preserve all the various kinds of precepts will attain birth in the true Pure Land of retribution only after having obtained the true heart of faith of the Other Power. Know that we are not born in the true Pure Land of retribution by ourselves, be it through all the good deeds of the precepts, the faith of personal power, or the good deeds of personal power."<sup>186</sup>

### a) The end does not justify the means

As can be imagined, such reasoning carried within it the seeds of the most licentious excesses. Already, it appeared implicitly in Hōnen's teachings, and he had to challenge the position of some followers who claimed that "to fear faults is to doubt the Primordial Vow". But Shinran faced an even more pernicious and cynical deviance, as reported in the *Tannishō*:

"In the past, there was one who had fallen into wrong views and said: 'Since the Vow is to rescue those who commit evil, I prefer to commit evil deliberately as karma to be born in the Pure Land!' When his bad deeds were reported to him, [Shinran] made this remark in a letter: 'Just because the antidote exists does not mean you should prefer poison!'"<sup>187</sup>

In fact, it is not in Shinran's doctrinal treatises but in his [p. 124] correspondence that we shall find his answers to the moral questions raised by his contemporaries. And there we see him clearly distinguishing between bad actions accomplished "recklessly, through the disruption of passions", and those committed deliberately, which he considers perfectly "unworthy"<sup>188</sup>. In short, this amounts to placing again the nembutsu practice within the framework of the karmic doctrine of intention (*sup.* p. 49).

### b) Life in nembutsu

At this point the question arises of whether Shinran expected his disciples to translate their faith into action, through moral conduct. The subject is not addressed in his dogmatic works, but some of his letters show a nuanced approach, as can be seen in the following:

"People who have long been in the situation of hearing the Name of the Buddha [Amida] and saying the nembutsu can be recognized through their revulsion for the evil in our world and for evil in themselves.

As for those who are only beginning to hear the Buddha's Vow, they come to know the evil of their own heart and thoughts, and then wonder how they will be born in the Pure Land in their present state. To these, we start by saying: 'It is because we are full of passion that He welcomes us without judging the good and evil of our heart'.

Having heard this, their faith in the Buddha deepens, and they really feel revulsion for themselves, while feeling saddened for having to transmigrate [in *samsāra*]. As they

<sup>186</sup> Shinran, *Yuishinshō mon'i*, § 3: “かやうのさまさまの戒品をたもてるいみじきひとびとも、他力眞實の信心をえてのちに眞實報土には往生をとぐるなり。みづからの、おのおのの戒善、おのおのの自力の信、自力の善にては眞報土には生れずとなり” (T. 83, pp. 701c, 707b / Jssz 2, p. 696).

<sup>187</sup> *Tannishō* 歎異抄, ch. 13: “そのかみ邪見におちたるひとあつて、悪をつくりたるものをたすけんといふ願にてましませばとて、わざとこのみて悪をつくりて、往生の業とすべきよしをいひて、やうやうにあしざまなることきこえ候ひしとき、御消息に、薬あればとて、毒をこのむべからずと” (T. 83, p. 731c / Jssz 2, pp. 1064-1065).

<sup>188</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 16: “煩惱にくるはされて”, “かへすがへすあるまじきこと” (T. 83, p. 718a / Jssz 2, p. 802).

have deep faith in his Vow and prefer to say the name of the [p. 125] Buddha Amida, these people, who originally had the heart to think and do evil, now end up thinking about abandoning that very heart - which is also aversion towards our world."<sup>189</sup>

It is important to note that *nowhere* in the many available sources does Shinran require of the practitioner a conduct that would guarantee the authenticity of his faith. As far as morality is concerned, it can only be a natural and spontaneous consequence, dependent on the intimate experience of the faithful. We also see that while Shinran's doctrine is that of absolute faith, its emergence is nevertheless modulated according to the spiritual dispositions of each person. And, quite naturally, these nuances will be found in the exercise of nembutsu:

"Those who judge that their birth in the Pure Land is not fixed will first say the nembutsu thinking of their own birth in the Pure Land.

As for those who consider that their birth in the Pure Land is fixed once and for all, they will remember the Benevolence of the Buddha: having introduced the nembutsu into their hearts, they will say it out of gratitude for his Benevolence, while thinking: 'May the Buddha's Law spread and the world [p. 126] be at peace!'"<sup>190</sup>

### c) Neither cleric nor layman

Finally, let us come to Shinran's famous position on monastic discipline. It is one of the most frequently mentioned yet least well understood aspects of him.

First of all, let us note that Shinran never expressed himself on this issue! Moreover, he was not the first Japanese Buddhist cleric to have a wife and children, as the available historical sources sufficiently prove. Other notable cases are his fellow disciples Ryūkan and Seikaku: the former had three sons, all of whom became Tendai monks, while the latter was not only the son of a cleric but also became the father, grandfather and great-grandfather of clerics.

In fact, Shinran's own position is known only by inference from the rather singular episode of his union with Eshinni, the specificity of which lies in the fact that it seems to have been claimed as a true marriage and that it was endorsed by Hōnen (*sup.* p. 32). However, the latter's own position is quite distinctive. He was privileged enough to have received the authorization to transmit the precepts of the Greater Vehicle according to the Tendai tradition (*endonkai* 圓頓戒), through a particularly venerable unbroken lineage, which had been introduced into Japan by Ennin, Saichō's disciple, and which went back to

<sup>189</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 20, dated 1252: “佛の御名をもきき念佛を申して、ひさしくなりておはしまさんひとびとは、後世のあしきことをいとふしるし、この身のあしきことをばいとひすてんとおぼしめすしるしも候ふべしとこそおぼえ候へ。はじめて佛のちかひをききはじむるひとびとの、わが身のわるくこころのわるきをおもひしりて、この身のやうにてはなんぞ往生せんずるといふひとにこそ、煩惱具足したる身なれば、わがこころの善悪をば沙汰せず、迎へたまふぞとは申し候へ。かくききてのち、佛を信ぜんとおもふこころふかくなりぬるには、まことにこの身をもいとひ、流轉せんことをもかなしみて、ふかくちかひをも信じ、阿彌陀佛をも好みまうしなんどするひとは、もところころのままにてあしきことをもおもひ、あしきことをもふるまひなんどせしかども、いまはさやうのこころをすてんとおぼしめしあはせたまはばこそ、世をいとふしるしにても候はめ” (T. 83, p. 721ab / Jss 2, p. 812).

<sup>190</sup> Shinran's letter, *Shinran Shōnin goshōsoku-shū* 2: “往生を不定におぼしめさんひと、まづわが身の往生をおぼしめして、御念佛候ふべし。わが身の往生一定とおぼしめさんひと、佛の御恩をおぼしめさんに、御報恩のために御念佛こころにいれて申して、世のなか安穩なれ、佛法ひろまれとおぼしめすべしとぞ、おぼえ候ふ” (T. 83, p. 723a / Jss 2, p. 830).

the Chinese master Huisi 慧思 (515-517)<sup>191</sup>. However, while Hōnen was rightly known for the sanctity of [p. 127] his personal life, he nevertheless considered that discipline was not a necessary condition for birth in the Pure Land, and he did not make his personal case a general rule. Here, it should be recalled that Buddhist precepts do not correspond to "commandments" of the type known in Mosaic Law, but are rather personal commitments within the framework of self-discipline. As such, the *discipline of precepts* constitutes the first of the "three trainings" (*sangaku* 三學) constituting Buddhist practice, and serves as a foundation for the second of these, *meditation*, which, in turn, supports the third, *wisdom*. However, according to Hōnen, this triple training is the hallmark of the Method of the Way of the Saints and does not concern the Method of the Pure Land, especially since the former Way had become impassable during the period of the vanishing of the Law. In these conditions, all disciplinary rules had themselves become obsolete, as Hōnen states:

"The rule of those who keep or violate the precepts falls within the periods of Correct or Copied Law. But in the vanishing of the Law, there are *bhikṣu* (monks) in name only, without precepts."<sup>192</sup>

Hōnen based his argument on the *Memory of the Lamp in the vanishing of the Law*, a work by Saichō known for this famous statement:

"If there were anyone in the vanishing of the Law to keep the precepts, it would be as surprising as a tiger in the market! Who could believe it?"<sup>193</sup>

It should nevertheless be noted that Saichō composed his [p. 128] thesis as a demonstration of the obsolescence of the precepts of the *Smaller Vehicle* alone, in order to justify his introduction of the discipline of the Greater Vehicle into Japan.

Shinran, following the logic of his awareness of the vanishing of the Law, took up this argument and applied it to the precepts of the *Greater Vehicle* themselves. He reappropriated the *Memory of the Lamp* to the point of quoting it almost fully in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in which this significant passage in particular is reproduced:

"During the vanishing of the Law, there is only teaching in words, but no practice or realization any more. Were there any elements of the precepts, they could be violated; but since there is no longer the element of the precepts, what precepts could be violated so that there is a violation of the precepts? If the violation of precepts no longer exists, then even less so does the keeping of precepts!"<sup>194</sup>

In the light of this, Shinran's marriage can therefore be reappraised. By marrying Eshinni, the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū did not violate the precept of celibacy as there was no longer any precept to break and furthermore, he never considered abolishing any discipline whatsoever. Shinran even found confirmation of his line of reasoning in quotes provided by the *Memory of the Lamp*, such as this excerpt from the *Sūtra of Great Māyā* predicting:

<sup>191</sup> Magnin, Paul: *La vie et l'œuvre de Huisi 慧思 (515-597), les origines de la secte bouddhique du Tiantai* (Paris, Adrien Maisonneuve, 1979).

<sup>192</sup> Hōnen quoted in Shinran's *Saihō shinanshō*, vol. 1a: "持戒の人破戒を制することは、正法像法のときなり。末法には無戒名字の比丘なり" (T. 83, p. 851a / Jssz 3, p. 876).

<sup>193</sup> Saichō's *Mappō tōmyōki* 末法燈明記, also quoted in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 80: "設末法中有持戒者, 既是怪異, 如市有虎。此誰可信" (T. 83, p. 634a / Jssz 2, p. 216).

<sup>194</sup> Saichō's *Mappō tōmyōki*, in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 80: "然則於末法中, 但有言教而無行證。若有戒法, 可有破戒。既無戒法, 由破何戒而有破戒。破戒尚無, 何況持戒" (T. 83, p. 634a / Jssz 2, p. 215).

"In the 11<sup>th</sup> century [after Śākyamuni's death], monks and nuns will marry and violate and revile the monks' *Vinaya* (monastic code); in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, all monks and nuns will [p. 129] have children together".<sup>195</sup>

Or this more picturesque passage from the *Sūtra of Great Compassion*:

"The Buddha said to Ānanda: "In the coming times, when my Law is about to disappear, there will be *bhikṣu* (monks) and *bhikṣuṇī* (nuns) who will be ordained in accordance with my Law but who will take their own children by the hand and together will visit one liquor store after another".<sup>196</sup>

Whatever Shinran's conception of his status as a married cleric was, it was shattered during his exile. His conviction in 1207 robbed him of his clerical status (*sōgi* 僧儀) in the same way that his ordination in 1181 had deprived him of his civil status, and so he considered himself no longer cleric nor layman (*hisō hizoku* 非僧非俗). This unprecedented situation was therefore not originally of Shinran's choice: it was his conviction in 1207 that officially confirmed the condition that had existed *de facto* his since his marriage in 1205. On the other hand, he did claim this status after his amnesty, by taking the nickname "Bald the Imbecile" (*Gutoku* 愚禿), by which he simultaneously assumed his secularism *and* his clerical condition. "Imbecile" is the term used by the *Sūtra of Contemplations* to designate people in the three lowest of the nine classes of beings who are born in the Pure Land, and it is to be taken in the literal sense of the weakness of ordinary ignorant people, while "Bald" refers to the shaven head of the monk.

During the last fifty years of his life, Shinran's secular status [p. 130] would be made apparent as his offspring grew up, while his clerical condition was displayed by keeping the *tonsure* and wearing the traditional Buddhist *habit* (*teihatsu zenne* 剃髮染衣). This last point is particularly significant and well attested by the portraits realised in the last years of his life, such as the "Mirror Portrait" (*Kagami no goei* 鏡御影) and the "Portrait of Anjō" (*Anjō no goei* 安城御影), both of which are still preserved at the Honganji. In these, Shinran is represented with a shaven head and dressed in the clothing of a Buddhist cleric, the essential element of which is the *kesa* 袈裟 (*kāṣāya*), resembling a simple cloth wrapped around the waist and held by a strap passing over the left shoulder. It is important as the sign of the Community (*Samgha*), one of the Three Jewels in which every Buddhist takes refuge, the two other being the Buddha and his Law (Dharma). The *kesa* is actually one of the "Three Jewels in tangible form" (*jūji sambō* 住持三寶), just as images of the Buddha and volumes of the Dharma Scriptures are the tangible signs of the other two Jewels. As confirmation of the value Shinran attributed to this piece of religious costume, he referred to the *kesa* as "the sacred costume, the banner of the deliverance of the Buddhas of the Three Times"<sup>197</sup>.

One may wonder why Shinran, who presented himself as "neither cleric nor layman", still wore the *kesa*, even though he had been defrocked at the time of his conviction. It is once again the *Memory of the Lamp* that provides us with the answer. According to the latter, clerics who violate the discipline but nevertheless keep the tonsure and wear the

<sup>195</sup> *Daijukkūyō* 大術經 as quoted in *Mappō tōmyōki* in *Kyōgyōshinshō* vol. 6, § 80: "千一百年, 僧尼嫁娶, 毀謗僧毘尼。千二百年, 諸僧尼等俱有子息" (T. 83, p. 633c / Jssz 2, p. 214; cf. T. 12, 383, p. 1013b).

<sup>196</sup> *Daihikyō* 大悲經 as quoted in *Mappō tōmyōki* in *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 80: "佛告阿難。於將來世法欲滅盡時, 當有比丘比丘尼, 於我法中得出家, 己手牽兒臂而共遊行, 彼酒家至酒家" (T. 83, p. 635a; Jssz 2, p. 220; cf. T. 12, 380, p. 958a).

<sup>197</sup> Shinran quoted in Kakunyo's *Kudenshō* (see bibliography), vol. 1, ch. 8: "*sanze no shobutsu no gedatsu dōsō no reifuku* 三世の諸佛解脱幢相の靈服" (T. 83, p. 742b / Jssz 4, p. 259).



*kesa* are "monks in name" only (*myōji biku* 名字比丘); and yet, in the absence of regular monks, it is these monks in name who constitute "the true jewel of the world" during the period of vanishing of the [p. 131] Law, as they are the last to incarnate the Community Jewel<sup>198</sup>.

In short, tonsured and dressed in the *kesa*, Shinran respected all the appearances of a monk during the vanishing of the Law, as described by the Scriptures. One may therefore also wonder why Shinran considered himself "neither a cleric nor a layman", rather than "both a cleric and a layman". In fact, by rejecting the association of the two conventional statuses of cleric and layman, the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū attributed a third and unprecedented dimension to his vocation. This singularity is reflected in one last detail of clothing: the *kesa* worn by Shinran was black, the colour used by clerics who lived withdrawn from the great monastic institutions; however its strap was white, following the indications of the *Sūtra of Great Māyā*, according to which the decadence of monastic discipline would cause the *kesa* to change to white during the thirteenth century following the death of the Buddha, white being the traditional colour of the laity in India<sup>199</sup>.

## 2. Spirituality

It is undoubtedly difficult to try to define Shinran's intimate spiritual experience in words, especially since he did not leave any spiritual diary. However, we can get an idea of it through a few passages of his works, where he does express his personal feelings. Two apparently contradictory excerpts from the *Kyōgyōshinshō* are particularly worth mentioning here in [p. 132] parallel:

"Truly, I know it! What a pity that I, Gutoku 'Ran, drown myself in the immense sea of loving desire and lose myself in the great mountain of fame and profit, without rejoicing in entering the number of the group of fixed [in the true], nor relishing in approaching the realization of true realization. What a shame! What sadness!"<sup>200</sup>

"What joy! My heart is rooted in the soil of the Buddha which is his universal Vow, and my thoughts flow into the sea of the Law which is difficult to conceive! I know deeply the pity of the Tathāgata and I really admire the kindness of the masters' teaching! As my joy increases, my gratitude doubles!"<sup>201</sup>

Shinran's spiritual experience thus seems to be part of a radical introspection of his human nature, which could seem almost desperate if it were not coupled with an absolute and optimistic abandonment to the compassion of the Buddha. This dynamic which results in a deep sense of gratitude is clearly expressed in these much-quoted statements:

"To reflect carefully on the Vow that had been meditated during five cosmic periods by 'Mida, I conclude that it was only for me, Shinran, alone! And so, how obliging is his Primal Vow designed to rescue someone as overwhelmed by his karma as I am!"<sup>202</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Saichō's *Mappō tōmyōki*, in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 80: "但今所論末法, 唯有名字比丘。此名字爲世眞寶" (T. 83, p. 634a / Jssz 2, p. 216).

<sup>199</sup> *Daijukkūyō* 大術經 as quoted in Saichō's *Mappō tōmyōki* quoted in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 80: "千三百年袈裟變白" (T. 83, p. 633c Jssz 2, p. 214; cf. T. 12, 383, p. 1013b).

<sup>200</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 113: "誠知。悲哉愚禿鸞, 沈沒於愛欲廣海, 迷惑於名利太山, 不喜入定聚之數, 不快近眞證之證。可耻可傷矣" (T. 83, p. 609c / Jssz 2, p. 105).

<sup>201</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 118: "慶哉。樹心弘誓佛地, 流念難思法海。深知如來矜哀, 良仰師教恩厚。慶喜彌至。至孝彌重" (T. 83, p. 643a / Jssz 2, p. 255).

<sup>202</sup> Shinran quoted in *Tannishō*, conclusion: "彌陀の五劫思惟の願をよくよく案ずれば, ひとへに親鸞一

[p. 133]

It is clearly observable that this double movement corresponds perfectly to the double conviction that characterizes the faith described by Shandao (*sup.* p. 49). Beyond the dryness of doctrinal definitions, we also discover in Shinran a man whose consciousness of his own finitude is the basis of his openness towards a transcendent dimension, to which he will prove to be the equal.

### a) Pilgrimage towards the truth

This transcendent dimension was not immediately discovered by Shinran. In fact, his personal journey had progressed through three main stages. The first was that of the Pure Land's various meditative practices according to Tendai doctrine during his stay on Mount Hiei. The second stage corresponds to his encounter with Hōnen and the exclusive practice of vocal nembutsu preached by the latter. The third, finally, was the obtention of the absolute, adamant faith in the sole effectiveness of Amida's vows.

Shinran himself was perfectly aware of this spiritual pilgrimage, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* formally identifying his progressive passage between, respectively, the 19<sup>th</sup> vow (various practices), 20<sup>th</sup> vow (vocal nembutsu), and 18<sup>th</sup> vow (nembutsu's true faith)<sup>203</sup>. However, while the first two steps are easily identifiable in Shinran's life (*sup.* p. 30), this is not the case for the third, which is not precisely datable. It is clearly dependent on Shinran's discovery of the notion of "Other Power" in the works of Tanluan, a master whom Hōnen almost never mentions. The importance of Tanluan is so decisive for [p. 134] the evolution of the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū that it is reflected in the name "Shinran" (親鸞) that he eventually adopted: "ran" is the second character of Tanluan's name (曇鸞), pronounced "Donran" in Japanese, while "Shin" is the second character of the Chinese name of Vasubandhu (世親), the author of the *Treatise* commented on by Tanluan, pronounced "Seshin" in Japanese.

Moreover, the third and last stage of Shinran's journey also seems related to the episode of 1214 during which he abandoned his recitation a thousand times of the *Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras* (*sup.* p. 35). Although it is difficult to be any more precise, Shinran's absolute faith appears therefore to be the result of a maturing process that lasted for some time. Proof of this is the additional episode of his life that occurred in 1231. In the summer of that year, Shinran remained bedridden for a few days with a high fever, during which time he began silently reading the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, when he experienced this flash of lucidity:

"Apart from the faith of nembutsu (*nembutsu no shinjin* 念佛の信心), what else should I have in mind?"

Linking this to his attempt, seventeen years earlier, to recite the *Pure Land Trilogy* a thousand times over, Shinran abandoned his reading of the sūtra, after concluding that "careful thought must be given to this human attachment that is the mind of personal power"<sup>204</sup>.

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人がためなりけり。されば、それほどの業をもちける身にてありけるを、たすけんとおぼしめしたちける本願のかたじけなさよ” (T. 83, p. 734c / Jssz 2, p. 1074).

<sup>203</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 6, § 68: “是以愚禿釋鸞仰論主解義，依宗師勸化，久出萬行諸善之假門，永離雙樹林下之往生。回入善本德本眞門，偏發難思往生之心。然今特出方便眞門，轉入選擇願海。速離難思往生心，欲遂難思議往生” (T. 83, p. 632c / Jssz 2, p. 210).

<sup>204</sup> Shinran quoted in Eshinni's letter 5, dated 1263: “これこそころえぬことなれ。念佛の信心よりほかにはなにごとか心にかかるべきと思ひて (...) 人の執心，自力のしんは，よくよく思慮あるべしと” (Jssz 2, p. 1036).

While this experience of 1231 appears to be a kind of relapse, it differs significantly from that of 1214. Indeed, during the latter, Shinran had thought to himself that nothing was missing except the nembutsu, understood as the recitation of the name of the Buddha Amida. But seventeen years later, he [p. 135] realized that faith of nembutsu alone was enough for him. We can therefore see that while conversion to faith from the Other Power constitutes an irreversible event, this emergence of transcendence in the heart of man can nevertheless be part of a process dependent on the complexities of his most intimate feelings.

No document better illustrates our point than this episode from the *Tannishō*, in which Yuien-bō, a close disciple, asks Shinran the following question:

"Although I say the nembutsu, I don't have the heart to leap for joy and, moreover, I don't even have the desire to go quickly to the Pure Land. Why is this the case?"<sup>205</sup> Yuien-bō's concern is all the more serious as it refers to an essential passage of the *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, in which the Buddha Śākyamuni declares to the Bodhisattva Maitreya:

"Whoever happens to be able to hear the name of that Buddha [Amida] and leaps for joy, if only in one nembustu, knows that he will obtain the great benefit!"<sup>206</sup>

Joy (*kangi* 歡喜) is indeed mentioned by Shinran as the seventh of the Ten Benefits in the Present Life. The master's answer to Yuien-bō's anguish about his lack of joy deserves to be quoted at length, because it reveals both his knowledge of human psychology and his own inner life:

"I, Shinran, also felt this uncertainty! And you, Yuien-bō, are now in the same state of mind too! But, on careful reflection, we must reflect that our birth in the Pure Land is all the more fixed because we do not rejoice in what we should rejoice in, to the point that we dance in heaven and on earth! For it is [p. 136] the conditioning of passions that prevents our heart from rejoicing in what it should rejoice in. That being said, the Buddha, who already knew this, called us 'ordinary beings full of passions'. So we know that the vow of compassion of the Other Power is made for people like us and we therefore confide in it all the more.

Moreover, the fact that we don't even feel the desire to go quickly to the Pure Land and that, with an anxious heart, we fear to die as soon as we are slightly indisposed also results from the conditioning of passions. If it is difficult for us to abandon our old home of painful passions - where we've already transmigrated through distant cosmic periods - and if we are not attracted by the Pure Land Peaceful-Sustenance - although we've not been born there yet, it is really because our passions are very powerful! However, despite the thought of leaving it with regret, as soon as the conditions binding us to our universe Sahā ("Endurance") are exhausted and we end up without strength, we will be born in that Land [of Amida]. He is especially full of compassion for those who do not have the desire to go there quickly. If we confine ourselves to this, we understand that the great Vow of his great compassion is all the more trustworthy, and our birth in his Pure Land all the more assured.

<sup>205</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 9: "念佛申し候へども、踊躍歡喜のころおろそかに候ふこと、またいそぎ淨土へまゐりたきころの候はぬは、いかにと候ふべきことにて候ふやらんと" (T. 83, p. 729c / Jssz 2, p. 1058).

<sup>206</sup> *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, vol. 2, § 47: "其有得聞彼佛名號、歡喜踊躍乃至一念、當知此人爲得大利" (T. 12, p. 279a / Jssz 1, p. 69).

Should we have the heart to leap for joy as well as the desire to go quickly to the Pure Land, it would be then a wonder [p. 137] whether we really no longer have any passions!"<sup>207</sup>

Let's admit it!, this inner questioning draws us particularly close to Shinran through its humanity. He could also express his faith in this high-flying style:

"As we are carried by the ship of the Vow of great compassion and float on the immense sea of [Amida's] light, the breeze [of his name] of supreme merits transforms the waves of our ills. Immediately, the darkness of ignorance is torn apart, we quickly reach the land of Immeasurable-Light, realize the great final nirvāṇa, and follow the virtues of Samantabhadra."<sup>208</sup>

"Even if they have neither the practice of discipline nor the knowledge of wisdom, those who embark on the ship of 'Mida's vow do cross the sea of suffering of the cycle of births and deaths. As they reach the shore of the Pure Land of retribution, the black clouds of passions quickly dissipate, and the moon of the Awakening of elementary nature appears immediately; and, sharing the same flavor as the unobstructed light [of Amida] filling the Ten [p. 138] Directions, they benefit all beings: then, at that moment, is the Awakening (*satori*)".<sup>209</sup>

## b) Did you say "mystical"?

At this point, we may well wonder whether Shinran should not be considered a "mystic". Certainly, this rather hackneyed word should be used with some care, all the more since the very notion of *mysticism* is a Western one that was completely unknown in ancient Japan. However, the same question has been asked of Hōnen and received an affirmative answer from an authority as respected as the Catholic theologian Father Henri de Lubac<sup>210</sup>.

A few days before his death, Shinran's master revealed to his entourage that over the past ten years he had constantly seen the Pure Land with its ornaments, Buddha and

<sup>207</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 9: “親鸞もこの不審ありつるに、唯圓房おなじころにてありけり。よくよく案じみれば、天にをどり地にをどるほどによろこぶべきことを、よろこばぬにて、いよいよ往生は一定とおもひたまふなり。よろこぶべきころをおさへて、よろこばざるは煩惱の所為なり。しかるに佛かねてしろしめして、煩惱具足の凡夫と仰せられたることなれば、他力の悲願はかくのごとし、われらがためなりけりとしられて、いよいよたのもしくおぼゆるなり。また浄土へいそぎまゐりたきころのなくて、いささか所勞のこともあれば、死なんずるやらんところぼそくおぼゆることも、煩惱の所為なり。久遠劫よりいままで流轉せる苦惱の舊里はすてがたく、いまだ生れざる安養浄土はこひしからず候ふこと、まことによくよく煩惱の興盛に候ふにこそ。なごりをしくおもへども、娑婆の縁つきて、ちからなくしてをはるときに、かの土へはまゐるべきなり。いそぎまゐりたきころなきものを、ことにあはれみたまふなり。これにつけてこそ、いよいよ大悲大願はたのもしく、往生は決定と存じ候へ。踊躍歡喜のころもあり、いそぎ浄土へもまゐりたく候はんには、煩惱のなきやらんと、あやしく候ひなましと” (T. 83, pp. 729c-730a / Jssz 2, pp. 1058-1059).

<sup>208</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 2, § 78: “爾者乘大悲願船浮光明廣海, 至徳風靜衆禍波轉, 即破無明闇, 速到無量光明土, 證大般涅槃, 遵普賢之徳也” (T. 83, p. 597c / Jssz 2, p. 50).

<sup>209</sup> Shinran quoted in *Tannishō*, ch. 15: “戒行慧解ともになしといへども、彌陀の願船に乗じて、生死の苦海をわたり、報土の岸につきぬるものならば、煩惱の黒雲はやく晴れ、法性の覺月すみやかにあらはれて、盡十方の無礙の光明に一味にして、一切の衆生を利益せんときにこそ、さとりにては候へ” (T. 83, pp. 732c-733a / Jssz 2, p. 1068).

<sup>210</sup> Lubac, Henri de (1896-1991), S.J.: *Amida* (1955), new edition *Aspects du bouddhisme* (Paris 2012).

Bodhisattvas, a vision that Hōnen recorded in a secret diary discovered after his death<sup>211</sup>. Nothing comparable to this is true of Shinran: he never mentions visions similar to those of his master. Certainly, we know of some experiences which were out of the ordinary, the revelation of Shōtoku in 1201, and the dream of Nyoirin-Kannon in 1203 (*sup.* pp. 29, 32). To this should be added a dream in 1257 during which Shinran received a stanza opening his *Japanese Hymns on the Ages of the correct, copied and vanishing Law*, which says:

“Have faith in ‘Mida's Primal Vow!  
All those who have faith in his Primal Vow, [p.139]  
By the benefit of his unfailing embrace,  
Achieve unsurpassed Awakening”,<sup>212</sup>.

Admittedly, these elements alone appear too meagre to allow one to draw definitive conclusions. But, what to think of Shinran when he is reported as having said that *the heart of one who has faith already dwells in the Pure Land*? Does that not come from a mystic?

Here a few clarifications are needed. First of all, this statement is an isolated one: Shinran wrote it in a letter, nine months after his 1257 dream, and it is found nowhere else in his works. However, this letter was addressed to one of his most intimate disciples, Shōshin 性信 (1187-1275). It also deals with a delicate subject, since it is the principle developed by Shinran that one who has obtained true faith is an equal to the future Buddha Maitreya, in that he himself will become Buddha from his next existence. Here is the excerpt from this letter:

“The venerable of Guangmingsi [Shandao] explains in his *Hymns on the Pratyutpanna* that for one with the heart of faith, his heart already resides constantly in the Pure Land. ‘Resides’ means that in the Pure Land, the heart of one who has the heart of faith resides constantly. This is to say that such a person is the same as Maitreya.”<sup>213</sup>

So we are dealing with an indirect quote from a hymn dedicated by Shandao to the *samādhi* for Encountering Face-to-Face the Buddhas of the Present. The full quotation of [p. 140] Shandao’s text is:

“To be disgusted by this Sahā world is to part with it forever.  
To be delighted about the Pure Land is to reside there always.”<sup>214</sup>

This is a good example of Shinran's freedom of interpretation, especially as he indicates in his letter that the heart of the faithful "already" (*sudeni*) resides in the Pure Land, though such an interpretation does not appear explicitly in Shandao's hymn. This subtle notion will be further addressed by Shinran's successors such as Kakunyo, who will use the expression "birth in the Pure Land without abandoning the body"<sup>215</sup>.

<sup>211</sup> In Shinran's *Saihō shinanshō*, vol. 2a (T. 83, pp. 866b-867a / Jssz 3, pp. 629-929); or *Sammai hottoku ki* 三昧發得記 (*Diary of obtaining samādhi*), in Ryōe's *Shui Kurodani Shōnin gotōroku* 拾遺黒谷上人語燈録, vol. 1 (T. 83, 2612, p. 239ab / Jssz 6, pp. 371-373).o

<sup>212</sup> Shinran, *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 1: “彌陀の本願信ずべし, 本願信ずるひとはみな, 攝取不捨の利益にて, 無上覺をばさとるなり” (T. 83, p. 664bc / Jssz 2, pp. 467-468).

<sup>213</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 3, dated 1257: “光明寺の和尚の般舟讚には, 信心のひとは, その心すでに つねに淨土に居すと釋したまへり。居すといふは, 淨土に, 信心のひとのこころつねにゐたり, といふこころなり。これは彌勒とおなじといふことを申すなり” (T. 83, p. 713a / Jssz 2, pp. 783-784).

<sup>214</sup> Shandao, *Hanjusan*: “厭則娑婆永隔, 忻則淨土常居” (T. 47, p. 456a / Jssz 1, p. 1007); more fully quoted in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 82 (T. 83, p. 608a / Jssz 2, p. 98).

<sup>215</sup> “*Fu tai shitsu ōjō* 不體失往生”, in Kakunyo, *Kudenshō*, vol. 2, ch. 14 (T. 83, pp. 745b-746a / Jssz 4, pp. 269-270).

The contextualization of Shinran's quote and Shandao's also reminds us of the underlying tension between our own Sahā universe and that of the Pure Land. It is at the heart of the properly religious dynamics of the teachings of Shinran and his predecessors, as we have seen with Shandao's presentation of the double aspect of “insurance” or faith. This tension is of the same order as the continuity that exists between the Bodhisattva Dharmākara and the subsequent Buddha Amida (*sup.* p. 63). On this point, Tanluan remarks that at the time of producing his vows, Dharmākara was no longer at the beginning of his journey but already at the 8<sup>th</sup> of its ten stages.<sup>216</sup> Access to this decisive stage occurs when a Bodhisattva realizes “the endurance towards the fact that the elements are not born” (*mushōbō-nin* 無生法忍), that is, when he knows directly that not only persons but also the elements [p. 141] that compose them are absolutely devoid of any self-nature, in accordance with the essential doctrine of the Greater Vehicle on voidness (*śūnyatā*). As a result, the Pure Land of Amida is nothing else than “the universe of no-birth”, and birth in it is itself “birth to no-birth”<sup>217</sup>. Let's face it, at this point, words and even ordinary reasoning no longer apply, and it suddenly becomes evident that only *silence* is possible.

This is indeed one of the key concepts of the Greater Vehicle in general and of Mādhyamika in particular, which Tanluan evokes in paraphrasing Nāgārjuna:

“When the space where the mind operates sinks and the path of language is transcended, all elements are immobile; such are the characteristics of nirvāṇa”<sup>218</sup>.

It is perhaps here that might be located a door opening onto a mystical dimension, in this dislocation or disengagement from language, an experience that is not foreign to Shinran and his master, as we have seen above and as the *Tannishō* repeats:

“In the nembutsu, it is nonsense (*mugi* 無義) that makes sense. Because it is incalculable, inexplicable, and inconceivable.”<sup>219</sup>

Mystical or not, Shinran's spiritual life was certainly out of the ordinary. Consider the way his religiosity was involved in his relationships with the two most significant people in his life, his wife and his master. For while Shinran considered his [p. 142] wife Eshinni as an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Kannon (Avalokitasvara), we also know through his works that he saw in his master Hōnen the manifestation of Amida's other assistant, the Bodhisattva Daiseishi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta)<sup>220</sup>. To the extent that Shinran was already familiar with these inhabitants of the Pure Land, a spiritual communion that extended to all Buddhas, as his hymns echo:

"He who pronounces *Namo Amida Butsu*,  
Kannon and Daiseishi together,  
With Bodhisattvas numerous as the sands of the Ganges or grains of dust,  
Will follow Him as his shadow. (...)

<sup>216</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 1, § 10: “序法藏菩薩，於世自在王佛所，悟無生法忍。 (...) 於是性中發四十八大願修起此土” (T. 40, p. 828c / Jssz 1, p. 458-459).

<sup>217</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 2, § 81: “birth to no-birth” (*mushō no shō* 無生之生); § 82: “the universe of no-birth” (*mushō kai* 無生界) (T. 40, pp. 838c, 839b / Jssz 1, pp. 504, 506).

<sup>218</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 2, § 49: “心行處滅，言語道過，諸法如涅槃相不動” (T. 40, p. 835b / Jssz 1, p. 489). See Nāgārjuna, *Daichidoron*, vol. 2 & 6 (T. 25, 1509, pp. 71c & 107a).

<sup>219</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 10: “念佛には無義をもつて義とす。不可稱不可説不可思議のゆゑにと仰せ候ひき” (T. 83, p. 730a / Jssz 2, p. 1059).

<sup>220</sup> See Shinran, *Jōdo wasan*, 118 (T. 83, p. 660a / Jssz 2, p. 399); and *Kōsō wasan*, 106 (T. 83, p. 664a / Jssz 2, p. 459).

He who pronounces *Namo Amida Butsu*,  
Is surrounded by hundreds and thousands of rows  
Of countless Buddhas of the Ten Directions,  
Who protect him with joy."<sup>221</sup>

We have seen that protection by all the Buddhas is one of the Ten Benefits of faith during the Present Life (*sup.* p. 55). While these may seem wonderful, for Shinran they were not just in his imagination. On the contrary, they represented for him a perfect reality, which we feel from his works he was experiencing personally. And for those who would not understand it, he did not hesitate to insist:

"That the Buddhas of the Ten Directions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges protect in this world the person of true faith, this is affirmed by the *Sūtra of Amida*. It does not say that they protect him after he has gone to be born in the [p. 143] Pure Land Peaceful-Happiness, but that they protect him wherever he dwells in our Sahā world."<sup>222</sup>

Finally, according to Shinran's logic, the nembutsu practitioner can not in any way claim the merits of such benefits, since they arise naturally from the faith transferred by the Buddha Amida. However, this very principle of spontaneity presents us with the key to the spirituality - be it mystical or not - of the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū.

### c) The natural mode

The expression "*jinen* 自然" appears frequently under Shinran's brush. For want of something better, it is translated here as "natural", or "naturalness", words that only imperfectly convey the implications of the original term. The latter combines two characters literally meaning "to be like this (*nen*), of oneself (*ji*)". In everyday Chinese or Japanese, this pair simply refers to 'nature', which is perceived as a spontaneous sequence of phenomena occurring without human intervention, such as the natural return of the seasons or the cycles of animal life. In Buddhist terminology, *jinen* basically refers to the way things are as they are, according to the principle of suchness (*tathātā*), which is the absolute and indescribable reality of the Greater Vehicle. Applied to the functioning of karma, the same word more particularly renders the natural sequence of causes and effects, and, by derivation, it qualifies the natural efficiency of the karmic power of the Buddha Amida's vows, which is spontaneously accomplished without any calculation [p. 144] by the practitioner:

"He who receives true faith, through the karmic power of the great Vow, is naturally no longer in contradiction with the karmic cause of [his birth into] the Pure Land; being drawn by this karmic power, he goes there easily and is not prevented from accessing the great unsurpassable nirvāṇa. (...) He is naturally drawn by the karmic cause of the

<sup>221</sup> Shinran, *Jōdo wasan*, 108 & 110: “南無阿彌陀佛をとふれば、観音勢至はもろともに、恒沙塵数の菩薩と、かげのごとくに身にそへり”。 (...) “南無阿彌陀佛をとふれば、十方無量の諸佛は、百重千重圍繞して、よろこびまもりたまふなり” (T. 83, p. 659bc / Jssz 2, 1509, 393, 394).

<sup>222</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 7 (1258): “この世にて眞實信心の人をまもらせたまへばこそ、阿彌陀經には、十方恒沙の諸佛護念すとは申すことにて候へ。安樂淨土へ往生してのちは、まもりたまふと申すことにては候はず。娑婆世界に居たるほど護念すとは申すことなり” (T. 83, p. 714b / Jssz 2, p. 788).

sincere heart and rejoiced faith of the Other Power. (...) ‘Naturally’ means that it is not the calculation of the practitioner.”<sup>223</sup>

However, the naturalness of the action of Amida's Vow is matched by the naturalness of the nembutsu of faith, which is a non-practice for its practitioner. And Shinran's ultimate analysis reveals that this correspondence between the naturalness of the vow and that of the nembutsu refers to naturalness in the primary meaning of the term, that of absolute reality, the Buddhahood personified by Amida and his Pure Land:

"Unsurpassable Buddhahood does not even have any form. Since it does not even have a form, we speak of ‘naturalness’ (*jinen*). When it manifests itself in a form, we no longer speak of ‘unsurpassable nirvāṇa’. It is to make us aware of this mode of absence even of form that we specifically speak of the ‘Buddha ‘Mida’. That's what I learned. The Buddha ‘Mida is to make us know the mode of naturalness. Once you become aware of this principle, there is no longer any need to constantly discuss this naturalness. (...) All this [p. 145] is the inconceivability of the wisdom of the Buddha.”<sup>224</sup>

This excerpt, from a famous letter written in a particularly compact style, is undoubtedly the passage from Shinran's work in which he most accurately captures the essence of his thinking. It is indeed this that also animates these recapitulative hymns:

"To be convinced that we are full of passions  
 And to let ourselves be carried by the power of the Primal Vow  
 Is to end up abandoning our soiled person,  
 And this makes us realize the constant happiness of the elementary nature. (...)  
 As faith is born from the Vow,  
 Becoming Buddha through the nembutsu is natural.  
 This naturalness is nothing else than the Land of Retribution:  
 The realization of the great final nirvāṇa can not be doubted.”<sup>225</sup>

At the end of this overview of Shinran's spirituality, it remains for us to note that he, like his master, never sets himself as an example. For although his personal pilgrimage through the three vows can be traced, it is not a universal method. In short, having given his teaching, Shinran disappears behind it, with a characteristic humility that did not further the spread of his repute outside Japan. [p. 146]

### 3. Shinran's inconspicuousness

The destiny of the founder of Jōdo-Shinshū is a surprising one. He was indeed one of Hōnen's very close disciples, since he received from him his masterpiece *Senjakushū*, a

<sup>223</sup> Shinran, *Songō-shinzō meimon*, § 3: “眞實信をえたる人は大願業力のゆゑに、自然に浄土の業因たがはずして、かの業力にひかるるゆゑにゆきやすく、無上大涅槃にのぼるにきはまりなしとのたまへるなり。(...) 他力の至心信樂の業因の自然にひくなり。(...) 自然といふは行者のはからひにあらずとなり” (T. 83, p. 689ab / Jssz 2, pp. 609-610)

<sup>224</sup> Shinran's letter, *Mattōshō* 5: “無上佛と申すは、かたちもなくまします。かたちもましまさぬゆゑに、自然とは申すなり。かたちましますとしめすときには、無上涅槃とは申さず。かたちもましまさぬやうをしらせんとて、はじめて彌陀佛と申すとぞ、ききならひて候ふ。彌陀佛は自然のやうをしらせん料なり。この道理をこころえつるのちには、この自然のことはつねに沙汰すべきにはあらざるなり。(...) これは佛智の不思議にてあるなるべし” (T. 83, p. 713bc / Jssz 2, pp. 785-786).

<sup>225</sup> Shinran, *Kōsō wasan* (Shandao), 73 & 82: “煩惱具足と信知して、本願力に乗ずれば、すなはち穢身すてはてて、法性常樂證せしむ。(...) 信は願より生ずれば、念佛成佛自然なり、自然はすなはち報土なり、證大涅槃うたがはず” (T. 83, pp. 662c, 663a / Jssz 2, pp. 441, 446).



privilege reserved for only half a dozen of his disciples, including the founders of the main branches of Jōdoshū. One would therefore expect to see Shinran mentioned among Hōnen's successors in the same way as a Benchō or a Shōkū, for example. This is not however the case. His name does not even appear in the *Notes of my Foolish Considerations*, where Jien 慈圓, his own Tendai master of ordination, recounts the circumstances of Hōnen's conviction and death<sup>226</sup>. Nor is he mentioned in the *Illustrated Life of His Eminence Hōnen*, the voluminous biography composed on imperial order by Shunshō 舜昌 to mark the first centenary of the death of the founder of Jōdoshū<sup>227</sup>.

Certainly, the expression "chapel of the image of His Eminence Shinran" (*Shinran Shōnin eidō* 親鸞上人影堂) appears as early as 1302 in documents from both civil and religious authorities linked to his mausoleum at Ōtani and to the Honganji that was born out of it<sup>228</sup>. Nevertheless, Shinran himself is conspicuously absent from works of other Buddhist [p. 147] schools, such as the *Origins of the Traditions of the Pure Land*, a monograph completed in 1311 by Gyōnen 凝然 of the Kegon School, in which nearly eighty disciples and sub-disciples of Hōnen are enumerated<sup>229</sup>. Similarly, in 1322 he was also excluded from the large *Buddhist Encyclopedia of the Genkō Era*, produced by Kokan Shiren 虎関師鍊 of the Zen Rinza School<sup>230</sup>.

In short, for three centuries following his death, Shinran was denied the status of Buddhist master, a phenomenon all the more paradoxical since the Honganji temple was at the same time becoming a powerful and recognized institution, as reported by contemporary historical sources, including reports from Western missionaries. All in all, it was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> century that Shinran would be mentioned in sources independent of his school, a period that coincided with the first publication of his doctrinal works. And yet, his name still does not appear in the 1702 *Biographies of the Eminent Religious of our Country* by Mangen Shibān 卍元師蠻 of the Rinza School<sup>231</sup>, which includes more than 1600 records.

This anonymity finally reached its peak at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a radical reaction characteristic of the time even defended the idea that Shinran could never have existed! But this absurd theory collapsed in the 1920s thanks to a scientific re-evaluation based, in particular, on the comparative graphological study of the many autograph manuscripts attributed to Shinran, as well as the discovery of his wife Eshinni's original letters<sup>232</sup>. [p. 148]

<sup>226</sup> Jien (1155-1225), *Gukanshō* 愚管抄, 7 vol. Td. Delmer M. Brown & Ishida Ichirō 石田一良: *The Future and the Past* (University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>227</sup> Shunshō (1255-1335): *Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezu* 法然上人行狀繪圖, 48 vol.; td. Harper Havelock Coates & Ishizuka Ryūgaku 石塚龍學: *Hōnen, The Buddhist Saint, His Life and Teaching* (1925; New York & London, Garland Publishing, 1981).

<sup>228</sup> Edict (*inzen* 院宣) of retired emperor Go-Uda 後宇多, dated 10<sup>th</sup> of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Shōan 正安 (Jssz 6, 808), etc.

<sup>229</sup> Gyōnen (1240-1321): *Jōdo hōmon genrushō* 淨土法門源流章. Td. Mark L. Blum: *The Origins and Development of Pure Land Buddhism* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>230</sup> Kokan Shiren (1278-1347): *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釋書, 30 vol.

<sup>231</sup> Mangen Shibān (1626-1710): *Honchō kōsō den* 本朝高僧傳, 75 vol.

<sup>232</sup> See the studies published by Tsuji Zennosuke 辻善之助 (1877-1955), Nakazawa Kenmyō 中澤見明 (1885-1946), Yamada Bunshō 山田文昭 (1877-1933), Washio Kyōdō 鷺尾教導 (1875-1928), and others.

### a) A master without disciples

For the most part, the origins of his anonymity can be attributed to Shinran himself and to his very discreet life. During childhood, the discredit that struck his family had excluded him from attending the influential circles of the nobility, and later the modesty of his status as a mere chaplain at the Enryakuji also excluded him from mention in the voluminous annals of the Tendai School. The stigma surrounding the loss of his clerical condition and exile, as well as his subsequent choice not to return to Kyōto or settle in Kamakura but to confine himself to a rural province, also contributed to his being forgotten by those in the cities. Even after his return to Kyōto, his modest life and the lack of foundation of a Jōdo-Shinshū "order" could only hinder his acquisition of fame.

Finally, Shinran was not a politician. Unlike other Buddhist figures of his time - such as Eisai, Dōgen, Nichiren, and even Hōnen - he did not seek contact with the great of this world. He was even less enclined to entertain a political project, although he could have developed one, based either on his own code of ethics or on the traditional principle of "state protection" (*chingo kokka* 鎮護國家), which aimed at the reciprocity of commitments between the secular world and the Buddhist community, in particular through the celebration of specific liturgy. A rare exception is found in a letter from Shinran to his disciple Shōshin 性信, when the latter was in litigation with the authorities in Kamakura:

“On reflection, it would be gratifying if not only you, but all of us who say the nembutsu, instead of thinking about our own interests, should say the nembutsu for the Court (*chōka* [p. 149] 朝家) and for the nation (*kokumin* 國民)”<sup>233</sup>.

However, this general lack of political focus could be explained by the purpose of the teachings of the Pure Land. In this tradition, the "great affair of this life" paradoxically resides in a goal to be reached in the afterlife, from a transcendent perspective that does not encourage interference in the affairs of this world. And when provincial communities inform Shinran of disputes between them and the civilian authorities, he recommends at most cautious conformity. This confirms, if need be, that Shinran did indeed present himself as a master, even if he seems to apologize for it in this hymn:

"Knowing nothing of good or evil, not discerning true from false:  
That is who I am!  
Although devoid of the slightest love and compassion,  
I enjoy being a master for fame and profit!"<sup>234</sup>

That he was a master and even a master concerned about his community and the preservation of his teachings, is eloquently demonstrated not only by his correspondence and all his literary works, but also by the texts by Seikaku and Ryūkan that he took the trouble to copy several times over to distribute, as well as by his calligraphic works and even his portraits that he granted to a few privileged people. The most striking example is that of the Takada community, whose leaders received, in 1255, permission to copy the *Kyōgyōshinshō* while being presented a scroll of the nembutsu in Shinran's own hand

<sup>233</sup> Shinran's letter, *Shinran Shōnin goshōsoku-shū* 2: “詮じ候ふところは、御身にかぎらず念佛申さんひとびとは、わが御身の料はおぼしめさずとも、朝家の御ため國民のために念佛を申しあはせたまひ候はば、めでたう候ふべし” (T. 83, p. 723a / Jssz 2, p. 830).

<sup>234</sup> Shinran, *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, 116: “是非しらず邪正もわかぬ、このみなり、小慈小悲もなけれども、名利に人師をこのむなり” (T. 83, p. 669a / Jssz 2, p. 531a).

[p. 150] as well as his portrait with an inscription written by himself, according to a rite that is not unlike the transmission he had himself received from Hōnen fifty years earlier<sup>235</sup>.

How can we explain then that Shinran is known for having declared that he did not have a single disciple? Here, a clarification is needed over the meaning of the word "disciple" (*deshi* 弟子), which does not refer to just any kind of student or auditor.

In Buddhism, the relationship between a master and the disciple he has recognized as such is that of a quasi-filial relationship, the disciple inheriting, in the literal sense, the teaching of the master, with the ability to transmit it in his turn. However, a very particular category also existed in Japan, that of the "true disciples" (*shintei* 眞弟), a euphemism referring to the children of clerics who became clerics in their turn, so that their spiritual filiation was coupled with that of blood ties. In this respect, Shinran could well consider his eldest son Zenran as his "true disciple", as evidenced not only by the name he gave him, but also by the permission Zenran received from his father to correct the doctrinal differences that had spread to the provinces after their return to Kyōto<sup>236</sup>. However, despite this *de facto* investiture, Zenran proved unworthy of the paternal trust to the point of being disinherited in 1256 (*sup.* p. 38). From then on, Shinran no longer actually had any "true disciple", and it is easy to imagine that the trauma of this betrayal might have influenced his conception of the transmission from master to disciple. Eventually, he would define it on the basis, much less trivial, of his deepest faith:

"As for me Shinran, I don't even have a single disciple. Here [p. 151] is why. If I made people say the nembutsu through my personal calculation, it would make them my disciples. But it would be completely foolish to call 'my disciples' those who say the nembutsu from 'Mida's Solicitations.'<sup>237</sup>

This is how the old lists of Shinran's followers do not refer to them as "disciples", but as "followers" (*monto* 門徒). It is by the name of "School of the Followers" (*Montoshū* 門徒宗) that they would designate themselves in the centuries after his death, since Hōnen's successors in the Jōdoshū (浄土宗) refused them the name "Jōdo-Shinshū" (浄土眞宗), and the political authorities imposed on them the name "School of the Unilaterals" (*Ikkōshū* 一向宗)<sup>238</sup>. It was under this last name that Shinran's school was to be discovered by Westerners.

## b) Missed encounters

Christian missionaries landed in Japan in 1549, three years after Luther's death. Over the course of the next sixty years, they collected important documentation on Japanese Buddhism in general, and on the Pure Land in particular. With great insight, they quickly distinguished between the doctrine of the latter, on the one hand, and all other Buddhist teachings, on the other. However, the atrocious eradication of Christianity and the

<sup>235</sup> The *Kyōgyōshinshō* copy is kept together with the scroll at the Senjuji, of the Takada-ha branch, while the so-called "Portrait of Anjō" (安城御影) is now at the Honganji.

<sup>236</sup> As a matter of fact Zenran (a.k.a. Jishinbō 慈信房) is mentioned as Shinran's "true disciple" (*shintei* 眞弟) in the lists (*kyōmyō* 交名) of Shinran's disciples (Jssz 6, p. 862).

<sup>237</sup> *Tannishō*, ch. 6: "親鸞は弟子一人ももたず候ふ。そのゆゑは、わがはからひにて、ひとに念佛を申させ候はばこそ、弟子にても候はめ。彌陀の御もよほしにあづかつて念佛申し候ふひとを、わが弟子と申すこと、きはめたる荒涼のことなり" (T. 83, p. 729b / Jssz 2, p. 1057).

<sup>238</sup> The name "Shinshū" was not recognized by the authorities until 1872, and that of "Jōdo-Shinshū" was admitted only in 1952.

isolationist withdrawal of Japan at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century quickly brought down the veil that had just been lifted on spirituality linked to the Buddha Amida. In the event, the discovery by the missionaries did not contribute in a decisive [p. 152] and lasting manner to knowledge about Shinran and the Pure Land. As for the age of Enlightenment that followed in Europe, it proved to be one of perfect obscurantism with regard to Buddhism in general. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a serious approach developed.

Contrary to its previous history in Asia, Buddhism did not arrive in Europe as a living religion carried there by its own missionaries. Instead, it was discovered through the academic means of philology. The father of modern Buddhist studies, the Frenchman Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852), could be described as the Champollion of Buddhism, as he established the link between its four canonical languages (Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan), while seeking to return to the original sources of Indian Buddhism. It is no less paradoxical that the West welcomed the teachings of the Buddha in a dead form, since they had disappeared from their country of origin seven centuries earlier. Burnouf established a precise analysis of the Sanskrit text of the *Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra*, which was published in 1844 in his masterful *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*<sup>239</sup>.

The reopening of Japan followed upon this, and two clerics of the Ōtani-ha, Nanjō Bun'yū 南條文雄 (1849-1927) and Kasahara Kenju 笠原研壽 (1852-1883), were sent to Oxford to train in Indian Buddhist philology with Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), in order to have access to the original texts of the fundamental sūtras of the Pure Land. Between 1880 and 1894, with their help, Müller edited and published the Sanskrit text of both the larger and smaller versions of the *Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra*, which he also translated into English and published in 1894 in his large collection of *The Sacred Books of the East* [p. 153] (Vol. XLIX, Part II). The latter also includes Nanjō's translation of the *Sūtra of Contemplations*, despite Müller's reluctance to incorporate a text known only in Chinese and of which he had been "so much disappointed by the contents". In this way, the English-speaking public had at its disposal a complete translation of the *Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras*, which for decades remained the only one.

However, Müller's otherwise remarkable realization was hampered by two defects that were to have serious consequences for the appreciation of Shinran in the West. On the one hand, Müller's translation of the Pure Land Trilogy was adulterated by its inclusion of only one of the three Chinese sūtras, while the Sanskrit versions of the other two texts<sup>240</sup> corresponded only approximately to their Chinese translations - the only ones on which the masters such as Tanluan, Shandao, Hōnen, and Shinran had based themselves. On the other hand, in his translation of the Sanskrit version of the *Sūtra of Amida*, Müller found himself confronted with a textual difficulty that led him to wonder whether the doctrine of deliverance by nembutsu was not "in direct opposition to the original doctrine of Buddha, that as a man soweth, so he reapeth"<sup>241</sup>. Although this remark was immediately corrected by Thomas Watters (1840-1901) in a brilliant (but not sufficiently known) study<sup>242</sup>, Müller's interpretation was quickly taken up by most of Western commentators, who thus

<sup>239</sup> Td. Katia Buffetrille & Donald S. Lopez Jr.: *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>240</sup> See their definitive Sanskrit edition by Fujita Kōtatsu 藤田宏達: *The Larger and Smaller Sukāvātīvyūha Sūtras*, Edited with Introductory Remarks and Word Indexes to the Two Sūtras (Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 2011).

<sup>241</sup> Müller translates: "Beings are not born in that Buddha country of the Tathāgata Amitāyus as a reward and result of good works performed in this present life", while it should read "as a reward and result of inferior good works" (*nāvaramātrakeṇa*).

<sup>242</sup> Watters, Thomas: "The A-mi-t'ê Ching", *China Review*, or Notes and Queries on the Far East, vol. 10, no. 4 (Hong Kong: "China Mail" Office, 1881-1882), pp. 225-240.

spread the idea that the Pure Land in general and Shinran's thought in particular [p. 154] were a deviance - not to say a heresy - from the fundamental Buddhist law of karma, a prejudice still noticeable today in many works.

Finally, Müller was a radical purist and in his attempt to return to the sources of a hypothetical “original Buddhism”, he did not hesitate to pose as a censor of Buddhist orthodoxy by writing:

“Is it not high time that the millions who live in Japan and profess a faith in Buddha should be told that this doctrine of Amitābha and all the Mahāyāna doctrine is a secondary form of Buddhism, a corruption of the pure doctrine of the Royal Prince?”<sup>243</sup>

In these conditions, it is understandable that Müller's Japanese students were hardly inclined to make known Shinran's faith, which was also theirs!

A more favourable climate prevailed on the other side of the Channel. As early as 1876, Emile Guimet (1836-1918), the founder of Paris' eponymous museum of religion and Asian art, had gone on an official mission to Japan to study its religions, and during this he interviewed senior representatives of Jōdo-Shinshū. Unfortunately, the reports he published four years later in the first volume of the *Annales du Musée Guimet* testify to the difficulties in communication which he encountered, not the least of which was translation<sup>244</sup>. More successful was his initiative to bring Japanese students to [p. 155] France, including Imaizumi Yūsaku 今泉雄作 (1850-1931) and Yamada Tadazumi 山田忠澄 (1855-1917). Although they were not specialists in Buddhism, they translated into French the Chinese version of the *Sūtra of Amida*, their work appearing in 1881 in the same *Annales*, alongside the French version of the translation of the Sanskrit text of this sūtra by Müller. Ten years later, Guimet also welcomed two Jōdo-Shinshū clerics then visiting Paris, Koizumi Ryōtai 小泉了諦 (1851-1938) and Yoshitsura Hōgen 善連法彦 (1864-1893), who celebrated with great pomp in his museum the annual Shinran commemoration ceremony (*Hōonkō* 報恩講). The event caused a sensation and saw the *Tout-Paris* attending - though this did not go beyond the scope of a society event. Later, however, the French-speaking public was better able to discover Japanese Buddhism through a contribution by Fujishima Ryōon 藤島了穩 (1853-1918), a cleric sent by the Honganji-ha to study in Paris with Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935), and who published, in 1889, *Le bouddhisme japonais*. The last two chapters of this book, largely based on *A Short History of the Twelve Japanese Buddhist Sects* published in 1886 by Nanjō Bun'yū<sup>245</sup>, are devoted to Jōdoshū and Shinshū.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shinran, Hōnen, and the Pure Land were the subject of several monographs by Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries from Japan, including Arthur Lloyd (1852-1911), Harper H. Coates (1865-1934), Hans Haas (1868-1934) and August K. Reischauer (1879-1971). French publications from the same period are not to be outdone, but are of more varied inspiration and origin<sup>246</sup>. During the interwar

<sup>243</sup> Müller: “On Sanskrit Texts Discovered in Japan”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series, vol. 12 (1880), p. 174.

<sup>244</sup> French translation by Imaizumi Yūsaku 今泉雄作 (1850-1931), Yamada Tadazumi 山田忠澄 (1855-1917) and Tomii Masaaki 富井政章 (1858-1935): “Conférence entre la mission scientifique française et les prêtres de la secte Sîn-Siou” (AMG 1 / 1880, pp. 335-364). Translated from the French by Michael Pye: “A Nineteenth-Century Dialogue in the Hall of Flying Clouds”, *The Eastern Buddhist* 48/1 (2017), pp. 111-135.

<sup>245</sup> Reprinted: Washington, University Publications of America, 1979.

<sup>246</sup> See my article “Pure Land Sources in French”, *The Eastern Buddhist*, 48/1 (2017), pp. 137-157.

period, at any rate, Shinran should logically have been integrated into the fascination that the [p. 156] East then exercised over the Western public, through such figures as Rabîndranâth Tagore and Râmakrishna. However, an important guarantor was missing: that of the academic world and, in the first place, of the specialists in Buddhist studies. As a matter of fact, the young Franco-Swiss sinologist Paul Demiéville (1894-1979) published at that time two important contributions related to our subject: a study on "the unique thought" of nembutsu (*ichinen* 一念), as well as the article "Amida" in the first volume of the Franco-Japanese encyclopedia of Buddhism written in French, the *Hōbōgirin* 法寶義林 (1929).

Unfortunately, Chinese studies were not concerned with Buddhism due to its Indian origin, and were devoted almost exclusively to the study of the Chinese Classics, so that Indianism retained its hold over Buddhology. However, Buddhist studies were led by the great Belgian scholar Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1869-1938), who, although passionate about philosophers like Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, saw in the Pure Land only "the exact counterpart of the Vaiṣṇavite paradise" and "a Buddhist form of the Hindu *bhakti*, or devotion", which "has very little in common with ancient Buddhism, but is excellent Kṛṣṇaism"<sup>247</sup>. As long as this internationally-recognized authority was not more interested in Pure Land Buddhism, Shinran would also remain absent from academic disciplines. And as if he was not already sufficiently unobtrusive, the tragedy of the Second World War - with the stigma it brought to Japan - finally pushed him back into the shadows.

Roughly ten years after the end of the war, a newly-discovery Shinran emerged from Japan, when Yamamoto Kōshō 山本晃紹 [p. 157] (1898-1976), a courageous cleric and scholar, published the first English translation of the *Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras* from the Chinese, together with other texts (*The Shinshu Seiten*, 1955), as well as the *Kyōgyōshinshō* (1958). In the same vein is the project of Inagaki Hisao 稲垣久雄 (1929-2021) who translated not only the *Trilogy* (1994) and the *Kyōgyōshinshō* (2003), but also works of the Chinese Pure Land masters. In the meantime, Ryūkoku University, which has historical links to the Honganji, established a Buddhist Text Translation Centre to make Jōdo-Shinshū texts accessible in English academic versions (*Ryūkoku Translation Series*, 1961-1980). The Honganji itself launched its *Shin Buddhism Translation Series* to publish in English the complete works of Shinran, a vast undertaking that spanned some 20 years (*The Collected Works of Shinran*, 1997), as well as the *Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras* and then works of the Seven Eminent Masters, with Ueda Yoshifumi 上田義文 (1904-1993), Nagao Gajin 長尾雅人 (1907-2005), Inagaki Hisao and Tokunaga Michio 徳永道雄 as successive general editors. For its part, the Higashi-Honganji also published a translation of the first four volumes of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, due to the innovative pen of the famous D.T. Suzuki 鈴木大拙 (1870-1966) with Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900-1990) as Supervising Editor (1973), followed by a new revised edition under the supervision of Mayeda [Maeda] Sengaku 前田專學 (2012).

However, it was not until the 1970s-1980s that the Western academic world woke from its torpor to finally embark on the study of Shinran and the Pure Land in the various fields of Indianism, Sinology, Japanology, Religious Studies, and so on. This approach is shared by the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies (IASBS), founded in 1980, which strives to contribute to the decompartmentalization of disciplines.

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<sup>247</sup> In *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (ed. by James Hastings, 13 vol., 1908-1927; reed. T. & T. Clark's Publications, 1980), vol. II, p. 688b; vol. VIII, pp. 331b, 335a.

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#### Chapter 4. What about Luther in all this?

The famous comparison between Pure Land Buddhism and the German Protestant Martin Luther (1483-1546) was formulated about twenty years after the arrival of the missionaries in Japan. It is found, in particular, in the writings of the Jesuit Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) who lived in Japan from 1579 onwards. Indeed, after summarizing the principle of faith in the inefficacy of personal merits as against those of the Buddha Amida, he comes to this conclusion about the followers of Pure Land:

"They properly hold the doctrine that the demon, who is the father in both cases, taught Luther."<sup>248</sup>

Confirmation of Shinran's unobtrusiveness, he is not mentioned by name, even though the missionaries - for having visited it - knew the Honganji and the pomp surrounding its patriarchs. This comparison - which in Valignano's case is even assimilation - has survived for more than four centuries, to the point of becoming a cliché frequently cited even today, more as an easy option than as a result of solid analysis. [p. 160] For on examination, the parallel with Luther appears "not only illusory but positively erroneous", as demonstrated, for example, by the Jesuit theologian Pierre Charles<sup>249</sup>.

##### a) Beyond the cliché

While this comparison only reveals superficial appearances, it did nonetheless provoke a reflection on the part of Christian theology on this improbable alter ego from Far Eastern Buddhism. At the end of the Second World War, it inspired the Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) to write a famous passage of his *Church Dogmatics* (I, 2, § 17).

Nevertheless, it was Catholicism that was to prove the most fruitful in its approach, as demonstrated by the monograph *Amida* by Henri de Lubac which breaks with certain prejudices as fundamental as they are tenacious. The Jesuit theologian clearly demonstrates that Amida, in particular, "is not God in any sense" and that "the rigorous doctrine of the karman, despite appearances, remains intact"<sup>250</sup>.

Now let us return to Valignano, for we owe him an analysis of the Pure Land doctrine that is much more significant than the reference to Luther:

"By this they mean that all things proceed from this Amida, that he is their principle, from which they do not differ, and that in the end they are absorbed in him."<sup>251</sup>

Through these few lines, Pure Land doctrine was philosophically classified as a *monism*, a criticism that is still frequently at the heart of the Christian theological evaluation [p. 161] of Shinran today. He himself would no doubt have been very surprised, as nothing in his work suggests that the practitioner must disappear in the only true truth which would be that of Amida. Quite the contrary, the faithful, according to him, obtain the same status as the Buddha but without merging with him (*sup.* p. 54). In short, the person of the

<sup>248</sup> « De manera que tienen estos propriamente la doctrina, que el demonio, padre de ambos, enseñó a Lutero »; in Valignano, *Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias orientales* (1542-1564), I, ch. 19, p. 83.

<sup>249</sup> Charles, Pierre: "Hônen et le salut par la foi chez les Mahayanistes", *Recherches de science religieuse*, T. XVII (1928), pp. 236-252.

<sup>250</sup> See de Lubac, *Aspects du bouddhisme* (Paris 2012), pp. 257-269.

<sup>251</sup> "Etendiendo que todas las cosas proceden de este Àmida, que es su principio, del cual no difieren, y que cuando acaban se resuelven en él"; in Valignano, *Historia del principio*, I, ch. 19, p. 81.

practitioner and that of the Buddha each retain their own reality, especially in this dynamic of conversion of faith that is the spring of deliverance.

### **b) The laughter of the Buddha**

Several sensitive questions arise for Christian theologians, including that of grace, to which the Other Power of Amida's vows is often compared. "Grace" does not correspond to any specific term in Buddhist vocabulary, but in a broad sense it can indeed correspond, to some extent, to the notion of transfer of merits. However, this is not the case when it is assimilated to a "redemptive grace of forgiveness" within the framework of the remission of sins, all ideas foreign to Buddhism in general, and to Pure Land teaching in particular. Admittedly, Amida's vows correspond well to a plan inspired by his compassion, but this plan is not linked to any notion of justification and is exercised in perfect equanimity (*upekṣā*). This last quality is essential and is also signified by the rules of iconography according to which representations of a Buddha never smile nor cry. The transfer of Amida's merits is therefore exercised with similar equanimity, that of his compassion coupled with his wisdom, which, let us remember, transcend the limitations of good and evil.

In fact, this process of deliverance is part of one of the most fundamental notions of the Great Vehicle. As Tanluan points out, compassion is divided into three cumulative degrees. In the first one, compassion has the countless *living beings* [p. 162] as its object. It is certainly very respectable, but it is only the "small" compassion. In the second degree, compassion has the *elements (dharma)* as its object. Described as "medium", it is characteristic of a Bodhisattva who exercises his compassion towards beings while seeing, through his wisdom, their fundamental insubstantiality since they are but a temporary gathering of perishable elements. Finally, the third degree is that of compassion *without object (anālabana, muen 無緣)*. Beyond any discrimination, it belongs only to the Buddhas and is qualified as "the *great compassion*" (*mahā-maitrīkaruṇā, daijīhi 大慈悲*). This ultimate compassion is "the good that transcends the world", the cause of Awakening and the root of the Buddha Amida's realm of purity<sup>252</sup>. It is this intrinsic purity of the Pure Land that ultimately provides the least coarse reflection of the Buddhist absolute.

On the other hand, the Scriptures also relate how it may happen that a Buddha laughs frankly. He does so from time to time, when a practitioner is about to take a decisive step in his journey towards Awakening: at that moment, from the mouth of the Buddha flow streams of light that reach the practitioner.

This brings us back to the fundamental conception in the Greater Vehicle of the interdependence between the continuation of the work of a Buddha (*buddhakārya*) after his Awakening and the spiritual progress of the beings to be delivered (*sup.* p. 7). It also confirms how the process of faith according to Shinran does indeed establish a person-to-person relationship between the practitioner, understood in the totality of his suffering being, and Amida, personification of the ultimate reality. A modal personification that is not [p. 163] subordinate to this Absolute, in which it would eventually be absorbed according to a form of doceticism, but rather constitutes a "full communication" (*enzū 圓通*) as Daochuo defined it (*sup.* p. 44). That this relationship, finally, is established with respect for the otherness of persons, is sufficiently explicit in the very expression "Other Power"; it being understood, in good Buddhist doctrine, that these are "persons" and not

<sup>252</sup> Tanluan, *Ōjō-ronchū*, vol. 1, § 10: "大慈悲是佛道正因故 (...) 慈悲有三緣。一者衆生緣, 是小悲。二者法緣, 是中悲。三者無緣, 是大悲。大悲即出世善也。安樂淨土從此大悲生故" (T. 40, p. 828c / Jssz 1, p. 459).



individuals in the substantial sense of the term. All this deserved to be highlighted, even briefly, because the notions of “person” and “otherness” are now at the centre of interreligious dialogue between Christians and Buddhists.

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### Conclusion: The ultimate paradox

In recent decades, Buddhism has slowly made its way into the Western world. As early as 1952, Father Henri de Lubac considered that it had "now entered the current of universal thought"<sup>253</sup>. He also participated in the Second Vatican Council which took note of this in its declaration *Nostra aetate* (1965). In this formal document, Buddhism is classified among the "various non-Christian religions", even among those "bound up with an advanced culture", with a definition that could have been inspired by the distinction between "personal power" and "Other Power" dear to Shinran:

"Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation [Hīnayāna goal?], or attain, by their own efforts [*jiriki*?] or through higher help [*tariki*?], supreme illumination [Mahāyāna goal?]"<sup>254</sup>. [p. 166]

While the intellectuals of the "Beat Generation" (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Snyder, etc.) discovered Zen through the works of D. T. Suzuki, they did not pay attention to the texts in his famous three volumes of *Essays* (1927-1934) in which he dealt with the Pure Land; they were also ignorant of the fact that their mentor was the author of an English translation of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.

The offspring of the "Flower Power" then discovered Tibetan Buddhism, with an interest that intensified once the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize (1989). In the midst of this fashion, however, which is regularly reported in the press, Jōdo-Shinshū remains as invisible as its founder. Despite this, since 1954, the visits to Europe of the Honganji's patriarch Ōtani Kōshō 大谷光照 (1911-2002) have aroused vocations among many endearing personalities, such as Harry Pieper (1907-1978) in Germany, the first minister of the European Jōdo-Shinshū, or Jean Eracle (1930-2005) in Switzerland, who made particular efforts to translate the texts from Chinese into French, or again Friedrich Fenzl (1932-2014) in Austria, and Adrian Peel (1927-2009) in Belgium. Admittedly modest communities have formed around these pioneers, whose enthusiasm has been echoed as far away as Japan, notably through the International Association of Buddhist Culture (IABC). But, in the end, none of this is comparable to the phenomenon of "Buddhamania" which attracts numerous sympathizers to other Buddhist traditions (Tibetan, Zen) - and even practitioners.

Shinran's persistent invisibility in the West seems to stem from the many paradoxes that characterize his teaching. The first is that many Westerners imagine that they will find in Buddhism a radical change of scenery from their original spiritual environment, most likely Christianity, whereas Shinran's absolute faith, which aims at a "beyond", seems to [p. 167] them to plunge them - by its very vocabulary - into precisely the discourse they are trying to rid themselves of.

The second paradox is that Buddhism is generally presented as a personal path proposing to all that they advance by themselves towards Awakening, whereas Pure Land

<sup>253</sup> Lubac, *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (1952, rpr. Paris 2000), p. 262.

<sup>254</sup> *Nostra aetate*, § 2: "In Buddhismo secundum varias eius formas radicalis insufficientia mundi huius mutabilis agnoscitur et via docetur qua homines, animo devoto et confidente, sive statum perfectae liberationis acquirere, sive, vel propriis conatibus vel superiore auxilio innixi, ad summam illuminationem pertingere valeant".

leads to an awareness of the radical incapacity of beings to progress by their own strength, a concept which goes against the propensity of Westerners to claim to control everything, including their spiritual destiny.

The third paradox is that Jōdo-Shinshū does not offer a methodical practice by which to check one's progress, since the practice of nembutsu is "non-practice". Consequently, there is no place for a personal master - guru, lama or sensei with a charismatic face, especially if he or she were of Asian origin - in charge of transmitting various initiations or certifying the achievements obtained along the way. Remember that even though Shinran appears as the founding master of this tradition, he affirms - fourth paradox - that he does not have a single disciple.

Last but not least, in Jōdo-Shinshū, "nonsense is sense", an axiom that implies the abandonment of this ratiocination which is yet everyone's natural inclination. And that is the ultimate paradox! On the one hand, birth in the Pure Land is considered to be very easy since it is carried out through the nembutsu. But on the other hand, according to Shinran, even obtaining the faith of nembutsu is "the most difficult of all difficulties", as the sūtras he quotes say<sup>255</sup>, because it arises unilaterally from the transfer of the Other Power of the Buddha.

If so, what place is there left for man's initiative in the process of deliverance? For we cannot imagine that he will be born in [p. 168] the Pure Land in spite of himself! In other words, how can we provoke this liberating faith? Nowhere, and this is the most confusing element, does Shinran ask this question in these terms, since it would reflect, again and again, the elucubrations of personal calculation. The process of faith does indeed go against the most fundamental desires of the human being, and Shinran summarizes this in the following terms, as reported by one of his successors:

"Unless we really *forget ourselves* by respectfully turning to the wisdom of the Buddha, how could the bad karma to which we ourselves are attached be the cause of our birth in the Pure Land?"<sup>256</sup>

By definition, this erasure of the ego - which is at the heart of the Buddhist method - can only be accomplished naturally. And this free abandonment will be carried out through the most humble and unobtrusive attitude possible: *listening*. For, if we follow Shinran's thought well, the only alternative that remains is to really listen to the Buddha's teaching by hearing the content of Amida's vows and their fruition. Concerning hearing, which sounds like the last word of Jōdo-Shinshū, Shinran gives the following definition:

"*To hear* means that beings hear the genesis and full process of the Buddha's Vow without having a heart of doubt. This is *to hear*."<sup>257</sup>

On the whole, Shinran's life and thought have little to do with those of a Luther, let alone a Savonarola! But his spirituality is no less demanding, and his works formulate it [p. 169] without any compromise. Bathed entirely in the spirit of the Greater Vehicle, his spirituality even claims to convey the most subtle essence of the Greater Vehicle. Once the

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<sup>255</sup> *Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life*, vol. 2, § 47: "難中之難無過此難"; and *Sūtra of Amida*, § 13: "一切世間難信之法 (...) 難信之法" (T. 12, pp. 279a; 348a / Jssz 1, pp. 69; 111).

<sup>256</sup> Shinran as quoted in Kakunyo's *Shūjishō 執持鈔 (Notes on Holding to the Name)*, ch. 3: "さればおのれをわすれて仰ぎて佛智に歸するまことなくは、おのれがもつところの悪業、なんぞ浄土の生因たらん" (T. 83, p. 736b / Jssz 4, p. 236).

<sup>257</sup> Shinran, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, ch. 3, § 65: "言聞者、衆生聞佛願生起本末無有疑心、是日聞也" (T. 83, p. 604c / Jssz 2, p. 94).

clichés have been set aside, Shinran's teaching appears not as a cheap form of Buddhism but as one of the major contributions to universal religious history<sup>258</sup>.

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<sup>258</sup> Further reading (for example): Amstutz, Galen: *Interpreting Amida*, History and Orientalism in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism (Albany, State University of New York, 1997); Tanaka, Kenneth K.: *Pure Land Buddhism*, Historical Development and Contemporary Manifestation (Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2004); Hirota, Dennis: *Asura's Harp*, Engagement with Language as Buddhist Path (Heidelberg, Winter, 2006); Payne, Richard K. (ed.) : *Shin Buddhism: Historical, Textual, and Interpretive Studies* (Berkeley, Institute of Buddhist Studies and Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007); Paraskevopoulos, John: *Call of the Infinite*, The Way of Shin Buddhism (San Rafael, Sophia Perennis, 2016).

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[www.pitaka.ch/genchi.htm](http://www.pitaka.ch/genchi.htm)

#### I. The Trilogy of the Pure Land Sūtras (*Jōdo-Sambukyō* 淨土三部經)

1. *The Sūtra of Immeasurable-Life, Muryōjūkyō* (Ch. *Wuliangshoujing*) 無量壽經 (*Sukhāvāṭīvyuhā-sūtra*, larger version), 2 volumes, translated by Saṃghavarman in ~ 252, or by Buddhahadra in 421 ? (T. 12, 360 / Jssz 1). Abbr. *Daikyō* 大經 (*Larger Sūtra*).  
- Includes three poems: the “Poem in Praise of the Buddha” (*Sanbutsuge* 讚佛偈, or *Tanbutsuge* 歎佛偈); the “Poem of the Repetition of the Promises” (*Jūseige* 重誓偈) or “Poem of the Three Promises” (*Sanseige* 三誓偈); and the “Poem ‘From the Eastern Direction’” (*Tōbōge* 東方偈) or “Poem of the Visits” (*Ōgonge* 往覲偈).
2. *The Sūtra of Contemplations on Immeasurable-Life, Kan Muryōjūkyō* (Ch. *Guan Wuliangshoujing*) 觀無量壽經, td. Kālayāśas in ~ 430 (T. 12, 365 / Jssz 1). Abbr. *Kangyō* 觀經 (*Sūtra of Contemplations, Contemplations Sūtra*).
3. *The Sūtra of Amida, Amidakyō* (Ch. *Amituojing*) 阿彌陀經 (*Sukhāvāṭīvyuhā-sūtra*, smaller version), td. Kumārajīva in 402 (T. 12, 366 / Jssz 1). Abbr. *Shōkyō* 小經 (*Smaller Sūtra*).

[p. 171]

#### II. The Seven Eminent Masters (*Shichi Kōsō* 七高僧)

**Nāgārjuna** (~ 3<sup>rd</sup> C.)

1. *Jūju bibasha ron* (Ch. *Shizhu piposha lun*) 十住易行毘婆沙論 (\**Daśabhūmika-vibhāśa-śāstra*), 17 vol., td. Kumārajīva; *Treatise on the analysis of the Ten Stages* (T. 26, 1521).  
- volume 5, chapter 9: *Igyōhon* (Ch. *Yixingpin*) 易行品, “Chapter on the Easy Practice” (Jssz 1).
2. *Jūnirai* (Ch. *Shierli*) 十二禮, td. Dhyānagupta; *Twelve Praises* (T. 47, 1980, p. 442ac / Jssz 1).

**Vasubandhu** (~ 4<sup>th</sup> C.)

3. *Jōdoron* (Ch. *Jingtulun*) 淨土論 (\**Sukhāvāṭīvyūhopadeśa*), td. Bodhiruci in 529 ~ 531; *Treatise on the Pure Land* (T. 26, 1524 / Jssz 1). Full title: *Muryōjūkyō ubadaisha ganshōge* 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈), *Upadeśa of the Canon of Infinite-Life with the Poem of the Vow of Birth in Pure Land*. Other title: *Ōjōron* 往生論, *Treatise on Birth in the Pure Land*.  
- Includes the “Poem of the Vow of Birth in the Pure Land” (*Ganshōge* 願生偈).

**Tanluan** 曇鸞 (476-542):

4. *Ōjōronchū* (Ch. *Wangshenglunzhu*) 往生論註, 2 vol.; *Commentary on the Treatise on Birth in the Pure Land* (T. 40, 1819 / Jssz 1). Other titles: *Jōdoronchū* 淨土論註, *Ronchū* 論註.
5. *San Amida Butsu ge* (Ch. *Zhan Amituo Fo jie*) 讚阿彌陀佛偈; *Poem in Praise of the Buddha Amida* (T. 47, 1978 / Jssz 1).
6. *Ryakuron Anraku jōdo gi* (Ch. *Lüelun Anle jingtu yi*) 略論安樂淨土義; *Abridged Treatise on the Meaning of the Pure Land Peaceful-Happiness* (T. 47, 1957; Jssz. 1).

**Daochuo** 道綽 (562-645)

7. *Anrakushū* (Ch. *Anleji*) 安樂集, 2 vol.; *Collection on the Land Peaceful-Happiness* (T. 47, 1958 / Jssz 1).

**Shandao** 善導 (613-681)

8. *Hanjusan* (Ch. *Banzhouzan*) 般舟讚; *Hymns on the Pratyutpanna-Samādhi* (T. 47, 1981 / Jssz 1).
9. *Hōjisan* (Ch. *Fashizan*) 法事讚, 2 vol.; *Hymns of Liturgy* (T. 47, 1969 / Jssz 1). [p. 172]
10. *Kangyōsho* (Ch. *Guanjingshu*) 觀經疏, 4 vol.; *Commentary on the Sūtra of Contemplations* (T. 37, 1753 / Jssz 1).  
- Includes the “Poem of Refuge in the Three Jewels” (*Kisambōge* 歸三寶偈), or “Poem of Exhortation” (*Kanshūge* 勸衆偈), or “Poem in Fourteen Stanzas” (*Jūshikōge* 十四行偈).

11. *Kannen bōmon* (Ch. *Guannian famen*) 觀念法門; *Method of Contemplation on the Buddha Amida* (T. 47 1959 / Jssz 1).
12. *Ōjō raisange* (Ch. *Wangsheng lizanji*) 往生禮讚偈; *Hymns in Praise of Birth in the Pure Land* (T. 47, 1980 / Jssz 1).  
- Includes the “Hymns of Praise for the Six Periods” (*Rokuji-raisan* 六時禮讚): Sunset (*Nichimotsu* 日没), First Watch of the Night (*Shoya* 初夜), Midnight (*Chūya* 中夜), Last Watch of the Night (*Goya* 後夜), Morning (*Jinjō* 晨朝), Noon (*Nitchū* 日中).

**Genshin** 源信 (942-1017)

13. *Ōjō yōshū* 往生要集, 3 vol., in 985; *Essentials on Birth in the Pure Land* (T. 84, 2862 / Jssz 1).

**Hōnen** 法然 (1133-1212)

14. *Senjakushū* 選擇集, in 1198; *Collection on the Selection* (T. 83, 2608 / Jssz 1). Full title: *Senjaku hongan nembutsu shū* 選擇本願念佛集; *Collection on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow*.

### III. Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1263)

- In Chinese

1. *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信證, 6 vol., ca. 1234; *Teaching, Practice, Faith and Realization* (T. 83, 2646 / Jssz 2). Full title: *Ken Jōdo shinjitsu kyōgyōshō monrui* 顯淨土真實教行證文類, *Anthology revealing the True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land*.  
- Includes (ch. 2, § 102) the “Poem of True Faith’s nembutsu” (*Shōshin nembutsu ge* 正信念佛偈). Abbr. *Shōshinge*.
2. *Jōdo monrui jushō* 淨土文類聚鈔, in 1252; *Anthological Compendium of the Pure Land* (T. 83, 2647 / Jssz 2).  
- Includes the “Poem of nembutsu’s True Faith” (*Nembutsu shōshin ge* 念佛正信偈). Abbr. *Monruige* 文類偈.
3. *Gutokushō* 愚禿鈔, 2 vol., in 1255; *Gutoku’s Notes* (T. 83, 2648 / Jssz 2).
4. *Nyū-shutsu nimonge* 入出二門偈, in 1256 ?; *Poem on the Two kinds of Entrance and Exit Doors* [p. 173] (T. 83, 2649 / Jssz 2).

- In Japanese

5. *Jōdo wasan* 淨土和讚, in 1248; *Japanese Hymns on the Pure Land*, 118 stanzas (T. 83, 2650 / Jssz 2).
6. *Kōsō wasan* 高僧和讚, in 1248; *Japanese Hymns on the Eminent Masters*, 119 stanzas (T. 83, 2651 / Jssz 2).
7. *Yuishinshō mon’i* 唯信鈔文意, in 1250; *The Meaning of the Passages in the “Notes on Faith alone”* (T. 83, 2658 / Jssz 2).
8. *Jōdo Sangyō ōjō monrui* 淨土三經往生文類, short version (*ryakuhon* 略本), in 1255; long version (*kōhon* 廣本), in 1257; *Anthology from the Three Sūtras pertaining to Birth in the Pure Land* (T. 83, 2654 / Jssz 2).
9. *Songō shinzō meimon* 尊號眞像銘文, short version (*ryakuhon* 略本), in 1255; long version in 2 vol. (*kōhon* 廣本), in 1258; *Inscriptions on the Scrolls of the Venerable Names and Authentic Portraits* (T. 83, 2656 / Jssz 2).
10. *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan* 皇太子聖德奉讚, in 1255; *Hymns in Praise of Imperial Prince Shōtoku*, 75 stanzas (T. 83, 2653 / Jssz 2).
11. *Ōsō-ekō gensō-ekō monrui* 往相廻向還相廻向文類, in 1256; *Anthology on the Transfer of Merits in the Going forth Direction and the Transfer of Merits in the Returning Direction* (T. 83, 2655 / Jssz 2).  
Other title: *Nyorai nishū-ekō mon* 如來二種廻向文; *Passages on the Two Transfers of Merits by the Tathāgata in the Going and Returning Directions*.
12. *Dai-Nippon-koku zokusan ō Shōtoku Taishi hōsan* 大日本國粟散王聖德太子奉讚, in 1257; *Hymns in Praise of Imperial Prince Shōtoku, Ruler of the Archipelago of Great Japan*, 114 stanzas (Jssz 2).
13. *Ichinen tannen mon’i* 一念多念文意, in 1257; *The Meaning of Passages in the “One nembutsu and Many nembutsu”* (T. 83, 2657 / Jssz 2).
14. *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 正像末和讚, in 1258; *Japanese Hymns on the Ages of the correct, copied and vanishing Law*, 116 stanzas (T. 83, 2652 / Jssz 2).
15. *Mida Nyorai myōgō toku* 彌陀如來名號德 (incomplete), in ~1255 ~1258 ?; *The Virtues of the Name of the Tathāgata ‘Mida* (Jssz 2).

- Letters' collections

16. *Mattōshō* 末燈鈔, 2 vol.; ed. in 1333 by Jūkaku 從覺 (1295-1360); *The Lamp in the Age of vanishing Law*, 22 letters (T. 83, 2659 / Jssz 2).
17. *Goshōsoku-shū* 御消息集; ed. by Zenshō 善性; *Collection of Letters (Zenshō text)*, 7 letters (Jssz 2).
18. *Shinran Shōnin goshōsoku-shū* 親鸞聖人御消息集; *Collection of Letters of His Holiness Shinran*, 18 letters (long version: Jssz 2) or 10 letters [p. 174] (short version: T. 83, 2660).
19. *Shinran Shōnin kechimiyaku monshū* 親鸞聖人血脈文集; *Documents of the Transmission of His Holiness Shinran*, 6 letters (Jssz 2).

- In Chinese and Japanese

20. *Saihō shinan shō* 西方指南抄, 3 vol., 1256-1257; *The Compass for the Pure Land in the West* (T. 83, 2674 / Jssz 3); Hōnen's works and archives compiled by Shinran.

#### IV. Shinran's fellow disciples

**Ryūkan** 隆寬 (1148-1227):

1. *Ichinen Tannen funbetsu no koto* 一念多念分別事; *About the Distinction between One nembutsu and Many nembutsu* (T. 83, 2677 / Jssz 2).
2. *Jiriki-tariki no koto* 自力他力事; *About Self Power and Other Power* (T. 83, 2678 / Jssz 2).
3. *Gose monogatari kikigaki* 後世物語聞書; *Record of Sayings on the Afterlife* (T. 83, 2676 / Jssz 2).  
Autorship uncertain.

**Seikaku** 聖覺 (1167-1235):

4. *Yuishinshō* 唯信鈔, 1221; *Notes on Faith Alone* (T. 83, 2675 / Jssz 2).

#### V. Tradition

**Kakunyo** 覺如 (1270-1351), 3<sup>rd</sup> patriarch of the Honganji

1. *Hōonkō shiki* 報恩講私記, 1294; *Ceremonial of Hōonkō* (T. 83, 2665 / Jssz 4).
2. *Honganji Shōnin denne* 本願寺聖人傳繪, or *Godenshō* 御傳鈔, 2 vol., 1295-1343; *The illustrated Life of His Holiness [Shinran] of Honganji* (T. 83, 2664 / Jssz 4).
3. *Shūi kotokuden* 拾遺古德傳繪, 9 vol., 1301; *The illustrated Life [of Hōnen] supplementing old Panegyrics* (Jssz 4).
4. *Kyōbyaku* 啓白, 1319; *Declaration* (SSZ 5).
5. *Shūjishō* 執持鈔, 1326; *Notes on Holding to the Name* (T. 83, 2662 / Jssz 4). [p. 175]
6. *Kudenshō* 口傳鈔, 3 vol., 1331; *Notes from the Oral Tradition* (T. 83, 2663 / Jssz 4).
7. *Honganshō* 本願鈔; 1337; *Notes on the Primal Vow* (Jssz 4).
8. *Gaijashō* 改邪鈔, 1337; *Notes on Correcting Errors* (Jssz 4).
9. *Ganganshō* 願願抄, 1340; *Notes on the Vows* (Jssz 4).
10. *Saiyōshō* 最要鈔, 1343; *Notes on the Most Essential* (Jssz 4).
11. *Shusse gan'i* 出世元意; *The Original Reason for the Coming [of the Tathāgata] to the World* (Jssz 4).
12. *Kan'yōki* 肝要記, or *Kan'yōshū* 肝要集; *Record of the Essential* (SSZ 5); autorship uncertain.

**Zonkaku** 存覺 (1290-1373), Kakunyo's son and 4<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Kibe-ha

1. *Jōdo shin'yōshō* 淨土真要鈔, 2 vol., 1324; *Notes on the True Essential of the Pure Land* (T. 83, 2667 / Jssz 4).
2. *Jimyōshō* 持名鈔, 2 vol.; *Notes on Keeping the Name* (Jssz 4).
3. *Benjutsu myōtaishō* 辯述名體鈔; *Notes Describing the Name and the Body [of the Buddha]* (Jssz 4).
4. *Haja kenshōshō* 破邪顯正抄, 3 vol., 1324; *Notes Destroying Errors and Revealing the True* (Jssz 4).
5. *Shojin hongaiishū* 諸神本懷集, 2 vol., 1324; *Collection on the Primal Motivation of the Kamis* (Jssz 4).
6. *Nyonin ōjō kikigaki* 女人往生聞書; *Records about Women going to be born in the Pure Land* (Jssz 4).
7. *Kemmyōshō* 顯名鈔, 2 vol., 1338; *Notes Revealing the Name* (Jssz 4).
8. *Busenshō* 步船鈔, 2 vol., 1338 ?; *Notes on the Walk and the Boat* (Jssz 4).
9. *Ketchishō* 顯智鈔, 1338; *Notes Discerning Wisdom* (Jssz 4).
10. *Hokke mondō* 法華問答, 2 vol. *Questions and Answers about the Lotus Sūtra* (Jssz 4).

11. *Hōonki* 報恩記, 1338; *Memoir on Gratitude* (Jssz 4).
12. *Senjaku chūgeshō* 選擇註解鈔, 5 vol., 1338; *Commentary on the Senjakushū* (Jssz 4).
13. *Shidōshō* 至道抄, 1338; *Notes on the Supreme Way* (Jssz 4).
14. *Zonkaku hōgo* 存覺法語, 1356; *Zonkaku's Sermon* (Jssz 4).
15. *Jōdo kemmonshū* 淨土見聞集, 1356; *Collections of minutes about the Pure Land* (Jssz 4).
16. *Tandokumon* 嘆德文, 1359; *Panegyric [of Shinran]* (Jssz 4).
17. *Rokuyōshō* 六要鈔, 10 vol., 1360; *Notes on the Six Volumes [of the Kyōgyōshinshō]* (Jssz 4).
18. *Jōrakudai-shu rōnō ichigoki* 常樂臺主老衲一期記, 1361?; [p. 176] *Memories of the Life of the Old Monk Abbot of Jōrakudai* (Jssz 4).
19. *Zangeki* 纒解記, 1362; *Memoir of Simple Explanation* (Jssz 4).
20. *Jōten mokuroku* 淨典目錄, 1362; *Catalogue of the Pure Land's Canon* (Jssz 6).
21. *Sode nikki* 袖日記; *Diary* (Jssz 4).

**Jūkaku** 從覺 (1295-1360), Kakunyo's son

1. *Bokie* 慕歸繪, 10 vol., 1351; *The Illustrated Life of Kakunyo* (Jssz 4).

**Jōsen** 乘專 (1295-1377), Kakunyo's disciple

1. *Saishu kyōjūeshi* 最須敬重繪詞, 7 vol. (vol. 3 & 4 missing), 1352; *The Illustrated Life of Kakunyo* (Jssz 4).

**Ryōgen** 了源 (1295-1336), 7<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Bukkōji-ha 佛光寺派

1. *Santōroku* 算頭錄, 1329; *Records* (Jssz 6).

**Rennyō** 蓮如 (1415-1499), 8<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the Honganji

1. *Gobunshō* 御文章, 5 vol., 80 letters (*Ofumi* ㊦文); ed. by Jitsunyo 實如 (1458-1525), 9<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the Honganji (T. 83, 2668 / Jssz 5). Vol. I, 15 letters (1471-1473); Vol. II, 15 letters (1473-1474); Vol. III, 13 letters (1474-1476); Vol. IV, 15 letters (1477-1498); Vol. V, 22 letters (undated).
2. *Gozokushō* 御俗姓, 1477; *On the Family [of the Founder Shinran]* (Jssz 5).
3. *Ge no Gobunshō* 夏御文章, 1498; *Summer's Letters*, 4 letters (Jssz 5).
4. *Gobunshō shūsei* 御文章集成; *Collection of Letters*, 270 letters (Jssz 5).
5. Commentary on the *Shōshinge*, in Japanese: *Shōshinge no taii* 正信念佛偈, 1458; *The General Meaning of the Shōshinge* (Jssz 5).  
In Chinese: *Shōshinge chūshaku* 正信偈註釋, and *Shōshinge chū* 正信偈註 (Jssz 5).
6. *Rennyō Shōnin goichidaiki kikigaki* 蓮如上人御一代記聞書, 2 vol.; *Records about the Life of His Eminence Rennyō* (Jssz 5).
7. *Rennyō Shōnin waka shūsei* 蓮如上人和歌集成, 295 poems; *Collection of Poems by His Eminence Rennyō* (Jssz 5).

**Shinne** 眞慧 (1434-1512), 10<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Takada-ha 高田派

1. *Ken shōryūgishō* 顯正流義鈔, 2 vol.; 1472; *Notes revealing the Doctrine of the Orthodox Current* (T. 83, 2673 / Jssz 6).
2. *Jūroku mondō ki* 十六問答記, 1493; *Sixteen Questions and Answers* (Jssz 6). [p. 177]

**Jihan** 慈範 (1446-1489), 9<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Kibe-ha

1. *Anjinshō* 安心章, 1489; *Letters about Faith*; 21 letters: the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> letters are signed by Zonkaku, the last one by Jihan (in *Shinsen Shinshū seiten* 新撰眞宗聖典; Kyōto, Chūgai shuppan, 1923; pp. 1501-1525).

**Ryōnyō** 良如 (1612-1662), 13<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Honganji-ha

1. *Ha Anjin-sōi-no-oboegaki jōjō* 破安心相違之覺書條々, 1654; *Refutation of the "Memorandum on Divergences of Faith"* (Sszs 50).

**Jakunyo** 寂如 (1651-1725), 14<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Honganji-ha

1. *Sambutsu kōshiki* 讚佛講式; *Ceremonial in Praise of the Buddha* (SSZ 5).



## VI. Anonymous

1. *Tannishō* 歎異抄; *Notes deploring Divergences*. Attributed to Yuien-bō 唯圓房 (?-1290) (T. 83, 2661 / Jssz 2).
2. *Kyōgyōshinshō taii* 教行信證大意, or *Kyōgyōshinshō myōgi* 教行信證名義, 1328; *Commentary on the Kyōgyōshinshō*. Attributed to Kakunyo or Zonkaku (Jssz 4).
3. *Shinshū kechimyaku denraishō* 真宗血脈傳來鈔; *Notes on Shinshū's genealogy and transmission*. Authorship uncertain, attributed to Kakunyo or Zonkaku (SSZ 5).

## VII. Editions

CSB = *Jōdo-Shinshū seiten, chūshakuban* 浄土真宗聖典, 註釈版 (*The Canon of Jōdo-Shinshū*, annotated edition), 2 vol.; Kyōto, Honganji shuppansha, 1988-1996.

- On-line: <http://labo.wikidharma.org>

CWS = *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 2 vol. (Shin Buddhism Translation Serie); Kyoto, Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997.

- On-line: <http://shinranworks.com>

Jssz = *Jōdo-Shinshū seiten zensho* 浄土真宗聖典全書 (*The Complete Collection of the Canon of Jōdo-Shinshū*), 6 vol.; Kyōto, Honganji Shuppansha, 2013-2019. [p. 178]

SSZ = *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書 (*The Complete Collection of Shinshū Scriptures*) 5 vol. (1940-1944); Kyōto, Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1972.

Sszs = *Shinshū zensho* 真宗全書 (*The Complete Collection of Shinshū*), 75 vol. (1913-1916); Tōkyō, Kokusho Kankōkai, 1971.

T. = *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (*The Buddhist Canon newly edited in the Taishō era*), 100 vol.; Tōkyō, 1924-1935.

- On-line (University of Tokyo) : <https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/>

*Teihon Shinran Shōnin zenshū* 定本親鸞聖人全集 (*The Complete Works of Shinran Shōnin, definitive edition*), 9 vol.; Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 1969-1976.

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