

Writing as Participation

Textual Streams and Argumentative Patterns in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*

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Strategies of meaning can only be understood
from the inside, by following their internal logic.
—François Jullien

Shinran's *Ken jōdo shinjitsu kyōgyōshō monrui* 顯淨土真實教行証文類, or *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証 as it is commonly called, is a curious example of medieval Buddhist philosophy. It has long suffered from being categorized as a “difficult work,” consisting of quotations “often presented with no interpretation whatsoever or with overly terse and enigmatic comments” (DOBBINS 2002, 31–2). For this reason it is little read, either by members of the Jōdo Shinshū sect or among scholars studying the sect, its founder, or medieval Buddhism in general. Even so, the importance of the text and its author is widely acknowledged. If one compares this situation with the *Shōbōgenzō* of Dōgen, for example, one notes that being “difficult” or “enigmatic” cannot be the only reason for resistance to the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, since no amount of sugar-coating is likely to make Dōgen's *opus magnum* more logical and easier to read. Yet one is read and held up to the light, while the other is shunted off into the VIP lounge of important works that no one wants really be seen with.

There is, however, one major difference between the two works that might help explain their respective reception. While both are long and full of theoretical discussion on various aspects of Buddhist themes, Dōgen's work consists of shorter, what one could call essay-like, writings intended for a specific audience, such as letters and sermons addressed to monks and disciples. Shinran's work, in contrast, is long and winding, constructed mainly of quotations without comment, so that no one knows quite for sure why it was written for or for whom. These facts present a range of questions concerning how a reader should relate to the text and how the text should be read and understood.

At the first glance, *Kyōgyōshinshō* looks like an endless string of quotations following one another. The work is divided into six chapters: Teaching, Practice, Faith, Realization, True Buddha Lands, and Transformed Bodies and Lands. The chapters are of varying lengths, from as short as a few pages to as long as a third of the entire work. Furthermore, the absence of breaks, subtitles, and other such conventions in the longer chapters makes for very heavy reading. Unlike Chinese *monrui* 文類 (C. *wen-lei*) texts,¹ every quotation is presented as its own unit and the sources are not grouped together, the result being that quotations from sutras, commentaries, and Shinran himself tumble over one another in a disorderly heap. If one assumes that *Kyōgyōshinshō* was composed as a compilation of important religious texts of the Pure Land tradition intended for Shinran's followers, as has been often suggested, it is impossible to arrive to any other conclusion than that Shinran was a highly incompetent editor who had no idea how to construct a coherent work.

Shinran's apparent editorial ineptitude is not the only problem with the text. When the Chinese originals are compared to Shinran's citations, it becomes clear that time and again the important passages are greatly modified, even to the point that the meaning of the passage becomes quite the opposite of what is found in the original. Deviations from and creative reinterpretations of the sutras have long presented an anomaly to scholars, who tend to see them as signs of a lower-class status or even as evidence of the lack of education and simple-mindedness

1. For more information on the *wen-lei* genre in Chinese Buddhism, see LIN 2005.

of particular Buddhist thinkers. This is certainly true in Shinran's case as well. Roger Tashi Corless points out that "even those who are committed to the Shinshū tradition are somewhat embarrassed at Shinran's apparent eisegesis" (CORLESS 1988, 273), while Eisho Nasu cites Mochizuki Shinkō, who is of the opinion that Shinran's "readings of Buddhist scriptures in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* are 'completely arbitrary and audacious in the extreme'" (NASU 2006, 240). It would seem, therefore, that on top of not knowing how to compile texts, Shinran either had absolutely no respect for his sources, or perhaps just a very bad knowledge of Chinese, both of which speak against his stature as a well-educated philosopher of Japan's medieval period.

This is often where the discussion stops. Insofar as Shinran is widely known not as a Buddhist theorist but as an advocate of a simple faith-based Buddhism in which *nenbutsu* 念仏, calling on the name of Amida Buddha, will ensure salvation in the Pure Land, and where good or bad deeds done in the past are of no account once one has let go and cast oneself entirely on the mercy of Amida, the apparent problems with his main doctrinal work do not tarnish the glow of his halo. However, to accept this explanation is to forfeit an understanding of just what *Kyōgyōshinshō* is. Rather than follow the traditional line of glossing over these "anomalies," would it not be more constructive to shift our perspective and read the texts without any preconceived notions of what Buddhist texts should look like, letting them speak to us in a new and fresh manner? As François Jullien states in his *Detour and Access*, "strategies of meaning can be understood only from the inside, by following their internal logic" (JULLIEN 2000, 10). What, then, is the internal logic of *Kyōgyōshinshō* and how will it shed light on the contents of the text?

STYLES STRAIGHTFORWARD AND MEANDERING

The first step in approaching medieval Buddhist argumentation is to notice how it differs from the straightforward and so-called "logical" approaches that typify philosophical discourse in the West. Rooted firmly in the rhetorical traditions of ancient Greece, where the art of debating developed simultaneously with the formation of rational thinking, west-

ern philosophy remains to a great degree characterized by “argument” in the sense of discursive procedures of confrontation (JULLIEN 2000, 45–6). If this is the default position from which one sets out to read a text, it follows that one will be on the lookout for effective argumentation in judging whether the text is successful or not. If the argumentation is solid and sharp, the reader is in a position either to be won over to the side of the writer, or to disagree mentally and make a case for a different point of view. Within these parameters, the worst possible outcome for a writer is that the fight is lost because of a deficient argument, which reflects badly on his qualities as a writer and suggests that he is not to be taken as a good philosopher. In its simplest form, western philosophical argumentation may be distilled into Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am.” We have a starting point (Descartes thinking), a climax (a “therefore” indication that a conclusion is just round the corner), and a conclusion (Descartes realizing what his thinking means for his existential status). Most philosophers, of course, take a more long-winded approach, but they rely on the same essential pattern we are taught to look for in composition of various sorts: philosophy, literature, and scholarly articles.

When we fail to grasp this or some other familiar pattern in a text, the difficulty of reading increases radically. With the familiar textual signposts missing, reading and understanding turns into the arduous task of trying to locate meanings and patterns on unfamiliar ground. One’s immediate gut reaction is to abandon the whole enterprise and label the text difficult, unreadable, or incoherent. As already indicated, this approach does not take us very far. The key is to shift perspectives. If medieval Japanese texts like *Kyōgyōshinshō* do not follow the canons of western argumentation, where does one start looking for a guide to the inner logic of the text? In a world where literature and religion have not yet been distinguished categorically, one strategy is to turn to classical literature for help, since the educated Buddhist monks, who were the authors and occasionally also the intended readers of these texts, would have had an intuitive understanding of prevalent literary patterns.

As KONISHI Jin’ichi notes in his discussion of the *Hōjōki* 方丈記 (1212), to the contemporary reader of the works of Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1155—1216) stylistic elements such as the rhythmic shift back and forth between parallel and non-parallel prose would have been perceived as an

inseparable part of the whole, serving to underscore Buddhist elements in the work (KONISHI 1991, 299–300). This is likely to escape the notice of the modern reader, however, for whom the literary background and approach to texts are completely different from what was the norm for an educated reader in twelfth or thirteenth-century Japan. Readers at the time had a sensibility to the texts that most modern readers can only dream about. If we want to have any inkling of how the texts were perceived back then, we need to look beyond the content of the text to its stylistic elements and try to appreciate the kind of emphasis they added to the words themselves.

THE STYLE AND STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENTATION IN *KYŌGYŌSHINSHŌ*

The major difference between the style of argumentation in *Kyōgyōshinshō*, and what we think of as philosophical argumentation in the west is that rather than following the story-line of starting point, escalation, climax, and conclusion, the overall structure of the text is cyclical and repetitive.² Each cycle forms a short thematic unit with its own beginning, theme development, and conclusion. Even though these thematic cycles are linked by certain rhetorical devices, the argumentative pace of the text is not constant or even accelerating at a steady rate. Like a natural stream, it meanders, pauses, and breaks into rapids. A closer look at the text itself makes it clear that the quotations, even though not grouped according to source, are arranged sequentially according to the following pattern:

1. Introduction of the topic by Shinran
2. Quotations from *Daikyō* 大經³ and *Nyorai-e* 如来会⁴

2. For a more thorough analysis on the structure of *Kyōgyōshinshō* with special focus on the *Shin no maki* chapter, see SÖDERMAN 2010.

3. 大無量寿經, or the Larger Pure Land sutra. Of all the 淨土三部經, the Three Pure Land sutras, this is the one that Shinran considered most important.

4. 無量寿如来会 is a variant Chinese translation of the Larger Pure Land sutra, translated allegedly by an Indian monk called Bodhiruci. According to the tradition Bodhiruci was also the monk who convinced the previously Taoist Tanluan 曇鸞, the third patriarch in Shinran's Pure Land lineage, of the superiority of Amida's Power.

3. Quotations from other sutras
4. Quotations from the Indian Pure Land masters (Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu)
5. Quotations from the Chinese masters (Tanluan 曇鸞, Taocho 道綽, and Shan-tao 善導)
6. Quotations from other Chinese teachers
7. Quotations from the Japanese Pure Land masters (Genshin 源信 and Hōnen 法然)
8. Summary of the topic by Shinran

Because the summary of one topic may also serve as an introduction to the next, a stable cyclical structure is established to keep the long text on track. The topics flow into one another, so that even when the text goes through a number of distinct topics, the argumentative flow is preserved throughout the *Shin no maki* 信卷 itself. Even a quick glance at the other chapters of *Kyōgyōshinshō* should suffice to make it clear that this structured movement, while present in the other chapters, is by far the most complex in the *Shin no maki* (Chapter on Faith), making it the most important chapter of the whole work as far as the argumentation goes. Most of the time, only some of the topics are present in the cycle, but the order does not change: the cycle begins with quotations from *Daikyō* and *Nyorai-e*, followed by quotations from one or more other sutras and quotations from one or two Pure Land masters. Comments by Shinran are attached to either end of the topical cycle.

One of the most important structural strategies in Shinran's work is the placement of *Daikyō* with its deviant translation, *Nyorai-e*. When this pair of sutras is encountered in the text, it is always a sign that a new subtopic will start. The passage in question also gives a slightly new direction to the preceding argument, as if taking it to a new level, but rarely provides any "new" information as such. The appearance of the *Daikyō* serves more as an introduction, roughly the equivalent of hitting the "enter" key to break the flow of the text and start a new paragraph. Interpreted like this, the otherwise monotonous *Shin no maki* is composed of nine parts, each starting with a citation from the *Daikyō* either by itself or, as is more often the case, paired with *Nyorai-e*.

On one hand, each of these cycles represents a complete unit with a

particular topic. On the other hand, the cycles are linked to each other on several levels. A systematic analysis of the ways in which Shinran links passages and cycles throughout the *Kyōgyōshinshō* can help counter scholars who claim that Shinran gives quotations “with no interpretation whatsoever or with overly terse and enigmatic comments.” For my part, I am persuaded that dividing *Kyōgyōshinshō* into Shinran’s words and quotations from outside sources, and thus focusing attention on distinguishing what Shinran created from what he copied, is mistaken. In fact, there are short but extremely meaningful passages definitely added by Shinran that can help us understand the *Kyōgyōshinshō* as a narrative whole and not just as a patchwork of quotations with the occasional cryptic remark tossed in. These introductory passages also create an inner hierarchy among the cycles, clarifying their respective relationships. This is accomplished principally in two ways: by theoretical association and by wording.

The first method of indicating connections between cycles is to weave a web of associations among theories consisting of discrete parts. For example, Shan-tao’s (613–681) theory of the threefold mind 三心 is developed by Shinran into his own theory of enlightenment. By associating one cycle with one part of this theory, namely, the third cycle with 信樂心, “self of joyous faith,”⁵ the tacit assumption is that the two other parts of the theory—至心, “attained self,” and 欲生心, “self yearning for birth”— will show up later and illuminate the relationship between the third cycle and whichever of the two parts it is connecting to. This is in line with the East Asian hermeneutic method of building nets of mean-

5. I should perhaps explain my decision to render 心 as “self.” The obvious problem is that Buddhism is a schoolbook example of a philosophy based on no-self or selflessness. But “mind” or “heart” do not seem to reflect adequately the holistic way in which Shinran thinks. “Mind” evokes the split between the bodily and the mental, and “heart” highlights the emotional aspect. But the experience of *shinjin* 信心 Shinran is talking about resolutely rejects any dichotomy between self and mind and heart. Joyous faith and the yearning for birth are more than just emotions, and most assuredly they are not mental processes. The things Shinran talks about are all parts of ourselves, something that each and every single living creature possesses. To identify this, the word “self,” without a lower-case “s” and without any specific philosophical or Buddhist connotations, seems to me the best way to translate this problematic term.

ings by rewriting and transforming existent systems rather than by dismantling the systems to analyze their constituent parts. The associations with the three selves needed to gain birth in the Pure Land provide a bond for the second, third, and fourth cycles. All three cycles are distinct from one another, as both structural and topical elements attest, but at the same time they present a continuous unfolding of arguments that essentially deal with a single subject, namely Shinran's interpretation of a theory that was originally Shan-tao's.

Another method of linkage is the use of short rhetorical devices like *kore wo motte* 是ヲ以テ (“therefore”) to bring new passages into the mainstream of the argument and tie them to their parallels. These devices must be kept in mind when trying to decipher the overall dynamic of argumentation in the *Shin no maki* and indeed in the whole of *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Passages within a given cycle are almost always introduced by a simple “*X* ニ言ハク” or “*X* ニ言タマハク”: “it is said in *X*.” The two major exceptions to this rule are Shinran's own comments and the *Daikyō* quotes that mark the opening of each of the cycles.

To give an example of how this structure works, we turn to the start of the *Shin no maki*, where Shinran's first comment begins:

Humbly I declare that the great faith is in the understanding that Amida directs his virtue to us in order to enable our going forth [to the Pure Land]. The great *shinjin* is.... (KGSS, 96)

These few words link the entire *Shin no maki* to the procession of themes in the whole of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, and in particular, the preceding chapter, *Gyō no maki* 行卷 (Chapter on Practice), which opens with a similar phrase:

Humbly I declare that both the great practice and the great faith are in understanding that Amida directs his virtue to us in order to enable our going forth [to the Pure Land]. The great practise is.... (KGSS, 17)

Based on this parallel, one could say that the *Gyō no maki* and the *Shin no maki* are two sides of the same thing: explanation on how Amida directs his own virtue in order to save the multitudes. Read from this perspective, the following discussion is already associated with the element

of “faith” in the process of going forth to the Pure Land. Another factor reinforcing the link between these two chapters is the fact that the first couplet of sutras are slightly modified versions of the opening passages of the *Gyō no maki* (KGSS, 17–18, 97). Only when this link with the previous materials has been established can the construction of themes start in the *Shin no maki*. Without going any further into the placement or relationship of *Shin no maki* vis-à-vis the other chapters of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, I will only point out that the same macrostructure of semi-independent topical cycles found in the *Shin no maki* is repeated throughout the entire work. In other words, the text is constructed in such a way that the same configuration of parts is repeated on a different scale.

Let us take another example. The second cycle opens with the following comment by Shinran:

...This attained self is the embodiment of nothing else than the attainment of the potency of the name. (KGSS, 117)

The sutra passages then start with a “therefore.” Inasmuch as the phrase quoted above is not separated as a distinct passage but is the conclusion to a longer passage, the *kore wo motte* serves to tie the text following it to the previous sentence as well as to the entire preceding section. A quote by Shan-tao follows, after which Shinran concludes the cycle with a comment that begins with *shikareba* 然乎 (“hence”) and ends with “this is called the attained self” (KGSS, 119). The implication is that the previous passages have now defined the first element of the threefold mind operating throughout the *Shin no maki*.

When the text is read in this way, focusing on the cyclical rhythm of the argument, one is able to discern a current of argument flowing beneath the surface jumble of sources and quotations. The text of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* takes on a luster of sophistication and complexity that makes us want to rethink many of our preconceived notions of Shinran and his religious philosophy.

Recognizing *Kyōgyōshinshō* as a carefully constructed textual work is only the first step. We are still left with the question of what to do with this new information. If the essence of Japanese textuality consists of constructing the form and written style in such a way that they add to the contents of the text, what does this tell us about *Kyōgyōshinshō*?

THE MYSTERY OF THE AUDIENCE

For such a central text to Kamakura Buddhism, *Kyōgyōshinshō* leaves a lot of fundamental issues open for debate. To this day, the questions of why, when, and for whom it was written lack conclusive evidence. Theories abound, each with the backing of one or the other academic or sectarian factions, but the only certain thing is that not much is known for sure. I would like to briefly examine the question of the intended audience in the light of the textual form of the text. What can we surmise about Shinran's intentions from the way he wrote his *opus magnum*?

The text is undated, but graphological evidence in the Bandō manuscript, the only manuscript written by Shinran himself, suggests that it was copied around the mid 1230s, thus coinciding with Shinran's return to Kyoto after years of exile in the Kantō area. It is possible that there were earlier versions of the same text, but no trace of them has been found. The date traditionally assigned to its completion is 1247, the year in which, according to the postscripts of two later editions of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran allowed his cousin and disciple Sonren 尊蓮 (b. 1182) to make a copy of the work. During the following decade, minor changes continued to be introduced into the text, but the granting of permission to copy it has been taken as a sign that the text was more or less ready to be distributed.

These two facts, the dating of the manuscript to 1230s and the fact that it was passed on to a disciple “when finished,” coupled with other social and historical conditions, have offered scholars and believers some clue as to the intentions of Shinran. First, it was written at a time when *nenbutsu* practitioners were persecuted and many of Hōnen's senior disciples were writing their own texts in defense of their master's teachings. If Shinran's text is included in this wave of Pure Land treatises, the argument goes, it would need to be read both as a defense of Hōnen and as a critique of the *nenbutsu* persecutions. Second, if the work was intended from the beginning to be distributed to Shinran's disciples as soon as it was deemed ready, it would have acted as a handbook of the texts Shinran based his doctrines on, a veritable “Reader's Digest of Important Pure Land Texts.” This is certainly the way *Kyōgyōshinshō* is used today by the Shin Buddhists, who have even issued an abridged version—a selection

of selections, as it were—included in the *Sacred Texts of Pure Land Buddhism* (浄土真宗聖典).

These explanations, however, raise not a few questions of their own. If Shinran was writing to defend Hōnen, why did he write such a long text? The scope of *Kyōgyōshinshō* clearly surpasses anything that could be considered an apology for one's master. Furthermore, Shinran departs rather far from Hōnen's teachings, changing even such fundamentals as the relative importance of the sutras used.⁶ On several occasions Shinran does praise his master for his wisdom and benevolence, but *Kyōgyōshinshō* does not really lend itself primarily as a defense of Hōnen's teachings. Would it therefore be a defense of Shinran's version of Pure Land teachings, intended to ward off doctrinal attacks from the side of Tendai? If so, Shinran would surely have made his work public, just as Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232) did with his critique of Hōnen's *Senchakushū* (選択集, 1198) in his own *Senchakushūchū zaijarin* (選択集注碎邪輪, 1212). But this was not the case.

Was it a private project then? Faced with censure and accusations from former colleagues at Mt Hiei, did Shinran wish to gather his thoughts and clarify the reasons behind his view of what the Pure Land was and how Amida's vow worked? The persecution and the general uneasiness that *nenbutsu* practitioners were suffering from may well have been one motivating factor behind the writing of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, but they are not the whole picture. The religious motivations of an author can never be downplayed when it comes to a religious text, and socio-historical factors, while always present, should not be allowed to dominate.

If, on the other hand, *Kyōgyōshinshō* was written with an eye to Shinran's disciples and with proselytization in mind, then we are faced with questions of language and distribution. The mere fact that after organizing itself into a new sect Pure Land Buddhists used Shinran's work as a kind of authoritative text, does not imply that it was intended as such from the very beginning. In addition to the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran's

6. Whereas Hōnen held the *Kanmuryōjūkyō* 觀無量壽經 as the most important of all three Pure Land sutras, Shinran based his own Pure Land readings on the *Daikyō*. See TERAKAWA 1990, 23–25

writing include letters, commentaries, hymns, and so forth, of which the letters and hymns were clearly intended for his followers.

The question that begs to be asked is: Just how many of Shinran's disciples would have had the necessary education to appreciate, or even understand, the text of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*? And if it was meant to be distributed among the disciples, why was it not? Hōnen's *Senchakushū* was to be kept hidden from outsiders, but copies of it circulated among his students (MACHIDA 1999, 96–97). Shinran's teachings seem to have circulated in the form of letters, hymns, and face-to-face encounters with disciples both during his exile and after his return to Kyoto. Then there is the Bandō manuscript, which is not a clean copy of a complete work but has the look of a personal working copy with additions, erasures, and comments.⁷ Even though he gave the manuscript over to Sonren for copying, it seems to have never circulated as widely as Hōnen's *Senchakushū* had, nor was it used as a resource for teaching as Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* was.

If *Kyōgyōshinshō* was written neither for critics who had the necessary background to understand it but probably never read it, nor for disciples who would have lacked both the requisite education and access to the few copies available, then why was it written and for whom? If the text was intended from the beginning for a certain audience, Japanese literary convention would have required a filtering process, a textual *hōben* to shape it in a form the audience could understand.⁸ In other words, we should be able to deduce some hint of the intended audience from the form of the text itself. Clearly it was beyond the reach of Shinran's followers and aimed at a readership with the same level of education as Shinran himself. Then again, no such person ever received a copy. We need to return to the cyclical structure outlined above and its impact on the contents of the work.

7. See, for example, the difference between the Bandō manuscript and the other two main copies, the Nishi Hongan-ji manuscript and the Takada Senjū-ji manuscript, of which facsimiles can be found in the front material of KAKEHASHI 2004 and 2008.

8. This question has been at the back of my mind as I was struggling to identify the audience of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, and I am grateful to Thomas Kasulis for spelling it out in the essay included in the present volume.

WRITING AS PARTICIPATION AND PRACTICE

Above, I have raised a number of problems related to the intended readership of *Kyōgyōshinshō*. The only person who had both the education necessary to read the text and access to it was the author himself, Shinran. But why would someone write such a lengthy and complex text only for himself? During the long years that Shinran continued to edit and rewrite his work, *Kyōgyōshinshō* became a personal project. If the manuscript was mainly copied in the mid 1230s, it is likely that he had been mulling over the texts and themes long before he actually began to set it down in writing. Even so, he continued to reread, rethink, and reshape the material until some years before his death when he was already in his eighties (DOBBINS 2002, 32). The text has more the feel of a personal *practice* than a vessel of *instruction* for others. If so, what does an analysis of the structural elements add to the overall meaning of the text?

What does it mean to speak of writing as participation and as Buddhist practice?⁹ The way Shinran presents his sources reveals an obvious pattern. Quotations are always given in a descending order, with Shinran's own remarks either introducing or concluding a given cycle. (Often his comments serve both to conclude one topic and to introduce another.) Even when there are minor deviations from this pattern, the procession of quotations always follows the same order. A hierarchical pattern, such as presenting higher sources first, might be at work here, but what would be the point to imposing such a hierarchy on a personal document? However, if we shift our perspective slightly and replace the abstract notion of "hierarchy" with the more culturally resonant category of "tradition" or "lineage," the impasse begins to break down. In writing *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran not only presents sound argumentation and textual evidence to back up his own personal reading of the Pure Land tradition, but also implies structural strategies to reinforce his own position as the last link

9. I am deeply indebted to Alari Allik of Tallinn University for the idea of "self-writing" as a Buddhist practice. I have learned much from long discussions with him concerning his own research on medieval *setsuwa* and the writings of Kamo no Chōmei.

in the Pure Land lineage as he understands it. He opens every topic by referring to the foundation of his religious philosophy. This is accomplished by selecting a passage from the *Daikyō* that gives direction to the discussion that ensues, while simultaneously linking it to the previous argument. Moreover, each time the *Daikyō* is quoted, it serves to anchor the theoretical treatment of Buddhist themes to the reality of the Pure Land lest they end up as empty words and ideas. In this way theory is always rooted in what Shinran considered the most important of all the sutras.

To speak of this as a principle of “lineage” is not to suggest that Shinran’s words are nothing more than a further elaboration of Hōnen’s teachings, or that *Kyōgyōshinshō* amounts to Shinran’s *Senchakushū*. Shinran’s lineage is, of course, his own construct, and the only members singled out for a teacher-disciple relationship (and indeed the only ones who could possibly have met) were Taocho and Shan-tao in seventh-century China, and Hōnen and Shinran. Shinran constructs his lineage and participates in it by writing about it and within it. By writing *within a lineage*, I mean that Shinran writes about his own religious experience by reinterpreting and rewriting existing Pure Land texts. He does not write as an individual named Shinran, who has had certain experiences which he would now like to share with the rest of the world. He writes *as a product of his Pure Land lineage and through the texts of that lineage*. It is not him, but the lineage, and thus the Amida Buddha himself, who is writing. Not even other members of his lineage can be identified as authors, since their transformed (and not “misquoted”) words are no longer theirs but mediated by the inner transformation Shinran has gone through.

As Jacqueline Stone points out in her book on original enlightenment doctrines, creative eisegesis through the reinterpretation and rewriting of texts, known as 観心読 or *kanjin*-style interpretation, was in no way an uncommon practice in medieval Japanese Buddhism. This practice has often been interpreted as a corruption of doctrine or willful ignorance of the original texts, but Stone argues that it is really only a different style of textual interpretation, albeit a style that is no longer deemed legitimate (STONE 1999, 153–8). Thus, rather than wondering about Shinran’s inept handling of his sources, it would be more fruitful to ask why he treated

his sources the way he did. This, in turn, affects the question of readership, since, as Stone points out, the only environment in which this kind of ongoing reinterpretation and recontextualization of texts was possible was one in which the audience knew and was familiar with the conventional meanings of the texts being bent out of shape. She notes that

to be effective, the *kanjin* mode of interpretation would have had to depend on more conventional doctrinal studies. One must know doctrines and texts before one can rearrange and reinterpret them; traditional doctrinal study was thus necessary to acquire the resources with which the game of *kanjin*-style interpretation, so to speak, was played. Moreover, many *kanjin*-style readings rely on their impact on the fact that they undercut or reverse conventional understandings.” (STONE 1999, 167)

Inasmuch as the deliberately reinterpreted quotations would be meaningful only for an audience that could instantly see the point in Shinran’s paraphrase, it begins to look increasingly doubtful that the work was ever really intended for Shinran’s disciples in the first place. Viewed as Shinran’s personal practice and participation in his Pure Land lineage, his reinterpretation and rewriting of the sources of his tradition in order to explain his own personal insight into the workings of Amida’s vow in the world need not shackle us to an idea of textual fidelity that seems much better suited to Protestant Christianity than to medieval Buddhism.

CONCLUSION

One problem with the hypothesis laid out in the previous pages is that we have no autobiographical evidence from Shinran detailing why he wrote the way he did. Still, if we wish to understand medieval Buddhist literature and philosophy on their own ground, we need to free ourselves from preconceptions of what Buddhist texts should look like, what is important in Buddhist ideas, and what amounts to a persuasive argument. Insofar as the spheres of Buddhist writing and literature were not clearly separated at the time, we need to take both sides into consideration when reading texts as carefully constructed as the medieval

Buddhist texts often are. The field of Buddhist literary studies has taken steps to address this question from the literary side, but Buddhist scholars would do well to take into account not only the Buddhist philosophy behind the texts they work with but also their form as literary constructs. If the impact on the legibility and argumentativeness of *Kyōgyōshinshō* produces such quick results, who is to say what might be gained if the scope were widened?

REFERENCES

Abbreviation

KGSS 『定本教行信証』 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1989).

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