

History and eternity

by W.S. Yokoyama

Introduction

History and eternity is a theme we encounter frequently in Buddhism. The Buddha is born, takes seven steps and says, "I alone am the honored one." Here at the very outset of the Life of the Buddha is the theme of history and eternity, the seven steps symbolizing history and the declaration expressing religious awakening. But what is the relationship of history to eternity? This is not always so clear, nor is there always only one clearcut answer. The present paper will (1) examine the treatment of this theme in early Jodoshinshu, (2) propose how history and eternity is dealt with in Jodoshinshu by introducing two contrasting models, and (3) speculate on the implications that this holds for Jodoshinshu as a world religion.

Examination

Historical role. In the West, we know relatively less about Kakunyo 1270-1351, due in part to lack of information. The grandson of Shinran 1173-1262, Kakunyo played an important role in the formation of the early Jodoshinshu community as one of the first interpreters of Shinran's thought, laying the foundation for later doctrinal interpretation. In his writings Kakunyo seeks to demonstrate the unique doctrinal position formulated by Shinran over and against the numerous positions taken by the leaders of the Pure Land Buddhist communities spawned by Honen. This takes the form of several written documents that, when seen together, can be said to present a portrait of Shinran. At the same time, we must keep in mind that Kakunyo is ultimately obliged to follow his own political agenda. Thus, as an early formulator of thought and also as the key political figure in early Jodoshinshu history, his role is not to be underestimated and needs to be closely scrutinized in order to be better appreciated.

His writings. Of the six Kakunyo works in the Jodoshinshu *seiten*, I examined and translated four of them: *Shujisho*: On Embracing the Name 1328, *Kudensho*: What Shinran Taught 1331, *Gaijasho*: Setting the Claims Straight 1337, *Godensho*: The Life of Shinran 1342. The latter, the legend to the illustrated biography of Shinran, is often given an earlier date of 1295; since no document exists from that year, the date given here refers to that of the illustrated scroll.

The influence of the *Tannisho*. It came as a bit of a revelation to learn that Kakunyo was strongly influenced by the *Tannisho*. The *Tannisho* is an early essay on Shinran's thought by an unnamed author writing some years after Shinran's death in 1262. As I examined Kakunyo's writings, it became clear that he must have had the *Tannisho* on hand when he compiled his works. This is also affirmed in the annotation to several of Kakunyo's works in the official Nishi Hongwanji *Jodoshinshu seiten*, Kyoto: Hongwanji Press, second edition 2003, where the reader is directed to similar statements in the *Tannisho*. However, it is never clearly stated that Kakunyo used the *Tannisho* to compile his works.

Kakunyo's methodology. At the same time, the more I read of Kakunyo, the clearer it became that Kakunyo did not merely incorporate *Tannisho* material wholesale into his writings. He was very selective in his choice of materials and carefully adapted them to his needs; in short. Kakunyo had a political agenda that was different from that of the *Tannisho* compiler. In particular, he chose to pass over the crucial model of reality used in the *Tannisho* and substituted it with another that better suited his needs.

Proposal

The two models of reality. My brief examination of the *Tannisho* and Kakunyo's writings leads me to propose that there were at least two theoretical models of reality operating in the world of early Jodoshinshu: one, the "paradoxical model" of the *Tannisho*, and the other, the "manifestation model" of Kakunyo.

The paradoxical model. The aged compiler of the *Tannisho* sought to set down in writing a subtle point of Pure Land Buddhist thought that he felt lay at the heart of the teaching that Shinran inherited from Honen: the key concept of *nishu jinshin*, the two kinds of deep mind, elucidated by Zendo 613-681, and alluded to in the Postscript to the *Tannisho*. Since this prepares the *Tannisho* reader for the quotations and discussions of Shinran's teachings that the *Tannisho* presents in the main body, the concept is the key to understanding the *Tannisho* as a whole.

The first kind of deep mind is the conviction that we are powerless to save ourselves, adrift as we are in the sea of karma, forever unable to free ourselves. The second kind of deep mind is the conviction that the power of the Vow will save us all without exception. Zendo brings these two opposing convictions together in the concept of *nishu jinshin*.

In layman's terms, this is the idea that "the world is growing worse and worse"; this we are convinced of when we see the downward trend of world affairs in recent years. At the same time we are equally convinced that "the world is getting better". These two kinds of convictions we hold about the world completely contradict one another. This state of mind is described by the paradoxical model of reality originally proposed by Zendo and alluded to in the *Tannisho*.

History and eternity thus exists in a dynamic state that Avatamsaka theory describes as a not-one, not-two relationship. A graphic way of visualizing this nonidentical yet nondual relationship is the Mobius band, where the two surfaces form one continuous surface; it is neither one surface nor is it two. As a digression we will note that Hakuin scholar Yoshizawa Katsuhiro of Hanazono University, Kyoto, has pointed out that Hakuin graphically demonstrated the Mobius band principle in a Zen painting he did some two hundred years before Mobius. Zendo's concept of *nishu jinshin* can also be said to be a written formulation of the same principle.

What we are uncovering here is the logic of the Infinite. The Avatamsaka sutra's metaphor of the Tower of the Infinite describes the case of a tower which contains another tower equally large. How can that be? It boggles the mind to think. Yet this is possible in the logic of the infinite. The philosopher Nishida Kitaro presents this logic mathematically in what I call Nishida's triangle of the infinite, in a talk that he gave called "Coincidentia oppositorum and love". (I have translated this essay and published it some years ago in the Eastern Buddhist journal, edited by John C. Maraldo with an introduction by Dr Michael Finkenthal.) In it Nishida presents an illustration of a triangle ABC with a smaller triangle BCD within it. In the logic of the infinite, if ABC is infinite, then $ABC = BCD$. Early religious philosopher Kiyozawa Manshi 1863-1903 also points to the logic of the infinite in his lord-subject metaphor in his English essay, "Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion" 1893, prepared for distribution at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religion.

Pure Land Buddhist thought is rich in such subtle concepts as the logic of the infinite from which Zendo's concept of *nishu jinshin* derives. One source for this logic is the *Dai Muryojukyo*, the Larger Sutra of Infinite Life. Describing the residents of the Pure Land, it says that the devas and humans who live there are no different in form or feature from one another; they are called devas and humans merely as a matter of conformity to the usage of such terms in other lands; in reality, "All of them naturally receive the ultimate state of the body of emptiness" (17-5).

The manifestation model. Kakunyo was well schooled in Buddhist doctrine and no doubt saw the subtle point that the *Tannisho* was driving at. But other, far more pressing matters consume Kakunyo's attention at this formative stage of the early Shinshu community. In his days he had to deal with dissent from within his own community, friction with leaders of other Pure Land Buddhist groups, and criticism from other Buddhist groups. How close these problems hit home is also gleaned from the fact that he was forced to cut ties with his own son Zonkaku 1290-1373 ostensibly due to differences of opinion. Kakunyo thus opts for a manifestation model of reality as a means of wresting power in this world.

In the manifestation model, a sort of great man theory holds, wherein all great men who appear in history are expressions of the eternal buddha body. The hidden forces of the spirit world, e.g. the deities of Shinto shrines, appear to people in dream visions, if not physical form. History thus becomes the stage on which the eternal dances. Kakunyo counts Shinran to be among such manifestations and, in tune with the times, his writings cite accounts where Shinran is regarded as a manifestation of either Kannon or Amida.

The beauty of the manifestation model is that Kakunyo becomes the spokesman for the spiritual world. History presides over the eternal, with Kakunyo serving as the conduit of truth. Several generations later Rennyo well understood the importance of this point, and began to conduct the memorial service for Shinran on a large scale. People rallied around them especially in dark times, and found comfort in the idea that even ordinary people like us were connected to Shinran through spokesmen like Kakunyo.

The downside to this model is, in final analysis it actually is a form of totalitarianism. This allowed Kakunyo and Rennyo to claim a mandate for their actions, with their mystique of spiritual power. Under its sway people felt compelled to act as a body to follow the national agenda without question, a trend that we note in world affairs today. In such a mentality, ordinary people feel they can only access the world of spirituality through the medium of those who hold the key of spiritual authority.

At this point, I need to say this does not mean we are to reject the manifestation model for the paradoxical one, or that Kakunyo's writings have nothing to offer the contemporary study of Jodoshinshu. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Kakunyo's works are engrossing reading, but we need to read them critically and learn how to employ these models in a judicious manner, if we are to share them with the world at large. After all, there is a place for both power and paradox in the religious world, as well as in world spirituality.

Discussion

As a modern example of the paradoxical model versus the manifestation model can be seen in D. T. Suzuki 1870-1966 and the myokonin Asahara Saichi 1850-1932. Suzuki and Saichi lived in two different worlds, Suzuki rubbing shoulders with elite members of society who stood at the hub of political power in Japan, while Saichi lived in a village on the desolate coast. Suzuki became an icon of popular culture in the West and sealed his reputation as a Zen man with the appearance of his newly edited *Zen and Japanese culture*, published by Princeton University Press in 1958. With that work Suzuki fulfilled his duty to the emperor, crowning his lifetime of striving to do good while living a moral life.

The drawback to Suzuki's approach is that he believed the emperor to be a great man and was willing to put religion in the service of the state. Thus he promotes Japanese culture as an expression of Japanese spirituality and raised the image of Japan in the eyes of the world. At the same time, the same D. T. Suzuki gave a talk in Kanazawa in 1949 a few months before he left for the States, wherein he states, in one of his more lucid moments, that during the Meiji period, Japanese society suffered under the burden of totalitarianism and in that day and age the national agenda was all that mattered; there was simply no room for individual freedom; this same state of affairs is also to be seen in many countries

today.

This is very much like the manifestation model that Kakunyo champions, where great men arise who have a claim to secular power. When the nations of the world cling to this kind of model, however, there can only be conflict, as the national agenda of each nation comes into conflict with those of the rest. Interestingly enough, Suzuki met a number of people who wanted to promote world spirituality, such as life philosopher Graf Hermann Keyserling and Hungarian orientalist and journalist Felix Valyi.

Suzuki published a journal called *The Eastern Buddhist* 1921-1939 that promoted Mahayana Buddhism as a form of Eastern spirituality, but nowhere do we see him promoting Zen Buddhism as a form of world spirituality, but rather as something unique to Japanese culture. Indeed, world spirituality cannot be patterned after the model of reality that *Zen and Japanese culture* is based on, where national sovereignty is the hidden political agenda. What is needed is a paradoxical model where world spirituality is participated in by all nations, while each nation retains its individual cultural distinctiveness.

A counter example to Suzuki's brand of spirituality is seen in the myokonin Saichi, who directly accessed Amida Buddha, calling him Oyasama, or "my dear Pappy", and spoke of Rennyō as his pal. Saichi had a living understanding of the Tannishō and saw the Power of the Vow flowing in the world around him everywhere. In a poem he writes: "The sea and the tide are one: Namu Amidabutsu." The Power of the Vow infuses Saichi with a Namu Amidabutsu that snatches up Saichi's wicked heart and sets it on a path to the Pure Land. In "Namu Amidabutsu" history and eternity converge, "Namu" representing the human karma and "Amidabutsu" the Power of the Vow; the willfulness of history (here, Saichi's wicked heart) is transformed by the will of eternity (the Power of the Vow). Once Saichi's wicked heart was taken up and embraced by the Power of the Vow, he saw himself reflected in the mirror of eternity, just as eternity was reflected in the mirror of the self; no longer alone, now he lived in the heart of his dear old Pappy, just as his dear old Pappy lived in his heart. This is what the Power of the Vow expresses by imparting Saichi with Namu Amidabutsu, as in the Larger Sutra passage cited earlier, "All of them naturally receive the ultimate state of the body of emptiness".

Suzuki was intrigued by Saichi's Namu Amidabutsu and pondered this point for many years, but like the desolate crag of an impenetrable koan, in the end he was defeated by it. Unable to grasp how the power of the Vow could accept even the wicked, as Saichi openly professed himself to be, Suzuki, who believed religion to be a form of moral pursuit, ultimately dismissed Saichi's position as untenable, at least to his considered take on the world. In the end, if Suzuki learned a lesson in compassion, it did not come from his long years of studying Saichi's poems. Here I wish to note that, as a person who has a grant to study the life and thought of D. T. Suzuki, it is not my intention to put Suzuki down, but to show how difficult it is to understand subtle concepts encountered in Jodoshinshū works, even for someone like Suzuki who must have come across them in his work of translating a Kakunyo work and editing the Imadate translation of the *Tannishō*.

At this point in history, we must look around at the state of the world and ask, what exactly does Jodoshinshū teach. What if anything does it have to contribute to world spirituality and the greater goal of world peace. Even after fifty or a hundred years in the West and the Americas, we still have no answers to these pressing questions. Clearly this is an important issue that we of the Jodoshinshū must address if we are to get one step closer to resolving the political tension of today's world where basic human rights are being taken away from us left and right, and fear, darkness, and despair descend upon the land. On the other hand, it could well be that we already have a viable answer on hand and only need the courage to develop it further as a genuine contribution to world religion. Infinite possibilities arise in a new world spirituality, where Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam stand on equal footing.

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Chronology

1262 Shinran dies
1270 Kakunyo is born
1290 Son Zonkaku is born
1295 Tannisho is composed by an unknown writer
1303 Kakunyo's Shui kotokuden, Honen biography
1328 Kakunyo's Shujisho: On Embracing the Name
1331 Kakunyo's Kudensho: What Shinran Taught
1337 Kakunyo's Gaijasho: Setting the Claims Straight
1342 Kakunyo's Godensho: The Life of Shinran
1351 Kakunyo dies
1373 Zonkaku dies

1911 *The Life of the Shonin Shinran*, trans. Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, and Sasaki, Gessho. Tokyo: Buddhist Text Translation Society. With notes and comments for clarity sake interpolated into text. See also 1923, 1937, 1973.

1923 "The Life of Shinran Shonin", trans. Suzuki Daisetz Teitaro. *The Eastern Buddhist* vol. 2, no. 5, 217-235; edited and without annotation.

1928 "Tannisho," trans. Imadate, Tosui. Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society.

1937 "The Life of Shinran Shonin", trans. Suzuki Daisetz Teitaro. Compiled in *From the Shin Sect*. Kyoto: The Eastern Buddhist Society. Slightly edited from previous editions, and without annotation.

1936 "Tannisho," trans. Imadate, Tosui. Compiled in Akegarasu, H. ed., *Selections from the Nippon Seishin Library*.

1937 "Tannisho" (selections), trans. Imadate, Tosui. Compiled in *From the Shin Sect*. Kyoto: The Eastern Buddhist Society.

1939 Shujisho. "The Shujisho: Treatise on Steadily Holding to the Faith." Trans. Yokogawa Kensho. *Eastern Buddhist* vol. 7, no. 3 and 4, 363-375. See 1973.

1973 "The Life of Shinran Shonin", trans. Suzuki Daisetz Teitaro. Compiled in Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism*, ed. The Eastern Buddhist Society. Kyoto, Shinshu Otani-ha, 1973, 165-190. Newly edited to include the 137 text, the 1911 notes and 1973 editorial comments, but one technical error from the 1911 version remains undetected.

1973 "The Shujisho: Treatise on Steadily Holding to the Faith", trans. Yokogawa Kensho.

Compiled in Suzuki, Daisetz Teitarô, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism*, ed. The Eastern Buddhist Society. Kyoto, Shinshu Otani-ha, 1973, 165-190. Reflecting a strange editorial decision to include someone else's translation in a volume of Suzuki's writings.

1973 "The Tannisho", trans. Imadate, Tosui. Compiled in Suzuki, Daisetz Teitarô, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism*, ed. The Eastern Buddhist Society. Kyoto, Shinshu Otani-ha, 1973. Another strange editorial decision to include someone else's translation in a volume of Suzuki's writings.

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1986 "Shujisho. A Tract on Holding Fast to the Name by Kakunyo." Trans. Inagaki, Hisao. Compiled in *Essays on Shinran and Pure Land Buddhism* [Shigaraki Festschrift]. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1986, 79-88.

1995 Notes on Oral Transmission, Kudensho. Trans. Yasuo Izumi (Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada) with Philipp Karl Eidmann. BC Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Churches Federation, 1995.

2005 "Shujisho: On Embracing the Name". Trans. W.S. Yokoyama, incomplete, unpublished.

2005 "Kudensho: What Shinran Taught". Trans. W.S. Yokoyama, unpublished.

2005 "Gaijasho: Setting the Claims Straight." Trans. W.S. Yokoyama, unpublished.

2005 "Godensho: The Life of Shinran". Trans. W.S. Yokoyama, unpublished.