

IASBS NEWSLETTER



国 際 真 宗 学 会

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SHIN BUDDHIST STUDIES

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GREETING FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Professor Mitsuya Dake

The 15th Biennial Conference of IASBS was held on August 4th-6th at Ohtani University in Kyoto in conjunction with the 750th Commemoration of Shinran Shonin and the 800th Commemoration of Honen Shonin. This conference was co-sponsored by the five universities, each founded by a lineage of the Jodo Shinshu teaching. The five are: Dobo University, Kyoto Women's University, Musashino University, Ohtani University and Ryukoku University. This type of event was unprecedented and marked

a new chapter in the history of the IASBS. This conference was divided into seven sessions with more than sixty presentations, with many Japanese and non-Japanese participants.

I had the opportunity to attend some of these sessions, all of which were extremely scholarly and provocative. What I was particularly impressed with was how the young Japanese graduate researchers were able to present their works in English. I was

convinced that these young students will be able to carry on the task of actively participating in the IASBS in future. Shinran Shonin quotes from T'ao-cho's *Anrakushu* and states at the end of the *Kyogyoshinsho*, "Those who have been born first guide those who come later, and those who are born later join those who were born before." It is my sincere wish that the IASBS will be able to serve as the mechanism by which this goal can be achieved.

The success of this event can be attributed to those who contributed to overseeing, planning and preparing for the conference, especially the dedicated Ohtani University professors and students who made

everything run so smoothly. I cannot mention all of the names of the people I would like to thank, but I would like to extend my utmost appreciation to all those people involved in making this event successful.

In the recent years, research workshops such as those conducted by the IASBS have been taking place not only in Europe, but in other parts of the world too. I think it is a wonderful thing that people with the same interests and enthusiasm have an opportunity to meet and deepen their studies. The next IASBS event will be held in the North American district and I look forward to seeing you all in two years time.

IASBS News Update

1) New Project of Book Reviews started on IASBS Facebook

Spearheaded by some younger members, we have started a new project. If you have not done so, please sign up on Facebook for the 'IASBS Communication Board'. This project should help to activate our IASBS site on Facebook established over a year ago. The first book review (by Eisho Shimazu, who is not so young but just as energetic!) is as follows:

Nobuhiro Yamamoto, *Seishin-shugi wa dare no shiso ka*
(‘Whose Thought is Kiyozawa Manshi’s Spirituality?’) Hozokan; Kyoto 2011.



This book is an epoch-making breakthrough in the study of Kiyozawa Manshi. Kiyozawa has long been regarded as one of the foremost modern Shin Buddhist thinkers. Although most contemporary scholars view him favourably, there have been several critics of his work. Most of them have criticized his lacking of social concern and justification of the status quo. Dr. Nobuhiro Yamamoto found, however, that many of his writings were actually heavily edited by his students, especially Akegarasu Haya. Some of them were even written by students from the beginning and published with Kiyozawa's name. Kiyozawa seemed to allow them to do so (which, I understand, was not unusual during that period in Japan). At any rate, the author has initiated a new phase of research on Kiyozawa Manshi. This book is a must read for anyone interested in Kiyozawa and modern Japanese Buddhism. While this work is based on the author's doctoral dissertation, it is easy to read - just like a mystery novel - and is highly recommended.

2) IASBS Panel in San Francisco at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), November 19-22, 2011

Time: Sunday, Nov. 20, 3:00 pm-4:30 pm 11月20日(日)、3:00~4:30

Room: CC-2022

Theme: Revisiting the Pure Land: New Research in Pure Land Buddhist Studies

Panelists:

Scott Mitchell, Institute of Buddhist Studies, Presiding

Mark L. Blum, State University of New York

Kenneth Tanaka, Musashino University

Eisho Nasu, Ryukoku University

Jessica Main, University of British Columbia

Bringing together an international group of established and younger scholars, this panel presents ongoing research on Pure Land Buddhism, a foundational yet often misunderstood branch of Mahayana Buddhism. Discussion of fundamental Pure Land concepts such as *neinfo* and *shinjin* complement more historically contextualized doctrinal considerations including the possibility of children's birth in the Pure Land, and the Buddhist Marxist humanism of pre-World War Two Japanese Buddhist thinkers. The panel seeks to balance doctrinal and textual considerations with the specificity of history and place, thereby demonstrating how Pure Land Buddhist ideas have played a key role in Buddhism's doctrinal development across Asia. Presentation topics will act as starting points for discussion and conversation regarding the current and future state of Pure Land Buddhist scholarship with the hope of generating new work in this subfield.

3) A Panel and Reception for the Late Professor Leslie Kawamura held at the AAR (see above)

Time: Monday, Nov. 21, 7:00 pm

Room: Please ask where session M21-400 (one of the Buddhist Section sessions) is being held.

Theme: Leslie Kawamura Memorial Panel and Reception

Panelists: 9 members, including Kenneth Tanaka, representing IASBS

IASBS and IASBS North American Branch have contributed financially to this reception. If any IASBS members living in the San Francisco area are interested in attending, please do so. We look forward to your participation. (There should be no problem attending even if you are not signed up for the annual meeting. If there is problem. call Ken Tanaka's cell phone on 617-435-4006.)



The 'Problem' with Dialogue

Alex Minchinton



In this critical period, when man's very existence becomes questionable, religion must not be just a temporary diversion. Today's religion has the responsibility of teaching the way by which mankind can truly become humanized. It behoves us, the religionists, not to ingratiate ourselves to secular powers, but to become fully knowledgeable of the teaching in which we place our faith and courageously walk the path to Truth hand in hand with those of the same faith. Furthermore, we must not forget to hold earnest dialogues with others whose religions are, historically and traditionally, rich in truth.¹

(His Eminence Monshu Ohtani Koshin)

Today, one of the major problems for man, in a world in which traditional boundaries and borders of both a physical and religious nature are removed, is how to study other religions sympathetically without losing the sense of absoluteness in one's religion which is a *sine qua non* of the religious life and which reflects the fact that religion does come from the Absolute.²

(Seyyed Hossein Nasr)

Both exclusivism and relativism are not religious. Religion equals a person's whole existence.³

(Shojun Bando)

Background

The following essay was prompted by my recent visit to Japan where I had the opportunity to spend a month in Kyoto - speaking to a wide variety of people (both local and international), as well as exploring, observing and participating in local events. In addition, I interviewed several people as part of my ongoing doctoral studies and attended the IASBS biennial conference. While I cherish my time spent in Japan and the many fascinating people and places I experienced, I was also confronted by the stark reality of the state of contemporary Shin Buddhism, both in academic discourse and as a living spiritual tradition. That many issues

¹ See: <http://www.hongwanji.or.jp/english/message.html#message00>

It is not our intention to examine the *mechanisms* by which particular Jodo shinshu traditions have sought to represent their institution, nor the apparent discrepancies between stated aims and tangible efforts. For a detailed assessment of these particular issues, see Elisabetta Porcu's survey of the representational strategies of both Honganji-ha and Otani-ha.

See: http://japanesereligions.jp/publications/assets/JR_34_1_a_Porcu.pdf

² Nasr, S. H. 1993. *The Need for a Sacred Science*, State University of New York Press. p.32.

³ Refer to page 88 of the *Pacific World* (1992) journal at: <http://www.shin-ibs.edu/documents/pwj-new/new8/07Kramer.pdf>

currently confront Shin Buddhism is no secret, and a good deal of ink has been spilt outlining many of the areas which need to be addressed: the decline in temples and temple members, a failure to strike a balance between traditional sectarian studies (reliant on textual interpretation and exegesis) and understanding grounded in practice and spiritual realisation; neglect of wider social issues; a crisis of identity and reciprocal ethno-spiritual hegemonies; a lack of 'spiritual literacy'⁴; a neglect of the issues pertaining to 'folk practices'⁵; limited inter/intra-religious dialogue and so on. Of these issues, it is the latter - *dialogue* - which I would now like to consider and which, by its very nature, impinges on all the other aforementioned matters.

It has become increasingly clear to me that there has been a serious failure to address the *means* by which inter-religious dialogue (I will define what I mean by this later) may take place; moreover, not only has 'conversation' remained limited but an understanding of *how* and *why* one might engage in dialogue has failed to be enacted. Part of this problem can be attributed to the nature of the 'problem' but elsewhere, particularly in academic discourse, options for dialogue have often remained constrained due to a succession of intentions, assumptions and ideological presumptions which have undermined any serious efforts - in other words, diverse outlooks have often been re-absorbed back into the dominant discourse even before having had their potential benefits exercised. Outside academic circles, the failure to address these same issues can, I would conjecture, be put down to a combination of an inability and/or unwillingness to address the contemporary global and local realities, both of which become mutually reinforcing. In what follows, I would like to offer my thoughts on some aspects of these many vexing issues. It is not my intention to offer a full scholarly account in this forum, nor outline definite solutions. Instead, I would like to propose several avenues for further inquiry and, although I am well aware that some of these suggestions may prove to be provocative at first, in many cases complacency is no longer an option we can accept.

What's (Not) Going On?

...it is hard to tell that Shin scholars are actually living in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁶

Our problem is not the teaching but, in the commercial context, our delivery system. It requires us to upgrade the education of our members and those who are going to be ministers by providing them with information and insight concerning current trends in contemporary thought and how Shin Buddhism may relate to them. The vitality of our

⁴ By 'spiritual literacy', we are here considering the process of *how* one engages in the processes of spiritual discovery – the subtle nuances at play as the spiritual life unfolds. Here, the importance of 'good friends in the dharma' becomes crucial in nurturing confidence in this process; this is particularly important as without such nurturing, these subtle undercurrents may easily retreat back into more reductionist or relativistic frameworks in order to ground one's experience, and therein halt the process. There is all the difference in the world between 'interpreting' a myth and inhabiting it; between saying the Nembutsu and living *in* the Nembutsu, and between reading Shinran and *hearing* Shinran.

⁵ These issues were brought to the fore by Sasaki Shoten, and can be traced all the way back to the disputes between Kakunyo (12-1325) and Zonkaku (1290-1373); the backlash against Sasaki illustrates what a raw nerve these issue can strike.

⁶ Amstutz, Galen "Kiyozawa in Concord: A Historian Looks Again at Shin Buddhism in America" featured in *The Eastern Buddhist* 41/1 see: p.132. For a freely available version refer to the following link on Alfred Bloom's website: <http://www.shindharmanet.com/writings/Amstutz.pdf>

sangha in the future depends on establishing mutual discourse and dialogue with the surrounding culture, local and worldwide.⁷

...we can build a religious institution that is capable of accommodating modern society. In order to accomplish this, we should cultivate a broad mind to understand and share the anxieties and feelings of others, create an organization in which we support each other, and transmit the Jodo Shinshu teaching. Likewise, we need to reorganize our institution's framework so that it meets the needs of the times.⁸

Although several scholars, representatives and practitioners have motioned towards the need for greater inter-religious dialogue, on balance, I think it is fair to say these good intentions have remained just that - intentions. A quick survey reveals as much. Searching for essays containing the word 'dialogue' in several prominent journals - *The Pure Land* (1979-2008), *Pacific World* (1982-2009), and *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1974-2008) resulted in only three or four instances in each. Nearly all of these were situated in a Christian-Buddhist context.⁹ Thus, in these three well-regarded journals, and in a combined span of some 100 years, we have a sum total of ten or so essays giving us an average of one every decade. Venturing further afield, while we find that the Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture held a round table discussion in 2005 centering on "The Dialogue among Religions: Reports from around the World"¹⁰, these efforts have evinced a tendency towards themes surrounding Science and Religion.¹¹ Likewise, the Institute of Buddhist Studies recently held a series of 'Red Book Dialogues' exploring the relationship between Jungian psychology and Buddhism. Here, even as something has occurred, it has failed to garner anything that would constitute a shift in momentum with respect to inter-religious dialogue and its various modalities. Shifting gear, let us briefly examine the most recent IASBS conference held under the rubric of 'True Disciple of the Buddha - The Mission and Challenges in Contemporary Society'. The aim here was to discuss problems confronting contemporary society and to consider how best to meet those challenges. Looking through the presentation schedule¹², one notices a substantial amount of weight is lent to particular contemporary realities: key textual analysis mediated in light of current concerns; issues pertaining to the crisis facing temples; questions of

⁷ "Shin Buddhism: The Contemporary Situation ..." by Rev Dr Alfred Bloom see:

<http://www.shindharmanet.com/writings/contemporary.htm>

⁸ His Eminence Monshu Koshin Ohtani see:

<http://www.hongwanjihawaii.com/documents/GomonshuMessageon750thMemorial.pdf>

⁹ Whether Christian-Buddhist dialogue has been too normative or not takes nothing away from the fact that this dialogue has been extremely rewarding and, indeed, enabling. One points to numerous works by John Makransky and the issues raised by Heel Sung-Keel's *Understanding Shinran A Dialogical Approach* (1995) which, whether one agrees with or not, have been constructive in furthering conversation. Besides, there is no approach to which we can point to as free from normative constraints – one must start somewhere and, commonly, it is in the *process* of engagement or dialogue that normative shackles are challenged, as has been the case with many Christian scholars or practitioners in the face of certain realities they can no longer ignore; i.e. it is hard to any longer posit *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* 'no salvation outside the church'. The academic obsession with finding a neutral critical tool with which to dissect Buddhist Studies or inter-religious efforts reminds one of *The Parable of the Poison Arrow* (Majjhima-nikaya, Sutta 63): while some theoretical knowledge is valuable (and necessary), to chase endlessly for a 'perfect' model for dialogue or comparative religion while neglecting dialogue itself is ridiculous. It also assumes that, even if the methodological tool was value free or somehow non-normative, that those who wield the tool are themselves free from presumptions, conceptions, prejudices or ideological biases! It is worth bearing these considerations in mind whenever we speak, too uncritically, of 'self-critical' enterprises.

¹⁰ See: <http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/welcome.htm>

¹¹ See: *Brain Science and Religion: Some Asian Perspectives* (2011) see: <http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/welcome.htm> under heading "Academic gatherings") also see "Inter-Religio" (under heading of Academic Associations).

¹² See: http://iasbs.net/pdf/2011_IASBS_conference/IASBS%202011%20Conf_%20Presenters.pdf

hermeneutics pertaining to issues surrounding myth and ongoing concerns regarding key concepts in Shin traditions i.e. *shinjin* etc; as well as talks focusing on a re-evaluation of the whole methodological underpinnings of 'Buddhist Studies' or 'Buddhist theology'. In all of this, there was very little discussion of, for example, dialogue, inter-religious dialogue, inter-religious hermeneutics, comparative religion and so forth. That nothing of this sort could be found under panel topics, such as 'Shin Responses to Modernity', caught my eye and it becomes obvious that one of the chief reasons for this lack of representation resides in the fact that there have been so few *responses* concerning the *means* of addressing global realities that would then be reflected in discussion. I think most people are well aware that there are numerous issues which need to be addressed, and many are moreover happy to make efforts to these ends. What is often missing in these discussions is the *how*. Firstly, one needs to be very clear on one central question: *How do we account for the existence of multiple religions and on what basis do you come to your conclusion?* Scholars and practitioners go very quiet when this question is posed – even as the answer itself will impact the trajectory of Buddhist Studies and sectarian organisations. How we answer this question has significant ramifications. As per the above quote, the Monshu states that "...we must not forget to hold earnest dialogues with others whose religions are historically and traditionally rich in truth." If other traditions are "rich in truth", then what does this mean? In wider academic circles, scholars have often counter-reacted through recourse to pluralism but this has led to another set of problems as Reza Shah-Kazemi states:

Are these people to deny the validity of faiths which give rise to these flowers of holiness, in order to uphold their belief in the exclusive validity of their own faith, and risk violating the integrity of their intelligence? Or should they affirm the validity of other faiths, doing so at the price of the absoluteness of their commitment to their faith? Religious thinkers in the West have struggled with this 'problematic'. Speaking in the most general terms, traditional polemics are being confronted by modern pluralism, the doctrine chiefly associated with the Christian scholar, Professor John Hick. According to Hick, all religions are equal, and equally salvific; one must abandon traditional claims to be sole possessor of truth, and one must affirm the equal truth of all religions. But this shift from polemics to pluralism has brought with it an inevitable dilution of commitment to the specific, unique forms of one's own faith.¹³

The central question then becomes:

How can one answer to the urgent need to transcend conventional exclusivism and open up to the Other, without relativising or diluting one's own faith and identity? How can one go beyond absolutist polemics without falling into the pitfall or relativistic pluralism?¹⁴

I would argue that ways of undertaking a critical response to these issues have been greatly neglected. Here, it is necessary for Shin to develop its own responses to these issues, but dynamic responses to modern circumstances have been hampered by what Galen Amstutz calls 'self-protectiveness and identity-seeking which is inseparable from the modern intellectual history of Shin'. Obviously, opening up does not come naturally for most and, in many cases, it is borne out of pragmatism rather than the more lofty aspiration to genuine understanding. As Catherine Cornille writes:

¹³ Paper delivered by Reza Shah-Kazemi at the Conference: Al-Azhar and the West - Bridges of Dialogue. Cairo, 5 January, 2009 See: <http://sfes.faiweb.com/0901shah-kazemi.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

Though openness toward the possibility of discovering truth in teachings and practices different from one's own thus constitutes an essential condition for a constructive dialogue, religions are not on the whole inclined to such hospitality. Most religious faith is based on a belief in the fullness and sufficiency of one's own religious teachings and practices. The very idea that other religions might harbor truth that has not yet been captured within one's own tradition may thus be experienced as a threat to one's own epistemic and religious confidence.¹⁵

Even the most objective scholar or practitioner soon shows his or her cards when asked to confront these realities. Often, many of the discourses surrounding Shin and Christianity, for example, have been seen more as a 'problem' to be overcome rather than being the basis of any real dialogue. Shin representation, where dialogue has occurred, both in theory and practice, has remained entrenched in a Buddhist-Christian dyad. Leaving aside for one moment the realities of the contemporary global environment, and to give just one example; encounters between Buddhist and Muslims stretch back to the age of the Silk Road (4BCE-1400BCE) and cover no less than the Far East, South-East, South, Central and West Asia and yet dialogue has yet to reflect the geographic, temporal¹⁶, intellectual and spiritual prominence which these two traditions not only occupy, but share!

It is truly a sign of the times that, after almost a century of production, the Islamic journal *The Muslim World* dedicated an entire volume on the theme of Buddhism and, more recently, there have publications such as *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism (2010)*¹⁷ which have sought to open intellectual and practical pathways to understanding. One searches in vain for any similar efforts among Shin scholars or representatives.

What Needs To Be Happening

Returning to the question of religious diversity, I see three main areas which Shin scholars and practitioners need to develop in order to not be left completely behind in wider academic and social discourse pertaining to inter-religious understanding:

- Inter-religious Hermeneutics¹⁸
- Comparative Religion and its variants
- Inter-religious Dialogue – interpersonal, intrapersonal and critical-comparative levels

Most of these methodologies fit under the general rubric of 'approaches to inter-religious understanding' that can roughly be grouped under the following schemas:

¹⁵ Catherine Cornille, *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Herder & Herder 2008), p.178.

¹⁶ For a detailed historical overview see: Elverskog, J. 2010. *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

¹⁷ For a free version of this book see: <http://www.islambuddhism.com/docs/CommonGround.pdf> This book is part of a larger "Common Ground project" instigated by HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad for further details see: <http://www.islambuddhism.com/>

¹⁸ A pertinent collection of essays which emerged from the 'Boston College Symposium on Interreligious Dialogue' see: http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/theology/interreligiousdialogue/symposia_2009.html can be found in Cornille, C., Tracy, D. & Conway, C. 2010. *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, Wipf & Stock Publishers.

Logical and Sceptical approaches -

Theological approaches:

- Exclusivism
- Inclusivism
- Pluralism
- Ecumenism

Syncretism, Universalism and Common Denominators -

Academic Perspectives:

- The Philosophy of Religion
- Religionswissenschaft*
- Historicism
- Phenomenology
- Comparative religions

The Traditionalist Perspective¹⁹

Here, it is important to note that the academic approach needs to be tempered by the aforementioned 'interpersonal' and 'intrapersonal' levels or as Abraham Velez de Cea remarks:

It would be irresponsible and somehow arrogant to practice today 'solipsistic scholarship,' as if cross-cultural interpreters could become aware of their own assumptions and hermeneutical prejudices without actual dialogue with the religious other and, more importantly, without *profound intrapersonal or intra-religious dialogue*. Not being concerned with critical self-awareness, which requires honest intra-religious dialogue, is hermeneutically naïve. Likewise, not treating other religious communities as subjects of self-understanding that can only be discovered through interpersonal dialogue is academically questionable and morally dubious. These solipsistic practices are a residue of paternalistic and ethnocentric attitudes characteristic of orientalist and colonialist scholarship. Most scholars would agree in rejecting these 'past' academic attitudes, *yet very few would be willing to do what is necessary to prevent them*; namely, inter-religious dialogue in the aforementioned interpersonal and intrapersonal senses.²⁰ [my emphasis]

It is worth pausing to consider what is meant by dialogue. Professor Harry Oldmeadow offers a worthwhile summary of the various modes that dialogue may take:

Firstly, there is what Eric Sharpe has called *discursive dialogue*, the courteous and sympathetic meeting of adherents of different faiths to openly and honestly discuss their beliefs and practices. Secondly, there is what I will label 'common front dialogue', where representatives of

¹⁹ Dr Richard Payne has critiqued this approach recently but, unfortunately, I do not believe this essay was, ironically, representative of 'Traditionalism' as a whole or as demonstrated by those authors represented. Furthermore, this work is littered with innumerable factual, ideological and scholarly errors and relies heavily on the dubious scholarship of Mark Sedgwick. While I am sympathetic to 'self-critical' efforts, they must not come at the expense of hasty categorisation and over simplification, however well intentioned. See: *Pacific World* (2008).

²⁰ See: Abraham Velez de Cea, *Interreligious Dialogue as a Method of Understanding: the Case of Raimundo Panikkar*, p.108. freely available at <http://irdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/JIRD-3-Velez-de-Cea.pdf>

different faiths meet together in an attempt to forge creative responses to problems of mutual concern. Such meetings may focus on the contribution the religious faiths might take to the solution of various ostensibly 'secular' problems such as poverty, environmental crises, the abuse of human rights, and so on...Or, such dialogue might take up more defensive posture, looking for ways to meet the challenges which face all religious traditions in the modern world – materialism, humanism, atheism, and suchlike. Thirdly, there is *intra-religious dialogue*, in which persons of the same faith (though perhaps of different denominations or groups) exchange their spiritual experiences and ideas about their own tradition and its relation to other traditions...The fourth kind of exchange might be called *experiential inter-religious dialogue*, usually focusing on the interior aspects of spirituality. Such dialogue is especially favoured by people of contemplative disposition and it is no surprise that monks and nuns have spearheaded this kind of dialogue in recent times. Finally, there is what we might call interior dialogue or, in Panikkar's phrase, 'intrapersonal soliloquy' wherein two faiths meet in the one human heart.²¹

Looking through Shin history, we can point to numerous scholars and practitioners who have made sincere efforts in the area of inter-religious understanding and dialogue. The *Pacific World* journal featured a fascinating essay in 1992 where Kenneth Kramer interviewed several prominent Buddhists (including Shojun Bando and Koshin Yamamoto) on their thoughts²² – like so much of this paper, space does not permit elaboration and I refer readers to the link below for perusal. Moreover, dialogue is not a theoretical construct needed 'out there', it already occurs 'inside' and 'outside' at many levels. To use myself as an example: I live in Australia which, for the last 30 years, has been built on immigration, hence our identity is very fluid and we are very multicultural. My heritage is Anglo-Celtic but also has distant aboriginal connections; my wife is Christian, I am Buddhist; two of my neighbours are Muslims and so on – speaking to people from Brazil, they have noted that it was a similar story for them too and I'm sure many places in America are the same. Several scholars have recently developed theories for dialogue based on the notion of hospitality, including John Makransky's Buddhist perspective on 'Awakening to Hospitality'²³ and surely one would think that a tradition which emphasises no-self, non-attachment, non-contrivance and deep listening would be well placed to openly engage in dialogue with the other without fear of gain or loss – in fact, dialogue *can be* and *has been* both a scholarly and religious mode of practice. Some scholars seem to think that Jodo Shinshu is best placed to deal with contemporary realities and that people across the globe have failed to appreciate its depth and value – but cannot every religion make the same claim? Propagation is not dialogue; it must be more open than this. Inter-religious and cultural dialogue is not a 'problem' to be overcome; rather, it is part of the solution - so long as it does not retreat into empty dialogues, hidden agendas and sentimental gestures.



Alex Minchinton, Latrobe University, Australia

²¹ Oldmeadow, H. 2008. *A Christian Pilgrim in India: The Spiritual Journey of Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux)*, World Wisdom books, p.232.

²² See: <http://www.shin-ibs.edu/documents/pwj-new/new8/07Kramer.pdf>

²³ Kearney, R. & Taylor, J. 2011. *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions*. London: Continuum.p.109-121.

European Shin Conference, Kyoto, September 2011 A Journey of Encounter for the Southampton Shin Sangha

Gary Robinson



Part One: The Journey

The four of us rendezvoused at Southampton airport all ready to set off on our first flight of the day to the Netherlands. We arrived in Schiphol at 7am and, as we were still full of energy at this early stage of our journey, we caught the train into Amsterdam and spent a few hours in this most beautiful of European capital cities.

Soon, we were back at Schiphol and ready now to board our UAE flight for the next stage of our journey, a six-hour flight to Dubai. Having travelled through a number of time zones to get there, we arrived at about 3am; just enough time to get some fish and chips for what was for us our evening meal - and then hop on to another huge airplane for a nine-

hour trip to Osaka.

Getting from Osaka to Kyoto requires another two-hour trip on a train or on a shuttle bus. By this time, we were quite exhausted and it was reassuring to be met at arrivals by a young Hongwanji priest named Moriwaki-san. We were on the shuttle bus at about 6pm and, according to our best calculations, it had been about thirty hours since we left Southampton.

Rev Moriwaki got us as far as Kyoto station where he had to leave us but, before he waved us safely on our way, he helped us to get a taxi to our accommodation.

The next morning we got up at 5am to get a taxi to Nishi Hongwanji for the morning service although, unbeknown to us, there were actually two services that morning. The first, which was sparsely attended and held in the *Amida-do* (Amida Hall), was a 'special' in memory of one of the Pure Land masters and it was only through a chance encounter with Rev. Jerome Decour (of the Swiss Shin Sangha) that morning, that I gained this piece of information - the rest is a just a hazy blur I am afraid!

We all then proceeded from the *Amida-do* to the *Goei-do* (Founder's Hall) for a more familiar service which was attended by many more people including those who were clearly simply popping in on their way to work.

Upon arrival the night before. I had been asked to be moderator for the first session of paper presentations for the conference portion of the proceedings and so as soon as the services were over, we caught another cab back to our accommodation for a short rest before the conference began at 10am with the chanting of the *Sambutsu-ge*. There followed a welcome message from Rev. Esho Sasaki and a keynote address by Rev. Prof. Michio Tokunga. Following this, we had lunch and then prepared ourselves for an afternoon of paper presentations. The rest of that day, and the whole of the next, were taken up with the European Shin Sangha Conference.

On the evening between the two days of the conference, we were all invited to a banquet which was attended by Shinmon Sama, son of the Monshu of Nishi Hongwanji.

The last time I saw the Shinmon Sama was when I looked up at this very young man who was conferring *Kikyoshiki* on a few of us at the European Shin Sangha Conference held in Oxford in 1998 . That was his very first visit to the UK – and the last time that the European Shin Sangha Conference was held in the UK, and I must admit that when I came face to face with him here again - now in his homeland of Japan - my emotions overwhelmed me. The last thirteen years of my life flashed through my mind in the blink of an eye and I realised that, back then in 1998, everything changed for me. To add to this upsurge of emotion, three members of the Southampton Shin Sangha (my home group) Mary, Sue and Craig stood alongside me that day and it filled me with so much joy to know that they too would be taking *Kikyoshiki* in the Mother Temple here in Japan just a few days' later.

Pictured to the left of Shinmon Sama (bottom centre) in the photo above, is Rev. Sasaki and, behind him, Louella Matsunaga. Louella has had a long standing acquaintance with the PLBF and, though she made her own way from Oxford to Kyoto, she was effectively the fifth member of the UK delegation in Japan. Her knowledge of Japanese culture and fluency in that language meant that she had to spend a lot of her spare time undertaking tasks like ordering taxis and generally 'fixing it' for other people and, though she was stretched to the limit, she gracefully assisted everyone that asked with equal aplomb.

Part Two: The Conference

DAY ONE (PM) - PAPER PRESENTATIONS (1)

1. **Frederik Bot**, 'Across "The Dutch Bridge" – Encountering Jodo Shinshu in the Netherlands'.
2. **Iulia Dinca**, 'A Buddhist Investigation on "Encountering" (*chigu*) from both Buddhist and Modern Physics Perspectives'.
3. **Fons Martens**, 'What is a word? – relating the meaning of *encountering* in different languages with Jodo-Shinshu concepts'.
4. **Toshikazu Arai**, 'Scolding Ananda'

DAY TWO (AM) - PAPER PRESENTATIONS (2)

After a couple taxis to and from Nishi Hongwanji to attend the morning service, we returned to the conference site for the second set of presentations which began at 9:30 as follows:

5. **Adrian Cirlea**, 'Shinran – A Manifestation of Amida Buddha and Avlokitesvara'.
6. **Frank Kobs**, 'A Small Place to Share the Dharma'.
7. **Sandor Kosa-Kiss**, 'Encountering the *Spiritus Loci* – Being Touched by the Spirit of the Place'.
8. **Jerome Ducor**, 'The Light of Amida Buddha Envelops Us'.

DAY TWO (PM) - PAPER PRESENTATIONS (3)

9. **Gary Robinson**, 'Legacy of the encounter between Jack Austin and Zuiken Inagaki'.
10. **Thomas Moser**, 'The Ten Ox-herding pictures in Relation to the Nembutsu Teaching'.

11. **Hoyu Ishida**, 'Living in the here and now into which the future melts'.

12. **Marc Nottelmann-Fell**, 'Encountering the Buddha via Translations'.

Part Three: Future Conferences

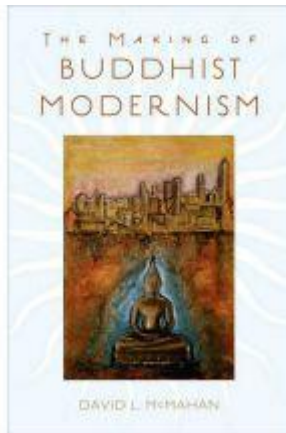
When the paper presentations were completed, we chanted the *Jusei-ge* together and then listened to Reverend Sasaki's closing remarks. This included the suggestion that we all remain where we were for a while and discuss the venue and date of the next European Shin Sangha. What followed was almost miraculous!

Under the brilliant leadership of Rev. Foz Martens, we all began 'brainstorming' together and, in just a little more than half an hour, it had been decided that the next European Shin Sangha Conference will be held in Dusseldorf on Thursday and Friday the 30th and 31st of August and on the Saturday and Sunday of the 1st and 2nd of September 2012. The theme will be "*The Importance of Sangha*".

We then actually went a stage further and decided upon Southampton (my home town) here in the UK as the venue for the 2014 European Shin Conference. The precise dates have not been decided yet and, although this is an important detail, it is for now just that, a detail, and the important thing is that we (the European Sangha) can now look to the future with genuine optimism and begin now to build upon that landmark encounter of harmonious intentions that was the 2011 European Shin Sangha Conference which was most generously hosted by the IABC in Kyoto on September 8th and 9th 2011.

BOOK REVIEW

The Making of Buddhist Modernism
David L. McMahan
(Oxford University Press, 2008)



What is 'Buddhist Modernism'? Why and how does it come to exist? Why should we care? This well written and well researched book answers most of these questions, and the reader can decide on the answer to the last.

It is important to begin a consideration of this book by reflecting on the title the author has chosen. 'Buddhist Modernism' is a very different thing to modern Buddhism! Accordingly, McMahan begins the book with an introduction that prefaces what the book will be about and in which he attempts to clarify what he calls the 'multivalent' term, *modernity*. Modernity is a term difficult to define, but McMahan puts it thus:

'the (...) social and intellectual world rooted in the Protestant reformation, the scientific revolution, the European Enlightenment, Romanticism and their successors reaching up to the present.' (p9). What modernism is then is the received intellectual landscape of this writer and all his readers.

McMahan sets the scene with his first chapter – 'The Spectrum of Tradition and Modernism' – which consists of sketches of the beliefs and practices of a wide range of people who might be considered to be Buddhists - a Western Buddhist sympathiser, a Thai laywoman, an American Dharma teacher, a traditional monk and an Asian moderniser. The sketches neatly encapsulate the views of a range of people who will be familiar to the reader either from personal experience or from books. Who is the Buddhist and who is the modernist? McMahan does not make a judgement, but he does set down three cultural processes – the products of modernity – that will let the reader draw their own conclusions. They are detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization.

These are clear and powerful concepts that we can look out for in what we read and what we think. Are they bad things? It is my opinion that a degree of

detraditionalization is inevitable with the movement of the Buddhist teachings to any different culture since the new culture will have its own traditions. The Dharma has historically always adapted in this way. We must try to be conscious of which traditions we preserve and which we change and why. As for demythologization, well, it depends. For me the 'meta-mythology' of the story of Dharmakara Bodhisattva and Amida Buddha should not be demythologized, but the physical aspects of Buddhist cosmology can be disregarded. Psychologization runs the risk of missing the salvific power of the Buddhist teachings entirely while allowing the appropriation of the teachings by people outside of, or only tangentially involved in, the tradition.

The second chapter – 'Buddhism and the Discourses of Modernity' – delves into the interactions between Buddhism and the West that laid the foundations of Buddhist modernism and concludes that the early interpreters of Buddhism to the West drew from three discourses: rationalistic, Christian and Romanticism-Transcendentalism. Are these discourses mutually contradictory or even mutually incomprehensible? Of course, but the contradictions didn't and don't seem to matter. We all live with unexamined and contradictory views in any case, and an argument only fails on the grounds on inconsistency if the inconsistency is noticed. Do any of these discourses truly represent the Buddha Dharma? Not at all. McMahan concludes that what has been created is a new Buddhism, a 'hybrid that is adapted to all three discourses and able both to complement and criticise them.' In the context of McMahan's scholarly and dispassionate viewpoint, he is correct. What this may mean I will come to in due course.

The next chapter expands on one aspect of the above as 'Modernity and the Discourse of Scientific Buddhism'. The discourse considered here is one in which it is not so much that traditional Buddhist beliefs are discarded or re-interpreted because of scientific knowledge (although, some, like the Mt Meru centred cosmology have been) but that Buddhists have attempted to tie Buddhist concepts onto the insights of modern science. I have discussed the naivety and danger of this process in previous reviews.

The fifth chapter – 'Buddhist Romanticism : Art, Spontaneity, and the Wellsprings of Nature' - is an important deconstruction of the edifice of so-called Buddhist but especially 'Zen' art, and demonstrates that there was really no such thing until thinkers imbued with Romanticism such as D.T. Suzuki invented it.

I have already discussed the next chapter – 'A Brief History of Interdependence' – at length in a previous review. It is an incisive critique of the confusion of Romantic deism with the critical Buddhist concept of dependent co-origination by Buddhists both Eastern and Western, many of whom should know better.

There is not the space here to discuss in detail the remaining chapters, but McMahan examines in depth the specious Buddhist modernist equation of Buddhism with meditation and the appropriation and psychologization of meditation as enthusiastic Buddhists, again both Eastern and Western, seem to forget what the purpose of the Buddha-dharma is and abstract Buddhist meditation from its soteriological context and attempt to turn it into a technology of the mind. He

equally well analyses the similar distortions of the practice of mindfulness.

The concluding chapter is entitled 'From Modern to Postmodern' and in this chapter McMahan wraps up with an overview of current trends in Western Buddhism – a bewildering range of tendencies from 'post-Buddhism' to 'retraditionalisation' and more.

Modern Buddhism is simply Buddhism as it is practiced now. Buddhist modernism, as the reader of this book will learn, is an amalgam of ideas deeply rooted in current Western culture and elements of the Buddha-dharma. McMahan, as an academic, describes what he sees and he does not judge what is authentic and what is not. As a Jodo Shinshu priest, I see things otherwise, notwithstanding that I am a product of my time and place. When I

ask myself whether we should care about Buddhist modernism, I conclude that we should. Buddhist modernism is in some shape or form perhaps the most common manifestation of Buddhism in the West. While it may serve as an introduction to Buddhism, I believe that it is ultimately not the real thing. It is our duty to hold onto, and to transmit, the authentic teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. His teachings are aimed at resolving, for each of us, the great matter of birth and death. It is critical that the true teachings remain available to be found by those who find the modernist versions ultimately futile. This book will not appeal to all readers as it is quite technical in parts. It is well written though and I found it most accessible. What McMahan reports is often disturbing, but that is a criticism of Buddhist modernism and not of the author or the book.



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