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Realm of Heavens (devaloka), Land of Bliss (Sukhavati), and the Pure Land : The Conception of the Pure Land in Shinran's Thought

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# 天 界、極 楽、浄 土

—親鸞における浄土の概念—

小 山 一 行

## Realm of Heavens (devaloka), Land of Bliss (Sukhāvati), and the Pure Land

— The Conception of the Pure Land in Shinran's Thought —

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### Preface

Shinran's thought called Shin Buddhism is generally considered to be one of the denominations of Japanese Buddhism. Nevertheless, it is needless to say that it was not established by him alone but is based on the long historical tradition of Buddhist thought. Shinran continued throughout his life to be a disciple of his master Honen, and it is well known that Honen had adored the Chinese Buddhist Master Shan-tao as his teacher. In addition, Shinran attached importance to the fact that there were seven great masters who succeeded in Pure Land Buddhist thought during its history from India to Japan. Moreover, tracing back to the origin of Shin Buddhism, it may be natural that we should reach to the teaching of Śākyamuni Buddha.

Shinran selected *The Lager Sūtra of Immeasurable Life (Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra)* among the vast number of sūtras believed to be taught by Śākyamuni, and named it Jodo-Shinshu or 'The True Essence of the Pure Land Way', which we call Shin Buddhism. *Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra*, one of the sūtras of Mahāyāna Buddhism, is constructed to focus on the characteristic narrative of Dharmākara-Bodhisattva, who aspired in Vows, fulfilled them and, as a result of that, established the adornments of virtues of Amida's Buddha-land. What is written in this sūtra apparently seems to be quite different from early Buddhist teachings due to the spiritual experience of Śākyamuni, and even from the main teachings of later Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore Seven Masters of Pure Land Buddhism tried to prove that Pure Land Buddhism, which teaches the birth in Amida's Land of Bliss, must be the genuine Buddhism. Through the history of those doctrinal interpretations, Shinran established his thought as Shin Buddhism, which is unique in the Buddhist tradition.

In the denomination of Shin Buddhism in Japan, many religionists have discussed the relationship between *shinjin* and *nembutsu*, namely, between the ultimate religious experience and the religious

practice. It is true that we cannot say this is without value, but more important topics we must think about today must be “Who or what is Amida?” and “What is the Pure Land where Amida lives?”

Prof. Tachikawa said that he had often been asked similar questions by Christian theologians: Why don't Japanese Buddhists start their argument with an ontological rationale?<sup>1)</sup> The ontological rationale for Pure Land Buddhism may be the question of Buddha-body or Buddha-land. Prof. Carter delivered an important and suggestive lecture on Trinity in Christianity and Buddha-body in Shin Buddhism at the colloquium in Dazaifu last summer.<sup>2)</sup> Comparing the view of Buddha-body with the concept of Trinity in Christian theology is quite significant for understanding Amida. I also tried to present a paper on the personal nature of Amida before but, because of my lack in understanding Christian theology, I have not reached a clear conclusion.<sup>3)</sup>

In this paper, I'd like to think about the second topic, Shinran's view of the Pure Land, from the view point of the history of Buddhist thought. My main concern is to consider 'Shin Buddhism as Buddhism' and I hope it will contribute to the global perspective for thinking about Shin Buddhism in this modern world.

### **I. Transmigration (saṃsāra) and emancipation (vimokṣa) in early Buddhist sūtras**

Early Buddhist sūtras show us an episode of 'no answer' (avyākṛta/avyākata) which states that Śākyamuni Buddha would not give the answers to the following questions asked by his disciple Māluṅkyāputta.<sup>4)</sup>

1. Whether the world is eternal or not.
2. Whether the world is an ending thing or not.
4. Whether the life-principle is the same as the body or these two are different from each other.
5. Whether the Tathāgata is after death or not.

Disciple Māluṅkyāputta was disappointed and questioned closely, “If the Lord will not explain these things to me, . . . then I will, disavowing the training, revert to secular life.” Then Śākyamuni told him ‘a fable of a poisoned arrow’. Śākyamuni said, “Suppose a man were pierced by an arrow smeared with poison. If he insists that he would not draw out that arrow until he knows of the man who pierced him whether he is a noble man or not, until he knows of the bow whether it was a spring-bow or not, until he know of the bow-string whether it was of swallow-wort or not, this person might pass away.” And Śākyamuni continued, “The reason I did not explain these is because it is not connected with the goal, is not fundamental to the Brahma-faring, and does not conduce to turning away from, nor to dispassion, stopping, calming, super-knowledge, awakening nor to nibbāna.” He spoke, “What has been explained by me is, ‘this is anguish’, ‘this is the arising of anguish’, ‘this is the stopping of anguish’, and ‘this is the course leading to the stopping of anguish’, because

it is connected with the goal, is fundamental to the Brahma-faring, conduces to turning away from, to dispassion, stopping, calming, super-knowledge, awakening and nibbāna.”

The meaning of this episode is quite clear. It means that Buddha was interested only in the practical question of how people could get free from their present suffering and that the metaphysical questions about the end of the world or life after death were not his main matter of concern.

Nevertheless, many sūtras often refer to realms after death. We can find those teachings everywhere in the sūtras, such as follows:

It is impossible, monks, it cannot come to pass, that one addicted to good deeds of body, speech, thought should consequent on that, as a result of that, when body breaks up, after death be reborn in the Waste, and the Way of Woe, in the Downfall, in Purgatory. But the opposite may well be.<sup>5)</sup>

In addition, early Buddhist sūtras state that Buddha told people to attain rebirth in the realm of heavens by making donations and observing the precepts. Those sermons are well known as three sets of formulas: speech of donation (dāna-kathā), speech of precepts (sīla-kathā) and speech of birth in heaven (sagga-kathā). Such an idea that we are to be reborn in different realms after death as a result of our deeds in this present life follows ancient Indian philosophy before Buddhism. Buddha also approved the doctrine that good actions have good results and evil actions have evil results as the natural principle for social ethics in this world. The reason he spoke of the virtue of donation might be that donation by the laymen would be indispensable to ascetic lives of Buddhist monks.

Seeing from this point of view, we can say that those sermons were nothing but the discourse or exposition of a succession of subjects (anupubbi-kathā). We must note that Buddha taught repeatedly that being born in the realm of heavens was not the ultimate goal of Buddhist path, and that we should seek nibbāna or perfect deliverance from birth-and-death. When Buddha attained enlightenment, he declared that “destroyed is birth, brought to a close is the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or such,”<sup>6)</sup> which was also stated as the words telling common sphere among his excellent disciples. Also there is the following verse in *Dhammapada*:

Some are born in a womb,  
Wrongdoers, in hell.  
Those of good course go to heaven,  
To Nibbāna those without influxes.<sup>7)</sup>

If one should be born in realm of heaven as a result of one’s good deeds, one cannot reach true

emancipation but a certain state of transmigration. There is an evident distinction between rebirth in heaven and emancipation or nibbāna.

Then, is the conception of transmigration only a provisional teaching adopted in Buddhism unwillingly? The answer is definitely ‘no’. It is true that the final destination of Buddhism is perfect freedom from suffering, but one must first realize oneself to be bound in the circle of birth-and-death to comprehend one’s suffering profoundly. Self-realization of transmigration is the starting point for attaining emancipation.

There are also people who comprehend suffering, who know how it happens, where it totally ends and how to get to where it ends.

They have got the emancipation of mind and the emancipation through knowledge: now they can effect an ending: no more going on and on, being born and getting old. (Sn.726-727)<sup>8)</sup>

Early Buddhist Texts expounded later describe five evil courses or six realms of transmigration, but the word ‘courses’ or ‘realms’ (gati/loka) in Buddhism does not mean that other real worlds exist somewhere else out of this world. It means the spiritual condition one reaches according to the result of one’s three modes of action, deeds, words and thoughts.

Ignorance of ourselves causes our evil action, evil action causes suffering, and suffering causes further ignorance. The doctrine of our flowing in six courses is taught to define the nature of transmigration as this threefold causality and to instruct us to seek the path to liberation from that cycle of delusions. We may find in this doctrine the religious meaning of Buddhist cosmology.

‘Emancipation’ in Indian thought refers to identifying Ātman, the eternal self, with Brahman, the extreme reality of the universe. This is taught on the assumption that Ātman exists as the true reality of oneself. In Buddhism, by contrast, clinging to such an idea of Ātman is regarded as the result of our ignorance, which is the very cause of transmigration.

Constant traveling from birth to birth, from this form to that form, again and again – this is what results from ignorance. (Sn.729)<sup>9)</sup>

When a man walks hand in hand with the thirst of craving, he will wander from birth to birth, now here, now there, and with never an end in sight. (Sn.740)<sup>10)</sup>

Long is the night for one awake,  
Long is a league to one exhausted,  
Long is saṃsāra to the childish ones

Who know not dhamma true. (Dhp.60)<sup>11)</sup>

Ignorance means that one does not know the real state of oneself. This ignorance causes attachment to the self, attachment causes blind passions, and the acts based on the attachment causes transmigration. Therefore we can not attain true emancipation from transmigration without awakening to the real state of ourselves; everything in the world arises and perishes depending on the countless causes and conditions, so there is nothing like an eternal self. Emancipation in Buddhism is often called nibbāna. Buddha instructed the people, who had been wandering in birth-and-death from ignorance, to walk on the path to reach nibbāna with wisdom.

It is due to this ignorance that people [’s minds] become dulled and muddled, that they go on endlessly wandering from life to life. But if you walk towards knowledge, you leave these rebirths behind, you do not go on becoming. (Sn.730)<sup>12)</sup>

Then what is true knowledge or wisdom? It is defined as knowing the self and the world as they are. In other words, it is to know clearly that everything in this world will appear and disappear by innumerable causes and conditions and that it has no ultimate substance. And it means simultaneously to know that transmigration is the result of one’s action (karman/kamma) caused by ignorance.

Knowing that action is action, and knowing result as result, showing (=casting) real light upon the phenomena which have arisen consequentially, leading to great rest, peaceful, it is fortunate at the end. (*Theragāthā* 422)<sup>13)</sup>

The way to attain this wisdom is described in the three types of leaning; moral conduct (sīla), meditation (samādhi), and wisdom (prajñā). That is to say, one should attain wisdom by keeping moral conduct and by calming mind with meditation. It has been considered to be the fundamental process of Buddhism and such is also succeeded to in Mahāyāna Buddhism as well. But it may naturally happen that the deeper the wisdom one attains, the more distant he/she finds himself/herself from the true Buddhist path. Pure Land Buddhism arose to open the gate of attaining Buddhahood by being born in Buddha-land for those who have realized that they cannot attain perfect wisdom in this world.

## II. ‘Land of Bliss’ and the ‘Pure Land’

In *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*, Amida Buddha’s land is described as an ideal world filled with various kinds of virtues of Amida itself, of the land, and of the living beings inhabiting that land. The sūtra

states that Amida Buddha “is the first among the Most Honored Ones,” “the radiant light of all the buddhas cannot surpass the light of this buddha,” and “the length of the life span of” Amida “cannot be calculated.” The Land of Amida “is naturally composed of the seven precious substances: gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, coral, amber, mother-of-pearl, and agate,” and “this land does not have any of the four seasons: spring, fall, winter, or summer. It is neither cold nor hot. The temperature is always moderate, constant, and agreeable.” “Furthermore, that Buddha-land is a world system surrounded on all sides by trees made of the seven precious substances.” “And again the lecture halls, the monks’ quarters, the palaces, and the watchtowers are all adorned with the seven precious substances, created miraculously,” and “inside and outside, on the left and on the right, are bathing ponds,” each of which “is filled to the brim with water possessing the eight good qualities.” “Moreover, when they blow, these breezes scatter flowers all over, filling this Buddha-field.” In addition, “all the living beings that go to be reborn in this buddha’s land possess the following qualities: bodies of pure color, marvelous voices, supernormal powers, and merits.”<sup>14)</sup>

All of these expressions are obviously made for the people who believe in the idea of transmigration and aspire for rebirth in the realm of heavens. In evidence of that, we can find some phrases in this Sūtra apparently written under the influence of the conception of heaven: “The palaces in which they reside, the clothing they wear, and the food they eat, the flowers that adorn them, the perfumes and ornaments they wear are like the possessions of the gods of the Sixth Heaven, which appear spontaneously,”<sup>15)</sup> and “Made from the essence of all the precious substances in the world, its jewels resemble those of the Sixth Heaven.”<sup>16)</sup>

If the Buddha-land of Amida is only an ideal world or a kind of paradise which exists beyond this world, Pure Land Buddhism will become nothing but a teaching of birth in heaven. Then Lager Sūtra, granting the primitive aspiration of common people on the one hand, tries to tell on the other hand that the Pure Land which they must seek is the realm of emancipation from the existence with conceivable form, which is the realm of nirvāṇa. *The Lager Sūtra* states:

My land will be like nirvāṇa, and it will be incomparable.<sup>17)</sup>

That Buddha-land is pure and tranquil, wondrous and delightful. It is not apart from the enlightenment of uncreated nirvāṇa. The śrāvakas, bodhisattvas, devas, and human beings there all possess lofty and brilliant wisdom, and their transcendent powers are thoroughly realized. They are all of a single kind, with no distinction in appearance. The words “human beings” and “devas” are used simply in accordance with usage elsewhere. Their countenances are dignified and wonderful, surpassing things of this world. Their features, subtle and delicate, are not those of human beings or devas; all receive the body of naturalness (*jinen*) or of

emptiness, the body of boundlessness.<sup>18)</sup>

These passages signify that the essence of the world called ‘Land of Bliss’ is the wisdom of Buddha or nirvāṇa without form. And here we can find why Buddha-land of Amida is established with many adornments of virtues. It is because the formless nirvāṇa reveals itself by compassion to make suffering beings enlightened. But the sūtra is written in a narrative form, only to tell such essentials of Buddhist teaching suggestively. Reasoning of its doctrinal meaning logically was left to the Pure Land Masters in after ages.

Vasubandhu who wrote *Treatise on the Pure Land*, the discourse on *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*, states that there are described twenty-nine virtues of adornments of Sukhāvātī (Buddha-land of Amida), and classifies them into three groups: seventeen virtues of the land’s adornments, eight virtues of Buddha’s adornments, and four virtues of bodhisattvas’ adornments. We should note that this work of his begins with the following verses:

Contemplating the features of that world,  
I see that it transcends the three realms.  
It is infinite, like space,  
Vast and boundless.  
The great compassion of true enlightenment (*tao*)  
Is born from supramundane roots of good. (*The Treatise on the Pure Land*)<sup>19)</sup>

Vasubandhu explains that the first two lines show ‘the virtue of purity’, and the third ‘the virtue of nature’ among the seventeen virtues of the land’s adornments. It means that the adornments with marvelous forms are established by Amida’s compassion to lead people to the enlightenment of Buddha or realm of nirvāṇa, and that the essence of Buddha-land is the dharma itself without form.

T’an-luan, who wrote the *Commentary on Vasubandhu’s Treatise on the Pure Land*, made this point clearer. He states, “These three types of fulfilled adornments were originally accomplished by the adorning activity of the pure Vow-mind expressed as the Forty-eight Vows; hence, because the cause is pure, the fruition is also pure.”<sup>20)</sup> Here, T’an-luan underlines the reason why Amida’s Land of Bliss is called the ‘Pure Land.’ It is because ‘the cause is pure’, which means that the name of the ‘Pure Land’ is based on the purity of Amida’s Primal Vows. By the theory that ‘because the cause is pure, the fruition is also pure’, T’an-luan became the first person to make it clear that ‘Land of Bliss’ is namely the ‘Pure Land.’ T’an-luan continues:

These preceding seventeen phrases on the land’s adornments, eight phrases on the Tathāgata’s



adornments, and four phrases on the bodhisattvas' adornments are "extensive." That they enter into the phrase "one-dharma" is termed in brief. Why is it explained that extensive and brief interpenetrate? Because all Buddhas and bodhisattvas have dharma-bodies of two dimensions: dharma-body as suchness and dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as compassionate means arises from dharma-body as suchness, and dharma-body as suchness emerges out of dharma-body as compassionate means. These two dimensions of dharma-body differ but are not separable; they are one but cannot be regarded as identical. Thus, extensive and brief interpenetrate, and together are termed "dharma."<sup>21)</sup>

This passage reveals that many adornments of the Pure Land are unified in the phrase 'one-dharma', that the phrase 'one-dharma' is the phrase 'purity', and that the phrase 'purity' is 'true and real wisdom or uncreated dharma-body.' This uncreated dharma-body without form manifests itself in all adornments of virtues filled with forms as compassionate means.<sup>22)</sup> Here, T'an-luan does not make a distinction between the issues of Buddha-body and of Buddha-land. He is treating these two simultaneously using the words of 'extensive and brief interpenetrate.'

Because they appear from the essence of uncreated dharma-body, Dharmākara Bodhisattva's Vows are said to be pure. In the same way, because they are fulfilled with the pure Vow-mind of Dharmākara Bodhisattva, the Buddha-body and Buddha-land of Amida are also pure and take any form without departing from the essence of dharma.

True and real wisdom is wisdom that is true reality. Because true reality is formless, true wisdom is no-knowing. Uncreated dharma-body is the body of dharma-nature. Because dharma-nature is tranquility, dharma-body is formless. Because it is formless, it never fails to manifest every kind of form. Therefore, the adornment of the Buddha's features and marks is itself dharma-body.<sup>23)</sup>

In this respect, it is clear that the land of bliss (the Pure Land of Amida) is none other than the realm of *nirvāṇa*, the uncreated. In consequence, unlike the rebirth in heaven, to be born in the Pure Land is not to gain happy condition of existence after death. Therefore, birth in the Pure Land is called the 'birthless birth.'

In order to clarify this doubt, one should contemplate the glorious merits of the Pure Land and clearly realize that [birth in] the Pure Land is the 'birthless birth' brought about by Amida Tathāgata's Primal Vow that is pure. This is not one of the delusory births as seen in the three worlds.

How can you say this? In the first place, the Dharma-nature is immaculate and is the state of ultimate non-birth. It is simply in accordance with the feeling of those who seek birth in the Pure Land that we speak of 'birth.'<sup>24)</sup>

### III. Shinran's View of the Pure Land

In the medieval times in Japan, many people thought sincerely about their life after death and Shinran was not an exception. Shinran said, in his writings, quoting the words by Shan-tao, "I am in reality a foolish being of birth-and-death, possessed of deep and heavy karmic evil and transmigrating in the six courses. The suffering is beyond words,"<sup>25)</sup> and "sentient beings long sinking in birth-and-death and for innumerable kalpas lost in transmigration, have no means of gaining emancipation for themselves."<sup>26)</sup>

It is often said that the characteristic of Shinran's view of man is a keen insight into the evil nature of human beings. But what he most emphasized is that birth-and-death caused by blind passions and deeds is itself evil. From the fundamental viewpoint of Buddhism, we must be able to attain nibbāna by gaining true wisdom. But Shinran realized fully that he had no ability to gain wisdom and, being led by Honen, encountered with the path in which everyone can attain nibbāna in the Pure Land of Amida by the power of Primal Vow. What then is the Pure Land for Shinran?

At the symposium held in commemoration of 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Ryukoku University in 1989, Prof. Gordon Kaufman raised four sets of questions to Shin Buddhism from Christian perspective as follows:<sup>27)</sup>

1. How is the Pure Land to be understood?
2. Who or what is Amida Buddha?
3. How are we to understand the dualism of good and evil that characterizes much of Shin thought?
4. In what respects, and why, should we regard Shin Buddhist claim as true?

As I was present there at that time, I heard directly the answers given by some Shin Buddhists but I felt them insufficient. Some scholars and religionists discussed on these questions later,<sup>28)</sup> which proves that it may be still important to understand Shin Buddhism from global perspective in this modern world.

Yoshifumi Ueda says that the conception of the Pure Land which has been stated for a long time as a certain blissful and peaceful place out of this world is now unbelievable and incomprehensible to modern people who have scientific view of the world, and that we have not found yet the bright answer to the question: "How can we make the religious meaning of this thought understood by the moderns?" He continues; to solve this problem is not easy and we must note first what Shinran himself thought about that.

## Pure Land as the realm of nirvāṇa

Among many passages where Shinran utters his opinions on the Pure Land, most important is the following one in *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization V*, which is titled literally “The True Buddha and Land of the Pure Land Way.” Here Shinran states that as Amida is the Buddha of inconceivable light, so the true Pure Land of Amida is the land of immeasurable light.

Reverently contemplating the true Buddha and the true land, I find that the Buddha is the Tathāgata of inconceivable light and that the land also is the land of immeasurable light. . . . Concerning the true land, the *Larger Sūtra* states, “Land of immeasurable light” and “Land of all-knowing wisdom.” The *Treatise* states, “It is infinite, like space, vast and boundless.” Concerning birth, the *Larger Sūtra* states, “All receive the body of naturalness (*jinen*) or of emptiness, the body of boundlessness.” The *Treatise* states, “The beings of the Tathāgata’s pure lotus are born transformed from the lotus of perfect enlightenment.”<sup>29)</sup>

‘Light’ is a symbol of wisdom or substance of Buddha’s enlightenment. Therefore, to be born in the Pure Land means to attain enlightenment, which also means to attain nirvāṇa that is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Shinran emphasizes that repeatedly in many passages in his writings.

*The land of bliss is the realm of nirvāṇa, the uncreated*

*The land of bliss* is that Pure Land of happiness, . . . *The realm of nirvāṇa* refers to the place where one overturns the delusion of ignorance and realizes the supreme enlightenment. *Realm* means “place”; know it as the place of attaining enlightenment. (*Notes on ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’*)<sup>30)</sup>

Further, *Hymn of the Two Gateways* states: “On reaching the land of happiness, necessarily, by the spontaneous working [of the Vow], Such a person immediately attains the eternal bliss of dharma-nature.”<sup>31)</sup> And *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling* states: “It is fundamental that because of this we will unfailingly reach the Pure Land of happiness, whereupon we will be brought to realize the same enlightenment of great nirvāṇa as Amida Tathāgata, being born in the flower of that perfect enlightenment.”<sup>32)</sup> It is quite evident that Shinran goes far beyond the conception of Pure Land as ‘the other world filled with happiness.’

The expression of Sukhāvati in *Larger Sūtra* is surely made as ‘the discourse or exposition of a succession of subjects (anupubbi-kathā)’, and it cannot be denied that the conception of the ‘Land of Bliss’ is closely connected with that of heavens. But the sūtra suggests in itself that the essence of

Amida's Buddha-land is none other than dharma-nature (dharma-tā). It is the fundamental standpoint of Buddhism, which T'an-luan tried to prove by his interpretation in *Commentary on the Treatise on the Pure Land*.

Succeeding Honen who instructed the practice of attaining birth in the Pure Land through *nembutsu* (saying the name of Amida), Shinran did not stay on that point and moved to reveal the ontological essence of the Pure Land. We can say that it was his trial to understand Pure Land Path from the fundamental perspective of Buddhism as the religion of emancipation. In this respect, Shinran stands, in a sense, beyond his master Honen. The most important matter for Honen was to instruct people to say *nembutsu* that was an easy and wide-open practical way for everyone. He emphasized the practice of *nembutsu* and attaining birth in Pure Land. Ontological questions such as 'what the Pure Land is like' were only a secondary matter for Honen. In other words, Honen thought that we need not discuss the substance of the Pure Land in detail, because we could recognize it naturally after attaining birth in the Pure Land. Such an attitude might be rather natural for Honen, who made much of the religious practice of *nembutsu*. By contrast, Shinran tried to elucidate the meaning of the symbol of the Pure Land, which must be the most important issue to understand Shin Buddhism in this modern world. That is the reason why Shinran, being led by T'an-luan, traced back to the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

### **Pure Land from which Tathāgata manifests itself**

Shinran states that the Pure Land is not only the realm where we realize the enlightenment of nirvāṇa but also the one that pervades the whole universe, because nirvāṇa is dharma itself without form.

*Nirvāṇa* has innumerable names. It is impossible to give them in detail; I will list only a few. Nirvāṇa is called extinction of passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true reality, dharma-body, dharma-nature, suchness, oneness, and Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is none other than Tathāgata. This Tathāgata pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*)<sup>33)</sup>

But foolish beings in transmigration with the attachment to the self cannot recognize their true situation and are bound in sufferings. Therefore, dharma-body without form, trying to manifest itself, establishes the Vows and takes form in fulfilled body or dharma-body as compassionate means to let them know it. This dharma-body as compassionate means is Amida, and Dharmākara's aspiration for establishing the Pure Land is to lead sentient beings to the enlightenment of Buddha, that is nirvāṇa.

Shinran states in *Lamp for the Latter Ages* as follows:

As the essential purport of the Vow, [Amida] vowed to bring us all to become supreme Buddha.<sup>34)</sup>

As dharma-body is none other than dharma itself without form, it has no 'land'. Therefore, the Land of Amida, namely the Land of immeasurable light, is called 'true fulfilled land' or 'land of fulfilled body'. Fulfilled body is the latter of the two dimensions of dharma-body: dharma-body as suchness and dharma-body as compassionate means. Concerning this, T'an-luan said, "these two dimensions of dharma-body differ but are not separable; they are one but cannot be regarded as identical." Therefore, Shinran states in *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'* as follows:

Since it is with this heart and mind of all sentient beings that they entrust themselves to the Vow of the dharma-body as compassionate means, this shinjin is none other than Buddha-nature. This Buddha-nature is dharma-nature. Dharma-nature is dharma-body. For this reason there are two kinds of dharma-body with regard to the Buddha. The first is called dharma-body as suchness and the second, dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as suchness has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. From this oneness was manifested form, called dharma-body as compassionate means.<sup>35)</sup>

And the following is from *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization V*:

The Pure Land of happiness arises from this great compassion; therefore this great compassion is said to be the root of the Pure Land.<sup>36)</sup>

Here Shinran states that the Pure Land is the origin from which Tathāgata manifests itself. The essence of the Pure Land is the realm of nirvāṇa, and nirvāṇa as dharma itself has neither color nor form like Amida as dharma-body that is beyond conception. Dharmākara Bodhisattva or Amida is its manifestation, aspiring to take form and announce the name. Thus, the Land of Amida is called the 'fulfilled land.' Just as dharma-body as suchness and dharma-body as compassionate means "differ but are not separable, and are one but cannot be regarded as identical," the Pure Land as the realm of nirvāṇa is not only standing still but also moving to save the suffering beings.

We feel grasped in the Pure Land and invited by it through practicing the *nembutsu*. It signifies that the Pure Land understood by Shinran is not only the place in which foolish beings aspiring to attain Buddhahood should be born but also the place which has an action of coming toward them. Shinran perceived the Pure Land and Amida to have such dynamic movements, which are another

important aspect of Shinran's view of the Pure Land.

### **Return to this world from the Pure Land**

Further, the more important aspect of Shinran's view of the Pure Land is that it is not the terminal end for us. For, when we attain the enlightenment of Buddha, namely wisdom in the Pure Land, that wisdom should necessarily turn into compassion and reach to all sentient beings. Once a person attains Buddhahood in the Pure Land, he/she will turn to this world to join the action of Amida saving all sentient beings. Thus, it becomes evident that the path of the birth in the Pure Land is none other than the way of the Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna tradition, who would accomplish self-benefit and benefiting of others simultaneously. Shinran states:

On reaching the land of the Vow,  
We immediately realize supreme nirvāṇa,  
And thereupon we awaken great compassion.  
All this called Amida's "directing of virtue". (*Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, Bodhisattva Vasubandhu)<sup>37)</sup>

Those who reach the Pure Land of happiness  
Return to this evil world of the five defilements,  
Where, like the Buddha Śākyamuni,  
They benefit sentient beings without limit. (*Hymns of the Pure Land*)<sup>38)</sup>

When person attain this enlightenment, with great love and grate compassion immediately reaching their fullness in them, they return to the ocean of birth-and-death to save all sentient beings; this is known as attaining the virtue of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. (*Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'*)<sup>39)</sup>

Shinran's thought that one attains Buddhahood by being born in the Pure Land reveals that one cannot attain Buddhahood in this world, and it also means that the birth in the Pure Land is not for one's benefit alone. Of course, it is after attaining birth in the Pure Land that one can accomplish benefiting others. So, there is not such an idea in Shin Buddhism that we must make this world into the Pure Land. At this point, Shin Buddhist Path has been criticized that, compared with Christianity, it has little sense of responsibility in the present society. Nevertheless, Shinran also states:

When we realize the diamondlike true mind, we transcend crosswise the paths of the five courses and eight hindered existences and unflinchingly gain ten benefits in the present life. (*The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization* III)<sup>40)</sup>

Then Shinran points out ‘the benefit of constantly practicing great compassion’ as the ninth of those ten benefits. It means that one who is settled to be born in the Pure Land by realizing *shinjin* has already become bodhisattva even if he/she is still nothing but a foolish being. From now on, we may have to think about the issues of Shin Buddhist ethics and social practice from this kind of perspective.

### Notes

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- 9) *ibid.*, p.85.
- 10) *ibid.*, p.87.
- 11) *The Dhammapada*, p.146.
- 12) *The Sutta-Nipāta*, p.85.
- 13) K. R. Norman, tr., *Elder's Verses I*, Pali Text Society, 1969, London, p.44.
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- 16) *ibid.*, p.176.
- 17) *ibid.*, p.164.
- 18) *The Collected Works of Shinran* Vol.I, Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-Ha, Kyoto, 1997, p.154.
- 19) *ibid.*, p.191.
- 20) *ibid.*, p.164-165.
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- 22) *ibid.*, p.165.

- 23) *ibid.*, p.165.
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- 25) *The Collected Works of Shinran* Vol.I, p.34.
- 26) *ibid.*, p.91.
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- 30) *ibid.*, p.460-461.
- 31) *ibid.*, p.629.
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- 33) *ibid.*, p.461.
- 34) *ibid.*, p.530.
- 35) *ibid.*, p.461.
- 36) *ibid.*, p.192.
- 37) *ibid.*, p.366.
- 38) *ibid.*, p.329.
- 39) *ibid.*, p.454.
- 40) *ibid.*, p.112.