

both have congregations based on some five thousand families each. (p. 36) In addition to the participation of Japanese members of some six hundred families, my guess is that there are probably small groups of twenty or thirty non-Japanese practicing *zazen* at one of the four Zen temples in Brazil related to the Sōtō-shū or one of the “numerous Zen Centers across the country that do not belong to Sōtō-shū.” (p. 36). But we are not provided with the most basic statistics on the number of members, their ethnic background (Japanese, non-Japanese), or the actual number of centers across the country.

In the end, the reader is left to surmise that Zen is primarily of interest to a small portion of Brazil’s upper classes and some descendants of Japanese immigrants. No doubt there are many “sympathizers” or “night-stand Buddhists” (to borrow an expression from Thomas Tweed) who may never join an organized form of the religion, but who read books and magazines about Buddhism, practice meditation, and define themselves as Buddhist. This is probably as true in Brazil as in North America, but it is impossible to gauge this on the basis of Rocha’s study alone.

Mark R. Mullins
Sophia University, Tokyo

Ugo Dessì
Ethics and Society in Contemporary Shin Buddhism.
Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007, 265 pages.

In fundamental ways, Buddhism in Asia was always a global, i.e. multiethnic – and multi-territorial, religious tradition; and contemporary research on the dialectic of East and West has made it clear that Buddhism’s modern give-and-take with the non-Asian world dates back long before the nineteenth century (see e.g. J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, Routledge, 1997). Most recently, since the latter half of the twentieth century, it has become apparent that Buddhist traditions have been undergoing a much accelerated process of globalization, in which their interests and discourses are interacting widely in more and more ways with a worldwide intellectual conversation.

One of the important ways this acceleration has been expressed is in new attention among Western scholars to Buddhist ethics, especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the case of Japan, this trend started with Zen, but now scholarship is examining the evolution of social ethical thought which has emerged in Japan’s large True Pure Land (Jōdo shinshū) tradition. These Shin developments form the theme of Dessì’s outstandingly useful study. Based on a 2006 Ph.D. dissertation for Marburg University, the study is divided into four major parts.

The first is an overview of doctrinal history, in which Dessì especially aims to extract from the Shin discourse its ideas about social ethics. Starting with Shinran, the review moves from the classic Pure Land sutras through the seven patriarchal expositors (Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Donran, Dōshaku, Zēndō, Genshin, and

Hōnen) used by Shinran in the construction of the interpretive formulation in his *Kyōgyōshinshō* anthology. The key point of Shin teaching is of course the universal possibility of liberation via entrusting to Amida's vow (*tariki shinjin*). Regarding concrete implications for ethical behavior, the classic Shin problem is that the importance of intentional, "good" moral action – at least as construed as contributing directly to *shinjin* and liberation – has to be formally rejected. While this has led at times to the suggestion that the practical implications of Shin teaching are morally passivist or even antinomian, as Dessì discusses it is clear that Shinran (as expressed in some of his later writings such as *Mattōshō*) expected the moral quality of behavior of persons of *shinjin* to be like that of any other followers of Mahāyāna – compassionate, distanced from worldliness, and aware of the interdependence of beings. Dessì also summarizes several other features of Shinran's thought that help frame a relatively clear ethical perspective: critiques of Confucianism, Taoism, *kami*-worship, vernacular magical religion, and (probably) the aristocratic power system of his day.

Dessì then surveys the story of how, in the generations right after Shinran, as Shinran's teaching turned into a transmissible institution, teachers such as Shinran's grandson Kakunyo and the eighth patriarch Rennyo backed away from the politically aggressive and dangerous implications of Shinran's critical attitude to Confucianism, *kami* and aristocratic power. The organized Shin tradition became a mixed accommodationist phenomenon with a nonmonastic clergy. Although this was a major, relatively egalitarian innovation in Japanese Buddhism, which was not to be taken lightly, it produced a richly pluralized, pragmatic, inconsistent body of teaching which moved away from the radical aspect of Shinran back towards the vernacular center of Japanese Buddhism and political society. This accommodationist deradicalization in the premodern period has been variously unsatisfactory to a significant number of twentieth-century Shin thinkers, pioneered by Kiyozawa Manshi, who have wanted to draw from the tradition something which offers an edgier, more contemporary message with a more energetic basis for coping with modern political and social problems. The relatively innovative modern figures have tended to be associated with the Ōtani branch of Shin: Sōga Ryōjin, Yasuda Rijin, and Kaneko Daiei (fairly widely known in Japan but barely known in English). Commentary on the problem of Shin ethics is also to be found in the writings of D.T. Suzuki as well as in Tanabe Hajime and Nishida Kitarō in the Kyoto School.

A conspicuous aspect of this first chapter, which Dessì researched in close contact with modern Shin scholars, is how extremely scripturally oriented the Shin tradition has been, i.e. how canonically authoritative the basic texts have remained. This means that considerations of ethics have remained closely bound to a certain corpus of Buddhist literature and a certain highly idiomatic religious language. Of course, the corpus has been mined, commented upon and interacted with in a diversity of ways.

Another issue which stands out is that the concept of Shin "ethics" is not really separable from a whole cluster of linked ideas, a cluster involving not only the psychology of liberation but also society and politics, and those broader interpretive parameters have changed repeatedly over time.

A final implicit point is that (with all due respect to the particular early twentieth-century philosophical hybridity of the Kyoto school and to the Buddhist globalization mentioned above in this review) the extent to which Shin thinkers so far have interacted with the huge *contemporary* range of Western thought about ethics – in Christianity, psychology, sociology, political science, even Buddhology, and so on, since for example the 1990s – is really quite limited.

Dessì's second chapter returns to the classical problem of how explicit ethical recommendations are possible at all in a *tariki* system and investigates particularly how some additional, more recent Shin thinkers – scarcely known outside of specialized publications and almost entirely in Japanese – have been approaching the problem. These include Kigoshi Yasushi and Yasutomi Shin'ya of the Otani branch and Shigaraki Takamaro of the Nishi branch, along with a number of others. A main challenge for these writers has been how to respond to critics who have accused Shin teaching of social disconnection and passivity. An important matter of doctrinal interpretation, one which has direct implications for action in society, concerns the precise existential meaning of the classic Shin goal called "birth in the Pure Land." Reacting to a long history of (allegedly Tokugawa-period) Shin interpretations which laid stress on death and its anticipation, these thinkers have formulated approaches which instead place stress on the more present-oriented state of life in *shinjin*, which clears space for a reconsideration of ordinary ethical life. (It might be noted here (with no criticism of Dessì) that the conventional idea of Tokugawa social passivity in the Shin school may be actually somewhat of a straw man in the modern thinkers' arguments, and does not accord with the kind of evidence about pre-modern Shin worldly participation described by historians such as Arimoto Masao.)

This second chapter opens up much material that is new in English, but as already indicated, outsiders who delve into these debates discover that the issues are always worked through in terms of Shin's specially idiomatic – and for many readers of course profoundly opaque – doctrinal language. In this connection Shinran's texts present ambiguities. For example, the debates touched on above about the existential emphasis to be placed on present-oriented *shinjin* necessarily have to be, in the restraining context of Shin discourse, worked through in terms of a distinctive semantics of whether the "Pure Land" is "here" or not for a person who experiences entrusting. Similarly, does the nonduality of Mahāyāna onto-epistemological theory erase the linear quality or developmental stages often understood in Pure Land doctrine? This last is actually a sharply interesting question, reenacting ancient, unresolved tensions in Mahāyāna between the hypothetical erasure of conceptual distinctions as an outcome of successful critical philosophy and practice (*sumiyatā*, modern Zen thought) and yet the simultaneous *de facto* practical persistence of psychological suffering and incompleteness on another level of awareness. A connected discussion is about the extent to which in Shin teaching a person of *shinjin* can accurately be considered a bodhisattva.

The debate which is thus initiated over the relation between *shinjin* and practical morality then turns to questions of how to think about spiritual equalitarianism and society and consequently how to engage in modern social criticism. Dessì surveys in

detail a series of contemporary scholars and activists who have carefully drawn upon the classic doctrinal resources which provide a relatively strong basis for a practice of social activism.

As Dessì notes (pp. 130-131) most of these revisionists understand the various parts of Shinran's original message – his *tariki* idea, his critique of Confucianism and *kami*, and his critique of regnant sociopolitical authority – to work together synthetically in providing a basis for the questioning of authority in the interests of compassion. At the same time, however, they know that the sheer individual subjectivity of Shin teaching has on the other hand long reinforced a tendency to personal quietism, which can also be deep and sincere. This last recognition raises an interesting point of interreligious comparison, which might be expanded in detail: how differences of political orientation between inner quietism and outer communitarianism coexist but cannot ever be quite resolvable, as in the history of Christianity as well.

Dessì at the conclusion of this chapter additionally highlights a somewhat uncomfortable strand in today's Shin thought – one supported by the official sectarian organizations – which assimilates the contemporary Buddhist social criticism to a broader critique of something identified as “anthropocentrism” or “humanism.” These terms are code words for vaguely defined materialist, capitalist, egocentric Western cultural traits, constructed as a dialectical Other in an occidentalist manner typical of modern Japanese cultural nationalism. As Dessì shrewdly hints, this rhetoric (so largely self-contradictory in view of the other kinds of genuine progressivism espoused by modern Shin institutions) seems to have something to do with a pursuit of institutional positioning in contemporary Japanese society.

The contemporary debate on ethics is usually highly theoretical and abstract, as can be seen from the above summary; however, in his third chapter Dessì examines concrete social practices in today's Shin institutions. As he notes, Shin thinkers circle inconclusively round and round the problem of stating a normative approach to ethics, but in reality there exists an interesting amount of practical activism, which interacts with doctrine, although it does not exactly flow directly from it. The explanation is that rather primarily from doctrine, the activism seems to grow somewhat indirectly from situational commitments common in special-interest sectors of the Shin community. As Dessì outlines, the activism has fallen into four clusters. The first of these is peace activism and opposition to the Yasukuni Shrine, a movement which has as its background the disastrous collaboration of the two head Hongan-ji temples with Japanese imperialism and militarism in the first half of the twentieth century and Buddhism's war responsibility. Dessì here presents an excellent summary of the participation of Shin activists in the legal battling staged around the Yasukuni issue since the 1960s. A second cluster is *buraku* anti-discrimination campaigning, which has its roots in the long special affiliation of Shin with its historical *buraku* membership base. A third is discrimination problems relating to Hansen's disease. Last is a selection of social welfare activities (frequently with traditional models) including schooling, disaster relief, and care of the aged and dying.

The fourth chapter provides an evaluation of Shin Buddhist ethics in the perspective of globalization. Dessì concludes that while there is no definitive or fully consistent

social ethics in Shin, either in terms of doctrine or in terms of concrete activity, still the contemporary Shin ethical situation can be set in a framework suggested by Peter Beyer (*Religion and Globalization*, Sage, 1994) to evaluate how religious traditions react to the challenges of globalization. Beyer suggested there are two main options, the conservative (reassertion of the tradition in spite of modernity, with authoritarian overtones related to nationalism) and liberal (pluralistic, ecumenical, tolerant, but somewhat unfocused). Dessì assesses Shin as displaying features from both options. On the liberal side, it leans to social equality, tolerance, dialogue, pluralization of social interests, and a certain centerlessness. On the conservative side, it leans to identity-seeking, a version of Japanese cultural nationalism, and a withdrawal to privatized religiosity. Future outcomes of this process in Japan are unpredictable, but Dessì observes (p. 206) that the Shin Buddhist world does not seem to be engaged in any deep reflection about globalization and how Shin should be fitting into it.

Other than to dutiful academic specialists keeping up with Japanese religions, how interesting can contemporary thought on Shin ethics and society be to audiences outside Japan? The answer to this question probably depends on how much future interest Shin Buddhism and its *tariki* psychology in general will draw worldwide. It must be said that understanding what is at stake in the Shin discussions requires being tuned in both to Shin's distinctive assumptions about religious experience and to the modern Japanese sociopolitical context. For general readers who have not internalized those assumptions, the conversation misleadingly tends to look murky and derivative. I suspect that *tariki* ethics for a non-Japanese audience will not be of much interest until *tariki* Buddhism in general is differently re-worked and re-presented for that audience. Until then Dessì's intense research effort has provided a dense work of high referential and critical value at least for specialists.

Galen Amstutz
Ryukoku University

Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (eds.)

Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions.

University of Hawai'i Press (Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture),
Honolulu, 2006, 466 pages.

Straight off. This is a substantial work which promises to define "Japanese religions" as a field for some time to come. It is produced by a wonderful constellation of expert writers who have evidently been persistently cajoled and organised by Paul Swanson of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture and Clark Chilson of Ithaca, New York (and previously associated with Nanzan). These are both well known and highly competent editors who humbly admit that they were assisted by others at every turn, including two of the contributors themselves, namely Trevor Astley and Robert Kisala, three Japanese members of the "project team," namely Horo Atsuhiko, Okuyama Michiaki and Terao Kazuyoshi, and the brilliantly indefatigable James Heisig, who