

# ***An Analysis of 'Shinranism in Mahayana Buddhism and the Modern World'***

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(Ed. note: This essay is a study of "Shinranism in Mahayana Buddhism and the Modern World," Takahashi Takeichi and Izumida Junjo. California, 1932. It is a significant work in the early effort to integrate western thought and Buddhism. We appreciate the author's permission to post it here.)

As the Higashi Honganji's North America District prepares to celebrate its 80th anniversary along with the L.A. Betsuin's 100-year anniversary, I should like to reflect upon the life of Reverend Junjo Izumida.

Although originally a Nishi Honganji minister, Junjo Izumida became the first Rinban of Higashi Honganji (Shinshu Otani-Ha) Los Angeles Betsuin and the first Bishop in its North America District. Even fifty years after his death, Izumida's contributions still remain largely unknown. For this reason, I have begun to do research on his life and the origins of the Higashi Honganji in the United States. It is hoped that, in learning about these early events and Izumida's life, we maybe able to plan more effectively for the future of Jodoshinshu.

Izumida was born in 1866, son of Hojo Izumida, a minister at Anyu-ji in Nagasaki Prefecture, which was a Nishi Honganji temple at that time. Later, the Izumida family moved to Shoren-ji in Saga City. Izumida was initially ordained into the priesthood in 1893, becoming a fully-fledged minister in 1897. A year later, he began teaching as an assistant professor at Bungakuryo, a Nishi Honganji school, later to become Ryukoku University, Kyoto. In 1902, he traveled to the United States. After receiving the consent of his family and members of Shoren-ji, he landed in Los Angeles in 1904. While we do not know exactly why he wanted to cross the Pacific Ocean, once he arrived in America, he began propagating the Jodoshinshu teachings.

At that time, Nishi Honganji had already established a temple in Northern California. However, Los Angeles, a city with a growing population of Japanese immigrants, urgently needed a minister to conduct services and be a spiritual leader to its community. Izumida appeared to have accepted that challenge. Although not sanctioned by Nishi Honganji Headquarters, he formed a Buddhist group, called Rafu Bukkyo Kai, or Buddhist Mission of Los Angeles, whose first temple was built in 1911 on South Savannah Street in the city's Boyle Heights section. Records show that soon after, two Nishi Honganji affiliated groups had been formed, called Nanka Bukkyo Kai and Chuou Bukkyo Kai. In order to strengthen its presence in Los Angeles, Nishi Honganji North America District Office (which later became the Buddhist Churches of America) and Nishi Honganji Headquarters in Kyoto proposed the consolidation of these three groups in 1917. However, as Izumida rejected this idea, Nishi Honganji broke its affiliation with his group and subsequently, he began building ties with Higashi Honganji.

In 1921, Izumida became a Higashi Honganji minister. A year later, his Buddhist Mission of Los Angeles changed its name to Higashi Honganji Los Angeles Betsuin and he became its first Rinban. Although there were many remarkable events in Izumida's career, perhaps the most notable was his efforts to introduce Shinran's teachings to America. Previously, the propagation of Jodoshinshu there had been aimed primarily at Japanese immigrants, hence, information about Jodoshinshu in English was extremely limited. However, with the help of Dr. Takeichi Takahashi, he published a book, in English, called "Shinranism in Mahayana

Buddhism and the Modern World" in 1932, which was the first attempt to introduce the Kyogyoshinsho in the United States. Although it was published 70 years ago, the book is still an important testament to the propagation of Jodoshinshu. In the book, the authors call the teachings of Shinran "Shinranism," and describe them as "the most fundamental doctrine of the Buddha." In addition to the analysis of the Kyogyoshinsho and Tannisho, they define Shinranism as "a democratic religion," "a social religion," "a pedagogical religion," "a common people's gospel," and "a voluntaristic futurism." Hopefully, by analyzing this book, we shall be able to understand their ideas more deeply, which are still applicable today. His struggle to bring Jodoshinshu to America is a story, full of inspiration, which can help us shape the future of the teachings and eventually the temples, already built there.

Before analyzing the content of this book, the authors' motivations for carrying out this task should be described first, after which their method of introducing Jodoshinshu into American society needs to be clarified. Finally, a definition of "Shinranism" will be examined.

Basically, the authors wished to publish this book to introduce the thought of Shinran to the Nisei, the second generation of Japanese Americans, as well as Americans in general. Izumida states in his introduction:

"My primary purpose and hope for the American mission has not been, from beginning to end, for old Japanese here, but for their children and Americans. Therefore, it has been my long cherished hope that I would be able to do something for them, which might remain long after my death, although I knew I could not possess such a mind as to fully realize my hope." [1]

Most of Izumida's life in America was spent busily meeting the religious demands of the Issei, the first generation of Japanese Americans who had first emigrated from Japan, such as collecting donations for the construction of a temple, conducting funeral and memorial services, handling temple affairs, and propagating the teachings. Therefore, it is probably fair to say that his original wish, namely to introduce Shinran's thought to America, was not easily met in his daily religious activities. In this sense, the scholar, Dr. Takahashi, who had received a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Chicago, understood Izumida's sincerity in sharing the teachings with the American people. He saw in him a man, faithful to the Dharma so much so that he would often forget his family and everything except to help those who wished to understand the Buddha's words. Not only this, but he saw him as one of the few rare ministers who sought for spiritual purity in American society or in his words "lotus-flowers in American ponds," who had no real interest in this mundane world in which other ministers seemed to get so involved. Basically, he was seen as a man in love with Dharma.

The two authors realized that not only by introducing Shinran's thought to the Nisei, but also to the American people as a whole, as the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism, the world would be brought into harmony through the study of comparative religions and mutual understanding.

"We must find the universal in the individuals, as far as each individual can be true for itself on the basis of today's theory of relativity. We can find an international spirit of humanity in all different individualities of both the East and the West, though the ways of expression may differ. If this truth be doubted, even the basis of each national organization will be broken up. From the point of view of social psychology, we find a theoretical ground of international spirit and organization on the basis of the contemporary theory of relativity. Not only so, but also we can find enough reason for it in our sciences and metaphysics. Here is indicated thus the author's

[sic] spirit in introducing Shinran's work, Kyo-gyo-shin-sho to western minds which are expected to be mostly Christians." [2]

In order to introduce Jodoshinshu to American society, the authors took two approaches; 1) to compare the teachings with western philosophy and religion, and 2) to place Jodoshinshu within the mainstream of Mahayana Buddhist development. Since most Americans had never heard of Jodoshinshu at that time, its comparative study with western philosophies and Christianity was crucial.

They pointed out the similarity of Shinran's teaching with that of Aristotle in the sense that truth could be found within oneself, which we can read on page three of this book. They also stressed that Shinran's life did not follow the religious norm as he found spiritual truth within his daily life and for this reason, he can be seen as more of an Aristotelian than a Platonist.

Based on this, they defined Shinran's thought as "a natural empiricism as religion" where faith was neither obtained through the supernatural working of God nor by increasing one's academic knowledge, but rather as "a natural process" which could never be grasped totally by the human intellect. According to the authors,

"Nature is thus presumed as an immeasurable series of realization[s] in terms of all kinds of human experience." [3]

And therefore Shinran's thought can be seen as different from other religions. Comparison between this and Christianity is further explored in this book. For example, similarities between the lives of Shinran and St. Paul are stressed in that both were persecuted and both expressed the universality of truth though, on the one hand, Shinran was not an Indian and on the other, Paul was not a Jew. However, differences in the structure of the salvation process are also emphasized, as for example, the vagueness in how faith is achieved in Christianity or whether Christian love is so conditional that those who do not have enough time to repent of their sins, can be saved. In Shinran's case, the authors argue that because of the 19th and 20th Vows, which they call "adaptational vows" and "adaptational Buddha Land," these problems can be solved. Overall, the differences can be found in such a short passage as:

"The Light of the Tathagata is omnipresent, and meanwhile his Life is eternal as an eternal complete Intelligencer, which existed eternally before the individual Tathagata was born, and would exist forever. But there is no idea of individual immortality at all here, which we observe in the traditional idea of Christianity, but an Aristotelian idea of metaphysical immortality; Aristotle assumed metaphysically a perfect intelligible reality as an eternal existence. For Aristotle, there is no history of reality. Similarly, for the Buddha there is no history of reality in a sense of Christian creation theory. In Buddhism, there is only a history of realization." [4]

The phrase "an eternal complete Intelligencer" corresponds to the "law of nature," namely Dharma which is explained through Nagarjuna's concept of sunya, called "concrete empty" in their book while the authors themselves place Jodoshinshu in Mahayana Buddhism as its fundamental doctrine. By defining Tathagata as the master of the Law in which all illusions and dreams on the appearance of all things are destroyed, they describe Shinran's idea in the following words:

"Muni-no-ho-shin' (the Non-selfish Law-Master) is the Master of Law by having obtained the highest perfect knowledge (the Bodhi Knowledge). By the highest perfect knowledge, Shinran means the knowledge of the Law as just that [as] it is.

Such knowledge is called true knowledge by the Shonin. And this knowledge is essentially marked out with the most concrete whole. Therefore, it is essentially the concrete empty. It is in a word, the knowledge of nirvana." [5]

Basically, although Shakyamuni Buddha taught that Amida and his Land became the salvation for all people, the concept of Amida itself is nirvana and concrete emptiness. Thus, the role of Bodhisattvas is to direct people to this realization since such profound concrete reality cannot be gained by all human beings through their own power. In this sense, the Bodhisattva is called "The Buddha as a socially active Master."

Though the aforementioned analysis and comparative study of Shinran's thought might be seen as rather simplistic from today's scholarly point of view, the authors' efforts which were made 70 years ago to "export," as it were, Shinran's idea to America where Jodoshinshu had been previously unknown, deserve great praise. One more area in which we have to be careful in this book, is their use of terminology as in order to introduce Buddhist concepts they borrowed Western, particularly Christian terms, as they state:

"Thus, the Buddhist theory of reality is quite different from all western theories of reality, not only in its practical phase as such, but also in its theoretical phase itself, although we use often similar words with those used in western systems. We should draw a very sharp distinction between this and the others; otherwise, we may be misled into a helpless tangle." [6]

Focus should also be placed on the uniqueness in this book which is still evident today, of the definition of "Shinranism," and its relation to society. Dr. Takahashi invented such a term though he did not know whether this was right or not. He states he merely did so as he was extremely eager to introduce Shinran's thought to America with great energy and hence the term "Shinranism" seemed appropriate at that time.

According to the authors, Shinranism is the unconditional obedience of human beings to Amida's Vow to grasp his Law, which is ultimately concrete emptiness. By using a metaphor of the lotus-flower, growing in a muddy pond while at the same time producing such a beautiful flower, the paradoxical Buddhist teaching of neither being nor non-being is presented, which does not mean ignoring the experience of human intelligence at all. Shinranism stands outside or in the authors' words, "above" human intellect, while not negating its qualities and experiences. This idea can be found in religion as a whole, as can be seen in the following quote:

"Here is the most fundamental ground of all religious experiences and values. Religion must stand above epistemology or logic. It must stand above ethics or any other science. It should not, however, ignore the results of these human intelligence[s]. We must distinguish between standing above them and ignoring them. The real task of science stands always above the actual knowledge of science in order to discover a new truth or value. Similarly, the real business of religion stands always above the actual knowledge of science and philosophy in order to enrich the essence of life further and further in terms of religious experience." [7]

Dr. Takahashi, himself, was influenced by John Dewey as shown in his Ph.D. thesis, where he states:

"What I want to make clear, in connection with my present thesis, is simply that I started from Dewey's instrumentalism and developed positively the most important thesis of the Chicago Pragmatic School which consists in its emphasis upon the future situation as a primary problem of knowledge or value." [8]

His understanding of Dewey's instrumentalism is described as follows:

"In opposition to the traditional Aristotelian concept of the good, Dewey presents an instrumental concept. The actualities of any moral judgment are merely tools to an end; they are working-hypothesis. The world is neither an eternally complete being nor an eternal consciousness. The problem of the world is essentially a problem of organization. The world is in the making; it is not ready-made for eternity. It is a process of making or of reorganization. The same is true of human nature itself; it always is a process of making along with its life conditions. Dewey regards the problem of human nature as being a problem of social conduct. The problem of social conduct is essentially a problem of social organization, a problem of communication in terms of social intelligence. Any problem and its solution must always involve the future. Therefore, in Dewey's view, any actual solution is merely a means to an end; it is a living-hypothesis. Any value theory expressed in terms of other than of human choice is an abstraction. It is only significant and real in terms of choosing process. There is no absolute solution nor absolute problem for Dewey." [9]

Therefore, we should keep the above in mind as we examine Shinranism, which is further stated to be "a democratic religion," "a social religion," "a pedagogical religion," "a common people's gospel," and "voluntaristic futurism." From such a perspective, the authors try to explain that Shinran's thought is not only a matter of individual salvation but also social welfare. In order to discuss this, I should like to look at their perception of religion and society first. According to them, all religious activity is seen within a social context and its values found in daily life where it is in contact with "the eternal harmonious whole by which all human superficial illusions are broken up in the depth of the human heart which shares most graciously in the eternal harmonious whole." [10]

They also saw that religion needed to be both individual and social. The former was necessary as man is basically a political animal, according to Aristotle, who is born and grows up in a particular age and environment, even the great prophets and leaders, found within religion, cannot escape this fact. For this reason, religion is essentially social though each individual needs to first unconditionally surrender their ego to serve others and hence will be saved unconditionally in the sea of life. [11] This "public-servant-ship" or "community servant-ship" is supported by the authors' unique interpretation of the conditional terms in the Eighteenth Vow, namely, "however, those who have ever committed [the] five Anantarya sins such as to murder father, mother, or teacher, to break peace among monks, as well as to shed blood from the Buddha, and those who blame the Buddha's teachings."

"And the conditional terms in the Eighteenth Vow were claimed by Shinran to have been made 'for Shinran alone,' and not for the rest. Thus, Shinran bore the Crown burden of all individual loss upon his shoulders for all the rest just as the Christ died on the Cross for all wicked mankind. By this claim of the Shonin, he showed us the principal key of religious life, that one who should lose his life for others, should obtain his life, while the opposite one should conversely lose his life." [12]

According to Dr. Takahashi, the real self is not the individual self as we know it but rather a social one, which will continue to live after our death. Socrates and Jesus Christ were such examples, and though antagonistic toward the mores of their day, they were socially active enough to try to reconstruct the ethics for the coming new age. [13] Shinranism as a democratic religion is defined by comparing it with Shodo-mon, or as they call it "Holy Path" and the equality of Law (dharma). Shinran saw that except for a few people with exceptional intelligence, most could not achieve enlightenment through self-practice. The Holy Path itself does not take into account the reality of the social environment unlike

Jodoshinshu which stresses this in its basic idea of a democratic religion. In other words, for Shinran, the social situation was very important. He married, ate meat, was neither monk nor layman as these reflected ordinary human life. Therefore, the objects of a religious life must be looked for within such circumstances. In addition, although the 20th century was characterized by evolutionism, socialism, pragmatism, relativism, democracy, reform, cooperation, federalism, international organization, new individualism and scientific development, the authors insist that there was an undeniable principle of human life running throughout, namely the Dharma. Through the life of interdependency and the realization of one's ignorance, all human beings can stand on the same ground. We find on pages 207 and 208 the following:

"For Shinran there could have [been] no slavery because of one person's wickedness (or for any other cause). Man should, in his view, be treated as an end in himself, not as any means to any other's end. Man ought to be delivered into the Pure Land no matter how full of sins he is. He is, as it were, a child of the Law to share equally in that tremendous nature of it after all. For Shinran there could be nothing perfectly true, good or beautiful in human intelligence. Truth, good and beauty are, in his view, not in terms of human actualities, but in terms of things believed in and hoped for. Therefore, man cannot, in his view, save himself by his own intelligence but only by the Other Power.

"Women should not be treated lower than men because of their inborn weakness, but ought to have equal opportunities for their growth and realization. Children should be respected fully as children; they should be treated as ends in themselves. Common people ought to have an equal opportunity with others for their growth and realization; for they are equally children of the Law. Democracy in Shinranism is not merely a democracy of religious and ethical humanity in terms of divine love or human love, but also in terms of metaphysical claim of equality in the Law of Nature as such...Although he [Shinran] had no interest in social and political philosophy, his doctrine had been worked out in the way of religious democracy from which ground we may properly deduce to-day's doctrines of democracy, humanity, international organization new individualism, etc. Shinranism is in this phase a democratic futurism." [14]

In short, Shinranism is a democratic religion as it gives a vision of self-evaluation not only of the individual but also of society, and by experiencing one's limitations and realizing human nature as being "wicked" and "ignorant," one can hold another's hand. This unity can be considered a framework for a society growing from the grassroots. According to Shinranism, there is no absolute authority governing society, and this principle of self-critique should be applied to the relationship of even master and follower, so that one who is constructively critical of Shinran, rather than blindly following, will no doubt protect the doctrine more, against those who wish to destroy it. In other words, Shinranism proposes to evaluate all kinds of "ism" through the Other Power beyond our calculating mind and Shinranism itself, by all means, must be constantly re-evaluated, though in this book, the authors tend to make Shinran an absolute figure as the reincarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha and justify Japan as a place where such a religious genius was born.

Shinranism is a social religion because as I mentioned above, salvation is looked for in ordinary life. Particular individualities and various social conditions which determine such lives are emphasized by the authors. Shinranism is a pedagogical religion because it teaches the differences among individuals based on the Dharma and reflects the essence of human nature that individuals cannot be saved through their own power.

Accordingly, Shinran was a voluntaristic man, which Dr. Takahashi explains as follows:

"Voluntaristic conduct does not ignore our past achievement, but stands upon, and yet above, it. It looks backward, not to repeat the maladjustments, but it looks also forward, not to be confined to our past particular achievement. Voluntaristic conduct never confines anyone to a beach where he picks up pebbles of truth before an immense sea of undiscovered truths, but always opens the door to the future although it is a subjective way of organization." [15]

In other words, Shinran was neither emotional nor rational because his will and not feeling or reason was the source of him discovering truth. In short, he was a seeker, and the awareness of receiving the Compassion of Amida brought him hope in his daily life.

"For Shinran the present life is not made to see a sun-set [sic] but a permanent rising sun going up, up and up with a sublime grace of Amida. Man cannot, in his view, see the possible universe by either the head or the heart. Man cannot live through the possible universe by reasoning. Man cannot grasp through things yet to be by intuition. Man can live through the possible universe hoped for only by means of faith in Amida who has ever brought its full evidence to light with the Forty-Eight Vows.

"For Shinran the best is not 'here,' not 'now,' but is only 'there' to be 'had' in the future." [16]

For Shinran, life in Tariki was a constant learning process in which there was no point at which to stop learning. Even the "best" now should be tested out for the future. Dr. Takahashi says that:

"Any concept of the good implies a denotative process of relations. And this is not merely an affair of immediate experience, but also of mediate experience. Much more, this is true since moral value cannot be dealt with simply in terms of actualities, but in terms of the future as possibilities to be tested out by human creative achievement. For nobody is able to grasp the future by reason or immediacy, but by critical analysis as a working-hypothesis to be tested out in the future as a possible program for something else 'there' more than the actualities." [17]

Human logic or thought is regarded as 'self-power' and the Tathagata and his Original Vow transcend it without actually denying it. Other forms of logic are limited as they are still caught within the human mind with no means of escape, whereas Shinranism transcends the limitation by placing "its deep-rooted ground of thought" in the realm of the Tathagata and the Original Vow which are above human thought. The human intellect to grasp the truth is never denied, but it is rather a matter of "testing it out" in order to realize its limitation. Therefore, as truth needs to be realized subjectively, it cannot be found in a world of ideas such as Plato's or a Christian heaven but always discovered within Nature itself as in Aristotle's doctrine of individuation and hence truth in Buddhism cannot be realized metaphysically.

It appears to me that the authors' aim was to modernize the Jodoshinshu teachings, particularly for the American society, and not merely to publicize or translate Shinran's writings in America. They tried to give the Western world a warning against rapid scientific development and to foster mutual understanding between East and West. They further tried to assist American society by providing it with a vision of self-evaluation that Shinranism offered.

1931 was the year of the Manchurian Incident and international harmony began to disintegrate, while in 1937, Higashi Honganji issued the "Dobo-Shinki" (wartime religious propaganda). [18] In this environment, the Jodoshinshu teachings were interpreted in such a way to support imperialism and military aggression in Southeast Asia. Therefore, at that time, it was impossible to express Shinran's thought as 'democratic' as it would be criticizing the absolutism of Japan. Reverend Izumida and Dr. Takahashi were, in that sense, precursors of the modernization of the Jodoshinshu teachings while providing a warning to the West, along with Bishop Yemyo Imamura, who was the first director of the Honganji Mission (Honpa Honganji or Nishi Honganji) in Hawaii.

According to Tomoe Moriya, Imamura was born in 1867 and emigrated to Hawaii and became the first Bishop of Honpa Honganji Hawaii Mission in 1898. In 1918, he published an essay called "Democracy according to the Buddhist View Point." [19] We are unclear how much Imamura's ideas influenced Izumida and Takahashi and what their relationship to him was like. However, it is fair to say that Jodoshinshu was challenged by democracy at the beginning of its encounter with American society, by being faced with a completely different culture in which it found itself. Or some might argue that they had to interpret Shinran's thought in that way because of their own survival in American where antagonism toward Japan was growing stronger.

At that time in Japan, religion was something to be kept to one's self, and thus expressing religiosity openly in society was never allowed. Even to this day, as far as Jodoshinshu followers, being engaged in society, are concerned, we can still learn from their definition of Shinranism in relation to democracy and hence there is a further need to see how this definition was incorporated into the author's actual social life. There are certain events in Izumida's life that I can call working for the welfare of society. For example, in 1893 the first World Parliament of Religion was held in Chicago where many Buddhists from various countries were invited. As well as this, in 1915, The Conference of World Buddhists was organized in San Francisco and Izumida, as vice-chairman, attended this with many other Japanese Buddhists. It is also said that he proposed building a Buddhist library in the United States for which he sought support when visiting Japan. Anyway, such events need to be more carefully explored in the future.

## References

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- [4] Ibid. p.32.
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- [7] Ibid. p.75.
- [8] Takahashi Takeichi. The Symptomatic Function and Value of Synthetic Moral Judgment. University of Chicago. 1927. p.115.
- [9] Takahashi. p.107.



[10] Ibid. p.2.

[11] Ibid. p.201

[12] Ibid. p.38.

[13] Takahashi. p.327.

[14] Ibid. pp.207-208.

[15] Takahashi. p.159.

[16] Ibid. p.204.

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