

Editorial Preface: Special Issue on Contemporary Shin Buddhist Studies at Ryukoku University

Ryukoku University occupies an important position within the sphere of Japanese religious scholasticism. Yet, it is not widely known outside of those circles. Certainly, the scholars of Ryukoku University and the religious thought they have created have never acquired the national or international renown of what is known as the Kyoto school. Nevertheless, Ryukoku University has been a locus for considerable scholarly discussion of Buddhist and Shin Buddhist thought for nearly four hundred years.

The school originated in 1639 with the establishment of the Gakuryō (later changed to Gakurin), in order to further doctrinal studies and educate temple priests of the Nishi Hongwanji branch of Jōdo Shinshū. Scholarship within the Hongwanji during the Tokugawa era—known as *shūjō* or *shūgaku*—was both sectarian in approach and highly formalized. According to Maeda Eun, one of its foremost critics, the traditional approach to the study of Shin Buddhism had four characteristics. First, it was based on extremely close and yet superficial philological exegesis. Second, it sought to interpret the entire history of Pure Land Buddhist doctrine from the perspective of Shinran, or of Kakunyo and Rennyo. Third, it emphasized sectarian Hongwanji stances. And, finally, it tended to work within the limitations of established topics for discussion (*rondai*).

In 1922 the Japanese government gave official recognition to the school as Ryukoku Daigaku (Ryukoku University). This event culminated a series of educational reforms within Japan during the Meiji and Taisho eras, which resulted in institutional changes for Ryukoku. At the same time, it also marked a sea change in the manner in which Shin Buddhism would be studied within the school. Traditional *shūjō* and *shūgaku* were replaced by *shinshūgaku* (Shin Buddhist Studies), which sought to free itself from ecclesiastical authoritarianism and adopted aspects of Western scholarship, including historical, philosophical, sociological and systematic methods of inquiry.

This issue of the *Pacific World* seeks to introduce to the Western audience the breadth of contemporary Shin Buddhist Studies currently in practice at Ryukoku University by offering the essays of eight of its scholars. The essays have been placed in order of seniority, that is, in the chronological sequence in which these eight individuals have assumed (or will assume) the senior position among Shin Buddhist scholars at the university. However, rather than following the order in which they are published, we will discuss them here in terms of methodology and subject matter.

Kōju Fugen takes what might be considered to be the most traditional approach, as he examines Rennyo's theory of Amida Buddha's Name. His analysis of textual passages from Shan-tao, Shinran, and Kakunyo demonstrates the way in which they influenced Rennyo's complex, relational explanation of "*namu-amida-butsu*." Kyōshin Asano undertakes to investigate the notion of the last dharma-age, a central theme in Pure Land thought and a key construct in the soteriology of Shinran. An exhaustive analysis of passages from Shinran's texts frames Asano's theoretical discussion as well. Sokusui Murakami argues against the tendency to hold to overly theoretical approaches to Shinran's thought. His essay maintains that, for Shinran, the stage of the truly settled does not simply indicate an assurance of future salvation, but represents the joy of true fulfillment in this world. The focus of Jōkai Asai's investigation is not Shinran, but Hōnen and his teaching of the salvation of the evil person. Asai carefully cuts through the apparent ambiguity of Hōnen's thought with a constructive consideration of a number of his works, most of which are not yet available in English. Like Asai, Ryōshō Yata also endeavors to take an historical approach to doctrinal developments. His effort to trace the development of Shinran's notion of shinjin, particularly his perspective on the two aspects of deep belief, is based on an extensive analysis of Shan-tao's scriptural interpretations. Ryōji Oka approaches Shinran's thought from a different direction. For Oka, Shinran's major work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, should not be viewed through interpretations subsequent to Shinran. Nor does he engage in an historical analysis of Shinran's doctrinal positions. Instead, Oka asserts that Shinran's work stands by itself; it represents a systematic and internally consistent explication of the "true essence of the Pure Land way." Ryūsei Takeda goes outside of the normal sphere of Shin Buddhist ideas in order to clarify those ideas from a unique perspective. Takeda's use of the notion of *duḥkha*, a fundamental Buddhist concept, to demonstrate the meaning of Amida's salvation might be considered to be an example of an intra-Buddhist, comparative study. Finally, Takamaro Shigaraki's discussion of the state of Shin Buddhist studies includes both a criticism of false interpretations of Shinran's thought (which result from sectarian or secular intervention into the true) and a radical revalorization of Shin Buddhism itself through Shigaraki's insistence that it be taken not to be a religion of power, but as a religion of path.

We are also pleased that in addition to the collection of essays presenting contemporary Shin Buddhist thought, this issue includes essays by two American scholars. James L. Ford's essay examines the relationship between Hōnen and one of his important contemporaries, Jōkei of the Hossō school (Fa hsiang, or Yogācāra). Charles Jones examines the varieties of Buddha recitation (*nien-fo*, or nembutsu) in Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. In this issue we also continue publishing Leo Pruden's translation of

Shinkō Mochizuki's landmark *Pure Land Buddhism in China: A Doctrinal History*, and publish the third and final part of Hisao Inagaki's translation of Shan-tao's "Exposition of the Method of Contemplation on Amida Buddha."

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