

# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

# SHIN BUDDHIST STUDIES

VOL. 24. NO. 1.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SHIN BUDDHIST STUDIES

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国際真宗学会

## GREETINGS FROM THE NORTH AMERICAN DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE

By Mark Blum, University of  
California

This is my first time writing as the representative for North America for IASBS and I want to extend a “summer” greeting to all, though I know that it is only in northern hemisphere that



we are in the hot months of the year. I also want to express a deep sense of gratitude to Jessica Main and all the many people who helped put on what was quite a wonderful conference at the University of British Columbia (UBC) at the end of May this year. This is the first newsletter since that singular event, which is worth commenting on in a little detail. I am also happy to report that the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley, California, has kindly offered to host the next conference in 2015.

Our conferences are important for a number of reasons. Most obvious is the exchange of new ideas and findings in which attendees learn more in two days than they could possibly remember, and of course the opportunity to meet a great many people from around the world who share common interests and passions. Less obvious perhaps is the fact that the content of the papers provides a kind of weathervane indicating which way the winds of change are blowing in our field. Both aspects were amply provided by the rich assortment of papers ranging from philological concerns that call into question our understanding of history to issues facing

Buddhist communities today in terms of how Pure Land religious thought and practice is perceived to be relevant or helpful. I was struck by the fact that, as a whole, a great many of the speakers were asking a similar question, regardless of historical period or locale: “What is the received tradition that Pure Land Buddhists live by, how has it worked, where has it been successful and unsuccessful, what values are embedded in it, and what is problematic, what needs to be revised in how we understand it?” This is a process of continual clarification inevitably moving not only from question to answer, but from answer to question. It reminds us that in order to be relevant, religion must have *both* mystery and power, and when it does it takes on a life of its own with often surprising results.

To return to the weathervane analogy, two things have been apparent in recent conferences and in Pure Land historical studies in general that are worth noting. First is the rise in interest in the modern period. The term “modern” is used differently within different academic disciplines, but in Buddhist Studies it generally begins with the response of traditionally Buddhist nations in Asia from some time in the latter half of the nineteenth century to European culture. This was the inevitable result of European imperialism, but also of immigration from Asia to the West, particularly to the Americas. While scholars in the West have been interested for some time in Western efforts to make Buddhism comprehensible in terms of Western sensibilities, as seen in such things as the editing, publishing, and translating efforts of the Pali Text Society that began in 1881, what we what we are seeing now is the beginnings of robust scholarship in Western Languages on how European traditions of religion, philosophy, government, and society impacted Buddhist societies in Asia itself. There is no question that within this “new field,” which we might call “Buddhist Mod-

*continued on page two*

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(Japanese)

## CONTENTS

- 1 Greeting from North American District
- 2 Suggested Reading
- 3 Treasurer's Report and Scholarly Activities
- 4 Overview of 16th IASBS Conference
- 8 Minutes of the IASBS General and Steering Committee Meetings

## WHAT'S NEW

The North American District of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies is happy to announce that it has been accepted by the *American Academy of Religion* (AAR) as a *Related Scholarly Organization* (RSO). RSO status will help facilitate greater ties between Pure Land Buddhist Studies and the broader array of religious studies scholars.

## PURE LAND JOURNAL

The IASBS annually publishes *The Pure Land: Journal of Pure Land Buddhism* (ISSN 0911-7660), an academic journal in English that contains research articles, essays, translations, and book reviews. Subscriptions to the Journal are available through [membership in the IASBS](#). All the past volumes of the Journal are currently hosted online by the American Theological Association Series. Members, please login to the [IASBS homepage](#) to view and download copies of the *Pure Land*.

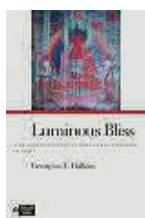
# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

## SUGGESTED READING



### Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet

A growing body of scholarship is slowly beginning to challenge the common perception of 'Pure Land Buddhism' as a 'unique' East Asian development. Georgios Halkias' remarkable study is



surely set to contribute to this newly emerging chapter in our understanding of Mahayana Buddhist traditions. Drawing on previously unexamined sources, Halkias examines not only the historical, social and cultural context amid which 'Tibetan Pure Land Buddhism' emerged, but also attends to those liturgical, experiential, and soteriological dimensions as developed in the works of seminal Tibetan Buddhist figures. In addition, *Luminous Bliss* also features an annotated English translation and critical analysis of the Orgyan-gling gold manuscript of the short Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra. A must read for anyone interested in understanding the full spectrum of 'Pure Land Buddhism'.

### The Religion and Film Reader

The intersection of film and religion is now widely studied in religious studies departments across the globe. This volume drawing upon over sixty interviews, essays and reviews from numerous directors, film critics and scholars, offers the most complete survey of this emerging field to date. Along with the *Journal of Religion & Film*, this volume is indispensable reading for the student, scholar, or for those with a genuine interest in the interaction between film and religion, or as has been recently suggested, film as religious activity.



-ernization," Japan played a major role as the first fully industrialized society in Asia, and in fact we know that other Asian nations watched and even came to Japan to study its modernization efforts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Within this field of study, Pure Land Buddhism has played a central role in China and Japan, and was very exciting to see so many papers given in Vancouver that reflected this fact.

A second direction that inevitably growing is the study of Pure Land Buddhism beyond Shin. For quite a long time the IASBS has been the most active place to pursue the critical consideration of issues related to Pure Land Buddhism precisely because nearly everyone involved in Pure Land Buddhism at the community or academic level who came to international conferences such as this one were from the Shin community. But interest in the wide tradition of Pure Land Buddhism has grown considerably in recent years. Over the past decade, IASBS conferences in both Japan and North America have seen participants from the Jōdo sect in Japan and Buddhist communities from Taiwan, and interest from those not directly affiliated with Shin is clearly growing. Reflecting this trend, the IASBS conference at UBC was called "Pure Land in Buddhist Cultures" and this broad perspective helped garner outside funding. In this regard it is worth noting that today, even traditional studies of Shinran (*shinshūgaku*) require putting him into the social and intellectual communities of his time, asking questions like what did Shinran himself study, who did he associate with, who were his major influences? This of course leads not only to Hōnen, but to the education that both Hōnen and Shinran received in Tendai traditions of thought, practice, and political culture, which in itself demands examination of, at the very least, the Chinese patriarchs of Tanluan, Daochuo, and Shandao, not to mention their own intellectual contexts.

The fact that most of growth in studying Pure Land Buddhism is evident in these two areas—the transformations of Buddhism's in the modern period and viewing Pure Land in the broader context of Buddhism as a whole—inevitably presents a challenge to our organization. That is, as the premier organization for the study of Pure Land Buddhist thought and culture until now, how should the IASBS react to these developments? It seems to me that we have essentially two

choices here: (A) ignore it, or (B) embrace it. Option (A) would mean essentially to keep to the same course that the IASBS has been on since its inception: remain an association devoted primarily to the study and discussion of Shin Buddhism. This has the advantage of serving Shin communities specifically and limiting discussions to familiar topics in which participation by people from those communities is easier; it has the disadvantage of branding us as sectarian, discouraging non-Shin participation and restricting ourselves to the same venues for conferences, and limiting the opportunity for learning from others with similar religious perspectives. Option (B) would mean reconsidering our purpose in an expanded way in which our perspective is one more explicitly devoted to the study and discussion of Pure Land Buddhism in all its forms, certainly including but not necessarily giving primacy to Shin. This stance has the advantage of expanding the conference in size and scope (enabling us to hold conferences in other Asian countries, for example), encouraging the participation of a much broader range of people and thereby giving rise to a more lively exchange of experiences and ideas; it has the disadvantage of signaling to the traditional membership that the identity and purpose of the IASBS as an organization devoted to serving the Shin community has changed, possibly prompting a sense of alienation and furthering the lack of participation on the Japan side.

I state these choices not to advocate for one or the other, but to raise the question so as to stimulate discussion among everyone associated with the IASBS. For the record, on the Japan side both membership in the IASBS and participation in the IASBS conferences has shown consistent decline in the past decade and we expect this trend to continue. This fact is particularly striking when contrasted with the fact that interest in Pure Land Buddhism worldwide is undeniably growing. For the steering committee, this raises serious questions about whether the traditional model upon which the IASBS was founded is still workable. The steering committee will not make a decision on this question until we have heard from the membership at large, and so everyone is encouraged to respond to this question by posting their comments on the IASBS website.

In gassho,

Mark

# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

## PLEASE CONTRIBUTE!

Please do not hesitate to contact the editor if you would like to share any information relating to Pure Land Buddhist activities. We encourage submissions which include, but are not limited to:

- Book Reviews
- Small Essays
- Suggested Readings
- Notices of Buddhist or Related Activities

Please email submissions or suggestions to the editor at:

alexminchinton@gmail.com

## REPORT FROM IASBS TREASURER

Prepared by Takami Inoue 5.27.2013

I. Cash balance at the beginning of the period 2,555,526 yen

II. Income received during the period  
Interest 176 yen

Donation from Rev. Doryu Baba  
500,00 yen

Total 500,176 yen

III. Expenses paid during the period

Newsletter Mailing (St amps and student help) 17,610 yen

Sundry expenses (transfer charge)  
1,050 yen

Subsidy for the 16th IASBS (Vancouver) conference (Travel Grant, etc.) paid through President Tanaka 209,000 yen

IASBS website and database maintenance Oct.2012-Dec.2012 (monthly 10,000 yen\* 3) 5/24 To Mr Shimazu  
30,000 yen

IASBS website (monthly 777 \*48, from Jan.2009-Dec.2012) (5/24 Paid to Prof. Dake) 37,296 yen

Total 294,956 yen

IV. Cash balance carried forward to the next account 2,760,746 yen

Auditor:

*Esho Sasaki*  
*[Signature]*

## (RE)IMAGINING SHINRAN

### ***Panel to reconsider Shinran on new theme at AAR annual meeting***

The North American District, as a related scholarly organization (RSO) of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), is sponsoring the panel “(Re) imagining the Founder: Shinran in Modern Japanese History” at the AAR’s annual meeting in Baltimore, MD from November 23-26. The panel will get underway in the afternoon of Sunday, November 24, 2:00~5:00PM, in the Grand Ball Room West, of the Marriott Inner Harbor

Participants and their paper titles are listed below. All IASBS members are invited to attend the panel.

Moderator: Scott MITCHELL (Institute of Buddhist Studies)

Orion KLAUTAU (University of Heidelberg)

“A World Unifying Prophet: Shinran and Nationalism in Imperial Japan”

Ryan WARD (Meiji University)

“Shinran and the Fictive Imagination”

Melissa Anne-Marie CURLEY (University of Iowa)

“For Myself, Shinran Alone: The Separation of Shinran and Shinshū in Kyoto School Philosophy”

Daniel FRIEDRICH (McMaster University)

“Conjuring the founder: Images of Shinran in Contemporary Shin Buddhist Practice”

Respondent: HAYASHI Makoto (Aichi Gakuin University)



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

## 2013 IASBS CONFERENCE IN VANCOUVER

*An overview of the 2013 IASBS conference held in Vancouver*

*By Dr Jessica L. Main, University of British Columbia*

The North American District hosted the IASBS's biennial conference this summer at the University of British Columbia. On a sunny and warm weekend in Vancouver, conference attendees were treated to a diverse and plentiful selection of presentations: just over fifty papers plus two evening keynote addresses. This was the 16<sup>th</sup> Biennial IASBS Conference, but it was also the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of UBC's 'Buddhism and Contemporary Society Program'. For the first time in its history, the IASBS held its conference together with another scholarly entity in a rewarding joint effort. Why was this cooperation significant? The



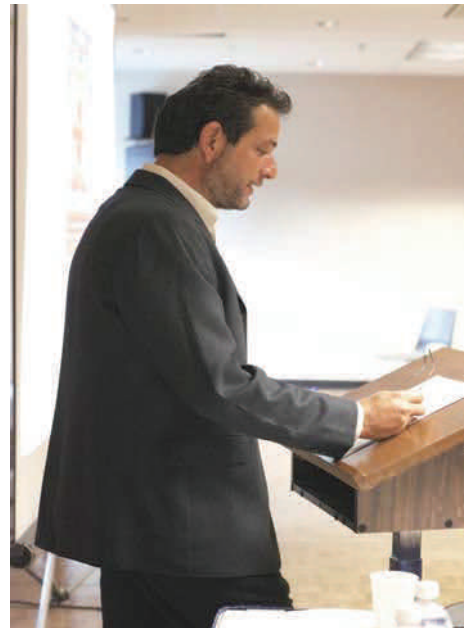
'Buddhism and Contemporary Society Program' is an academic unit, which was established by an endowment from The Tung Lin Kok Yuen (TLKY) Canada Foundation in 2005. Similar to the IASBS, it is linked to Pure Land Buddhism. And just as the IASBS has strong historical roots in Japan, the TLKY Canada Foundation is part of a philanthropic and educational lineage that stretches back to Hong Kong. Cooperation between these two scholarly entities presented a rare opportunity to gather scholars working on Pure Land Buddhism of many different kinds, places, and periods. It was a chance to consider the many ways that pure land cosmology, soteriology, and narrative reverberate through the Buddhist world and its history.

With an enthusiastic response to our call for papers, I am delighted to report that many students, scholars, and local residents took advantage of this opportunity.

Members will be familiar with the IASBS, but perhaps not with the TLKY Canada Foundation. It was founded early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with one principal goal: to support academic Buddhist studies in an effort to spread accurate and nuanced knowledge of Buddhism in Canadian society. It is the Canadian branch of an older philanthropic group based on Hong Kong, Tung Lin Kok Yuen 東蓮覺苑, founded by Lady Clara Lin-Kok in the 1930s. More information on the TLKY's history and the Ho family is available on the TLKY website: *buddhistdoor* (<http://www.buddhistdoor.com/eng/>).

In many ways, the TLKY Canada Foundation and its president, Robert H.N. Ho, have sought to overcome a set of stereotypes, particularly those that frame Buddhism throughout the modern period: that it is somehow otherworldly, passive, superstitious, irrational, devotional, simplistic, or moribund. The TLKY Canada Foundation, itself connected to Chinese Pure Land temples in both Hong Kong and in Vancouver, believes that the support of teaching and learning about history, contemporary social activities, and the broad range of traditions, is an appropriate response to these stereotypes about Buddhism in general, and Pure Land Buddhism in particular. At UBC, the support of the TLKY Canada Foundation has significantly expanded course offerings on Buddhism and the spread of academic knowledge through public lectures and conferences. otherworldly, passive, superstitious, irrational, devotional, simplistic, or moribund. The TLKY Canada Foundation, itself connected to Chinese Pure Land temples in both Hong Kong and in Vancouver, believes that the support of teaching and learning about history, contemporary social activities, and the broad range of traditions, is an appropriate response to these stereotypes about Buddhism in general, and Pure Land Buddhism in particular. At UBC, the support of the TLKY Canada Foundation has significantly expanded course offerings on Buddhism and the spread of academic knowledge through public lectures and conferences.

*Text continues on page 6*



The two keynote speakers of the conference. Above, Dr Georgios Halkias, who delivered a presentation on the "Three Paths to Amitabha's Pure Land: 'Sutra,' 'Tantra' and 'Great Perfection' Interpretations of Sukhavati in Tibet" and below, Dr Masahiro Shimoda who spoke on the topic of "Early Pure Land Buddhism Manifesting as Written Text in Ancient India: A Background for the Emergence of Buddhism of Otherness and Other Power".



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

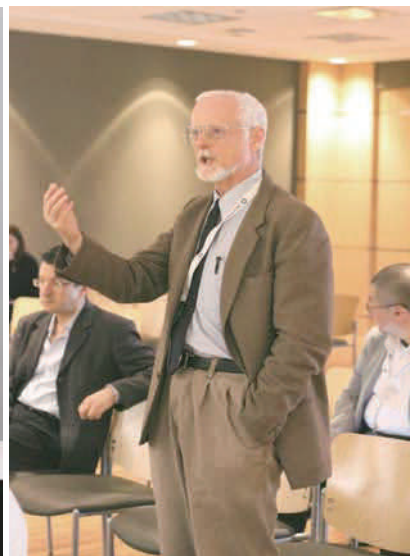
## IASBS CONFERENCE *Continued from previous page*



Above: Jessica Main  
Below: Ken Tanaka  
Bottom Left: Susie Andrews  
and Anne Spencer



Above: Stephanie Lin and Lei Ying  
Top Right: So Young Chang and Casey Collins  
(UBC Students and Volunteers)  
Second from Top Right / Middle Right: John  
Leung, So Young Chang, Ting Shuen  
(Photographer), Liton Barua (Attendee), Jason  
Tu, Victor Chan (all others, volunteers)  
Third from top right / Middle Right: Akinobu  
Kuwahara (Presenter) and Joanne Yuasa  
(Volunteer)  
Bottom Right: Charles Jones



## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

This cooperative venture between the two, IASBS North American District and UBC's Buddhism and Contemporary Society Program, produced a lively conference with several features I would like to touch on: (1) under the rubric of "pure land," there was an incredible diversity of presentation topics; (2) each keynote speaker outlined a novel contribution to the field; and (3) there was a high rate of participation by young scholars and students.

*Diversity:* Even a quick browse through the titles and abstracts, which will remain posted on the conference website (<http://pureland2013.wordpress.com>), reveals a stunning diversity of topics. The original goal of the conference was to gather scholars whose work, when taken together, would span more than one tradition, country, and historical period. The final program delivered well beyond this original goal.

With sixteen panels and just over fifty presentations, there is simply too much to summarize effectively here. I will attempt, however, to provide a sense of the conference's diversity by highlighting several trends and topics, with presenters last names in brackets following. The list and names, however, are not exhaustive. For example, even though I might include only a few names after textual analysis, many presenters used that bread-and-butter approach to Buddhist studies.

Diversity is immediately apparent in the number of presenters that went beyond the Buddha and Buddha-land of Amitabha/Amitayus to discuss Maitreya, Aksobya, and others (Strauch, Choi, Halkias, Bogin, Apple). Panels covered early and South Asian Buddhism, taking both scriptural and archaeological approaches, in fact, many used traditional methods of analysis of scripture and early manuscripts (Strauch, Shimoda, Xiao, Szuksztul, Leese). Others focused on the works of important teachers such as Tsong-kha-pa, Shinran, Zhongfeng Mingben, or Ippen (Apple, Tanaka, Isomura, Heller)--whether they were considered Pure Land Buddhists or pure land Buddhism was a component of their thought. And a few explored the interesting topic of the relation of pure land and esoterism, in both Japan (Proffitt, Lindsay) and Tibet (Halkias).

A number of panelists took up questions in Shin Buddhist exegesis, whether these were scholars or engaged practitioners (Kuwahara, Muraishi, Tanaka, Nakai, Wondra). A panel combining scholars from the two main Jodo Shinshu universities, Otani and Ryukoku, for example, worked together to explore specific issues in Shinran's thought (Dake, Kigoshi, Nasu, Inoue).

On the topic of medieval Chinese Buddhism, presenters grappled with the perennial topics of 'self power' versus 'other power' (Jones), the nature of *nianfo* (Conway), how Chan and pure land are related in poetry or treatise (Heller, Liu, Chu, Zeller), and how the various pure land Buddhas were imagined by practitioners (Mai). Moving forward in time to modern Chinese Buddhism, presenters demonstrated that the relation of Chan and pure land remained a matter of debate (Zamorski), and that pure land practice was very present in modern lay movements and in the thought of modernist monks (Lin, Ying). This imbrication was shown, in addition, to be true of Pure Land sects and modern social work in Japan (Penwell).

Some panelists focused, instead, on the relatively youthful Shin Buddhism of North America and contemporary pure land forms in Japan. As specialization in modern or contemporary topics allows, it is here we saw the greatest variety of methodologies. There were comparative philosophy and cultural studies (Payne, Largen, Curley, Minchinton, Herman), with a particular emphasis on modern therapeutic elements (Chilson). The way that new social spaces and cultural practices affected pure land in modern Japan seemed equally true of medieval Japan (Blum) and modern North America (Staples, Main). Others engaged with modern literature (Ama, Naito) or used sociological and anthropological fieldwork data to reach interesting conclusions regarding modern Shin: surveys of Sunday school curricula (Andrews), music (Mitchell), and demographics (Spencer), as well as, a sustained ethnography of Shin Buddhist preaching (Friedrich).

Despite an impressive range, there were a few regions that I hope will attract the interest of scholars in future. For example, the history of pure land in the countries today known as Korea and Vietnam remains virtually unexplored. For the former, Hyejeong Choi discussed the pure land of Maitreya in early Korean material culture and architectural history. For the latter, despite pure land being the most populous form of Buddhism, there are only a few scholars who focus on Vietnamese Buddhism working today. The best possible result is that these and other unexplored topics find support within a network of scholars whose interests in this field cross regional, historical, and disciplinary boundaries.

*Contributions by our keynotes:* Profs. Georgios Halkias (Visiting Associate Researcher, University of Oxford) and Masahiro Shimoda (Professor, University of Tokyo) each took a novel approach to pure land, broadly construed. Prof. Halkias took up the Tibetan tradition as a whole to show the way that pure land scriptures, ideas, and practices appear throughout. His work has pioneered the application of the term "pure land" itself to Tibetan Buddhist history and practice. Prof. Shimoda presented a novel way to understand the emergence of "pure land" as an identifiable movement within Mahayana Buddhism: as an effect of textualization. That is, the text is a necessary historical technology for what we know as Pure Land Buddhism.

*Text continues on page 7*



## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

Prof. Halkias struck a balance between accessibility and detail in his keynote address. Taking material from his recently published book, *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (University of Hawaii Press, 2012), he delved into the early roots of what would become “a pan-Asian religious phenomenon, known as Pure Land Buddhism” in the idea of the buddha-field and traced the development of this novel soteriological form. Furthermore, he provided descriptions of, and insights into, Tibetan pure land rituals and teachings in the present. He took a familiar three-part division of Tibetan Buddhist teachings (*sutra*, *tantra*, and great perfection), describing clearly and with the help of some exquisite images the way ideas and practices from early pure land scriptures appear within it. Prof. Shimoda, a specialist of early Mahayana Buddhism well known for his work on the *Nirvana Sutra* and in the ongoing digitization of Buddhist texts, brought his extensive knowledge of text and textuality to bear on the origins of Pure Land Buddhism. Prof. Shimoda’s speech focused, most notably, on the notion of the text-as-new-technology based on theories popularised by such thinkers as Walter Ong. On this basis, Buddhist practices and thought are distinguished by qualities emerging from the development of new technologies. Here, Prof. Shimoda suggested that by reconsidering Pure land Buddhism in light of these features, we might be offered new perspectives on the significance of visual and oral elements of Pure land traditions. Prof. Shimoda’s presentation posed many challenging questions as to how Buddhist texts and practices can be approached and understood, and subsequently question time was punctuated by lively discussion.

*A new generation of scholars:* Not only are more students and young scholars choosing research specializations that touch on pure land forms of Buddhism, but many submitted proposals and a significant number presented at the conference. Fortunately, we were able to offer modest trav-

el and accommodation support thanks to the generosity of The TLKY Canada Foundation and a donation by Rev. and Mrs. Bano. In total, nearly \$10,000 in support was distributed among nineteen presenters.



The conference website will stay online for several years. In the coming weeks, two video interviews by our keynote speakers, Profs. Georgios Halkias and Masahiro Shimoda, will be posted along with photos and portions of this report. If you have any great photos or inspired comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

As a final note, with beautiful weather and beautiful (and clothing optional!) beaches within walking distance of our Point Grey campus conference venues, I was very impressed by the fully present and engaged audiences at each of our panels. Many attendees stayed through to the very end of the three-day program, enjoying intellectual exchange, catching up with old friends, and making new ones. I can’t wait to see you all again in two years time!



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

## IASBS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

### *Minutes from meeting held on May 31, 2013 in Vancouver, Canada*

- Attendance: John Paraskevopoulos (Oceania and East Asia), Mitsuya Dake (Japan), Richard Payne (North America), Scott Mitchell (North America), Jessica Main (North America), James Dobbins (North America), Mark Blum (North America), Takami Inoue (Japan), Kenneth Tanaka (Japan), Eisho Nasu (Observer, Pure Land Journal editor)
- Consider the possibility of name change of the association to International Association of Pure Land Buddhist Studies. M. Blum will draft a letter to solicit opinion from the general membership.
- Treasury: Consider adopting Paypal system for the districts to pay the headquarters. T. Inoue will look into its feasibility.
- Newsletter editor: John Paraskevopoulos has resigned after 8 years as editor, for which IASBS expresses deep appreciation. He will be replaced by Alex Minchinton.
- Pure Land Journal: The next volume will be a combined year (2010 & 2011), Volume 26.
- Daniel Friedrich will replace Richard Payne on the Editorial Committee.
- Starting with Volume 27, the task of copy editing and typesetting will be transferred to the Institute of Buddhist Studies. Eisho Nasu will remain Editor-in-Chief to concentrate on managing the refereed process to be adopted.
- The journal actively seeks article submissions, including those of non-members. Members are encouraged to submit articles.
- Adopt the style sheet currently utilized by the *Pacific World Journal*.
- Steering Committee: Districts are encouraged to elect new members to realize flow of new blood.
- The IASBS was awarded Related Scholarly Organization (RSO) status at the American Academy of Religion (AAR). In the fall of 2013, the North American District plans on hosting a special panel at the AAR annual meeting.
- 2015 Conference: We discussed having it in the United States with Chicago and Los Angeles as possibilities. M. Blum and R. Payne will inquire.

## GENERAL MEETING

### *Minutes from meeting held on June 2, 2013 in Vancouver, Canada*

- All the decisions made at the May 31st Steering Committee (see minutes) were discussed and approved without any objection.
- It was decided to co-host a reception with the Institute of Buddhist Studies at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in November, 2013. The IASBS will contribute U.S. \$1,000 for the reception. The reception will be held in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of IASBS, which was founded in Kyoto in 1983. The reception also seeks to celebrate the IASBS being awarded the Related Scholarly Organization (RSO) status at the American Academy of Religion.