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Anniversaries, Founders, Slogans and Visual Media in Shin Buddhism**

This article explores self-representational strategies employed by the two major branches of Shin Buddhism, the Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha, for proselytization and self-promotion. In particular, it takes into account an important religious event, the 750th memorial for Shinran, who is acknowledged as the founder of this tradition, which will take place in 2011-2012. This event is explored through the institutions' employment of new visual media linked to popular culture and slogans as ways for conveying their teachings. The slogans chosen on this occasion by the Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha are analyzed in their historical and doctrinal developments in order to shed light on how religious institutions adapt communication strategies to social and economic changes and react to times of crisis. Self-representational strategies emerge as attempts by religious institutions to reach a large audience of followers and possibly to acquire new adherents. At the same time important religious ceremonies are significant for the institutions to reflect, maintain, and possibly enhance their own religious authority.

Keywords: Shin Buddhism – Shinran – Rennyo – Self-representational strategies – Memorial services – Visual media.

Introduction

Memorial services for founders and other prominent religious figures often provide an occasion for reformulating some of a denomination's basic assumptions and for representing itself publicly. Among the Japanese Buddhist traditions Jōdo Shinshū, or Shin Buddhism, is one of the largest. In 2011-2012 the 750th memorial

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for Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1262),¹ who is considered its founder, will take place. As with the 700th memorial for Shinran in 1961 and 1962, and Rennyō's² 500th memorial service in 1998, these memorials are usually accompanied by several inter-connected events, such as the release of theatre pieces and other kinds of cultural productions, including movies, *anime*, and so on. Internationally recognized artists often become involved: for example, Munakata Shikō did paintings for the Higashi Hongan-ji on the occasion of Shinran's 700th memorial. Also, memorials stimulate activities more practically linked to the local economy, such as construction works, guided tours, and public transportation, to cite just a few. At the institutional level, these events are often accompanied by public statements by the denominations, some reorganization of their structure, and new slogans to convey their teachings.

In this article I will focus mainly on Shinran's 750th memorial, taking into account in particular the two major branches of this religious tradition, the Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha, and their self-representational strategies in the form of slogans, visual media and other cultural events as ways of proselytization and self-promotion.

Self-Representations, Religious Events and Authority

Self-representations are a relevant and effective means of transmitting a religious institution's claims and messages to its followers. At a simple level, we can consider the pamphlets or other informative materials which are available at temples, churches and shrines. Through these forms of self-representation the institutions convey, within just a few lines, the essentials of their tradition. Visual images very often constitute a relevant part of these materials, and authority is also conveyed through them, for example, when depicting important cultural properties, ancient buildings, texts and so on. As relevant as *what* they say is *how* they represent themselves and the impact such informative materials have on their readers or observers. Sophisticated and appealing websites are also an effective means of self-representation and for promoting religions. The representational goal seems thus to be one of reaching a large audience of followers and non-followers alike.

Religious celebrations and religious authority go hand-in-hand. Celebrations can be seen as mirrors of authority, reflecting what and how institutions present themselves to themselves and to others.³ They serve both internal and external

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1. Memorial for Shinran's death. Shinran Shōnin 750kai dai onki 親鸞聖人 750 回大遠忌 (Honganji-ha); and Shūso Shinran Shōnin 750kai go enki 宗祖親鸞聖人七百五十回御遠忌 (Ōtani-ha).
 2. 蓮如 (1415-1499), Shinran's eighth successor. He is also known as "the second founder of Jōdo Shinshū" because it was under him that the Hongan-ji turned into a powerful religious institution.
 3. In another context cf. Handelman (1998: 41-42).

arenas. The prestige they acquire at the external level serves to consolidate authority at the internal level, within the religious community itself, which comprises the whole net of the institution, the main temple, temples, and adherents. The more visibility of the event the more lasting and powerful effect it creates in terms of religious authority and its durability over the years.

In this respect, we can mention the biannual journal *Annon* 安穩 of the Honganji-ha, first issued in September 2007 and one of the many initiatives linked with Shinran's 750th memorial. Here, the connection with Shinran's 700th anniversary (1961) is evident. On that occasion, according to the records preserved at the Nishi Hongan-ji, 480,000 followers from all over Japan paid visit to the head temple, and this time, it is stated, the administration expects even more participants.⁴ Other points of interest in this presentation are: 1) Kyoto, the city in which the event will take place, is a city of history, tourism, and universities that will in 2011 also become a "city of religion" (*shūkyō no machi* 宗教の街); and 2) in the same year of Shinran's memorial, Hōnen's 800th anniversary will take place. Through these connections, that is, through Shinran's master and through the location of the event itself, as one of the symbols of culture, history and religion in Japan, the Shin Buddhist event acquires yet more prestige, even further reinforcing its authority.

Such religious ceremonies offer the perfect forum for issuing official statements. As two instances, I will briefly introduce here the *Joint Declaration for the Fortieth Anniversary of the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō* (真宗教団連合, Shin Buddhist Federation), released on 22 April 2008,⁵ and the renewed version of the Honganji-ha's regulations for the religious life of its followers (*Jōdo Shinshū monto no shinkō seikatsu no kihan* 浄土真宗門徒の信仰生活の規範), the *Jōdo Shinshū no kyōshō: watashi no ayumu michi* 浄土真宗の教章—私の歩む道 enacted by the *monshu* (head priest) Ōtani Kōshin on 15 April 2008.⁶

4. *Annon* 安穩 no. 1 (2007: 7).

5. *Shinshū kyōdan rengō 40 shūnen kyōdō sengen* 真宗教団連合 40 周年共同宣言 . <http://www.shin.gr.jp/kyodan/102-40.html>. Its 40th anniversary will occur in 2010. From 2005 the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 真宗教団連合 (Shin Buddhist Federation) has undertaken the preparations for this anniversary and Shinran's 750th memorial. I will return later to this declaration. The ten major Shin Buddhist denominations joint the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō. They are: Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha 浄土真宗本願寺派; Shinshū Ōtani-ha 真宗大谷派; Shinshū Takada-ha 真宗高田派; Shinshū Kōshō-ha 真宗興正派; Shinshū Bukkōji-ha 真宗佛光寺派; Shinshū Izumoji-ha 真宗出雲路派; Shinshū Jōshōji-ha 真宗誠照寺派; Shinshū Sanmonto-ha 真宗三門徒派; Shinshū Kibe-ha 真宗木辺派; and Shinshū Yamamoto-ha 真宗山元派 .

6. See the article "Shin 'Kyōshō' o go-seitei" 新「教章」をご制定, in *Honganji shinpō* 本願寺新報 (20 April 2008). The new *Jōdo Shinshū no kyōshō* can be downloaded in

From the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō's declaration two main goals emerge: 1) To pursue a peaceful society for all human beings avoiding the use of violence; and 2) to spread the *nenbutsu* teaching throughout the world.⁷ Shinran's ideal of *dōbō* (fellow companions),⁸ that is, of a community of equals is highlighted here and functions as a *leitmotiv* within the Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha representational strategies. The constant reliance on Amida Buddha's vow (*nenbutsu ni yotte jinchi no yami o terasu hotoke no chie ni deai* 念仏によって人知の闇を照らす仏の智慧に出会い) and the aspiration of world peace through Shinran's teachings constitute a relevant part in this declaration. In this world, characterized by the isolation of human beings and competition in society, we further read that Buddhism is the way to overcome problems of excessive rationality in people, and to break their isolation.

Another theme that appears in this text is that of "life," *inochi* (いのち). This is one of the dominant themes of the 750th memorial, as can be seen in slogans of the Ōtani-ha (*Ima, inochi ga anata o ikite iru* 今、いのちがあなたを生きている) to which I will return later, the Shinshū Bukkōji-ha 真宗佛光寺派 (*Namu Amida Butsu wa watashi no inochi* 南無阿彌陀佛はわたしのいのち, "Namu Amida Butsu is my life") and the Shinshū Kōshō-ha 真宗興正派 (*Inochi, Tsunagari, Yorokobi* いのち・つながり・よろこび, "Life, Connection, Joy"). Life is intended here to mean non-self, the working of Amida Buddha's compassion and his vow. It also means being conscious of human beings' limits (that is, to be "ordinary beings," *bonbu* 凡夫) and to realize peace in the world through the *nenbutsu*, as a community of *on-dōbō on-dōgyō* 御同朋・御同行 (fellow companions and practitioners), and through Buddha's wisdom dispelling the obscurity of human knowledge.⁹

With regard to the Honganji-ha's regulations for the religious life of its followers (*Jōdo Shinshū monto no shinkō seikatsu no kihan*), the renewed version is an update of one enacted in April 1967 on the occasion of the spring service (*Haru no hōyō* 春の法要) for the first time by the previous *monshu*, Ōtani Kōshō 大谷光照.¹⁰ *The*

various sizes from the website of the Honganji-ha publishing company (Honganji Shuppansha) <http://hongwanji-shuppan.com/sp/kyousyou/index.html>.

7. Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 2008.
8. On the concept of *dōbō* and institutional reforms in Shin Buddhism after WWII, see for example, Heidegger (2006: 292 ff).
9. *Watasbitachi wa on-dōbō on-dōgyō toshite, nenbutsu ni yotte jinchi no yami o terasu hotoke no chie ni deai, soko ni koso sekai heiwa ga jitsugen sareru koto o kakushin shite, koko ni sengen itashimasu* 私たちは御同朋・御同行として、念仏によって人知の闇を照らす仏の智慧に出会い、そこにこそ世界平和が実現されることを確信して、ここに宣言いたします (Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 2008).
10. See the text in *Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha-Kyōgaku shinkō iinkai* 浄土真宗本願寺派・教学振興委員会 (2004: 274-275). In September 2007 the Honganji-ha's regulations (*shūsei* 宗制) were revised.

Essentials of Jōdo Shinshū (*Jōdo Shinshū no kyōshō* 浄土真宗の教章) contains some basic information for adherents, such as the name of the founder, the name of the denomination, the scriptures, the main image of worship (*honzon* 本尊), the name of the head temple (*honzan* 本山), the teachings (*kyōgi* 教義), and the main features of the denomination. This new version differs from the old one in some points, such as 1) the posthumous title *Kenshin daishi* 見真大師 given to Shinran by the emperor Meiji in 1876 has been deleted from his name; 2) a part called *Shūmon* 宗門 has been added, in which there is emphasis on the Shin religious community as a community of *dōbō* (*dōbō kyōdan* 同朋教団) that aims to create an equal society and to transmit the teachings of Shinran and devotion to Amida Buddha, his wisdom (*chie* 智慧) and compassion (*jibi* 慈悲). An important step, which is a sign of the institution's critical rethinking of its own past, is the deletion in the regulations that dictate believers should observe secular law (*sehō o junshu shi* [nakerebanaranai] 世法を遵守し[なければならぬ]).¹¹ This passage, which is related to the *shinzoku nitai* theory (this will be analyzed below), has been deleted in the new version to conclude the process of acknowledgment of Shin Buddhist war responsibilities. The denomination in 2004 "has officially invalidated wartime directives from 1931 to 1945 calling for war cooperation."¹² In this respect, the Honganji-ha acknowledged its war responsibilities in 1991 (the Ōtani-ha in 1987) with an official statement in which it is claimed that the denomination "ended by overlooking the essence of Shin Buddhism" in particular "through a misuse of the 'Two Truths' (*shinzoku nitai* 真俗二諦) theory." On that occasion, they encouraged the religious community to advocate peace according to Shinran's teachings: *Yo no naka an'on nare buppō biromare* 世のなか安穏なれ仏法ひろまれ, May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's teaching spread,¹³ which is the slogan chosen by the Honganji-ha to represent Shinran's 750th memorial.¹⁴

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11. In this respect, see the section on *Shūfū* 宗風 of the *Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha shūsei* 浄土真宗本願寺派宗制, which was enacted in September 1946 and came into force in April 1947. (Shiratori 1994: 3)
 12. See Dessi (2007: 148); *Honganji Shinpō* (1 June 2004: 5). See also *Chūgai nippō* 中外日報 (17 January 2008): *mata shūmon no sengo mondai shori o kanketsu suru tame, genkō no 'shūsei' ni awarete iru Meiji ki ikō ni henshitsu shita shinzoku nitai tekina naiyō no seisan ga okonaware, 'shūfū' no shō wa 'shūhan' to meisō o henkō shi, 'jindō o risen shi, sehō o junshu shi' nado no bungen mo sakujo sareru* また宗門の戦後問題処理を完結するため、現行の「宗制」に含まれている明治期以降に変質した真俗二諦的な内容の清算が行なわれ、「宗風」の章は「宗範」と名称を変更し、「人道を履踐し、世法を遵守し」などの文言も削除される。Online: http://www.chugainippoh.co.jp/NEWWEB/n-news/08/news0801/news080117/news080117_01.html (accessed in December 2008)
 13. See Dessi (2007: 148; 147). Shinran's words from: CWS I: 560.
 14. This sentence is also mentioned by the then *monshu*, Ōtani Kōshō in a letter on the occasion of the closing ceremony for the preliminary celebrations of Shinran's 700th

*Shinran's 750th Memorial and its Slogans*¹⁵
Honganji-ha Slogan

The words *Yo no naka an'on nare* 世のなか安穏なれ appear in Shinran's *Collection of Letters* (*Go-shōsoku* 御消息), in a letter addressed to Shōshin-bō 性信房.¹⁶ The whole sentence reads: *Yo no naka an'on nare, buppō hiromare* 世のなか安穏なれ 仏法ひろまれ (May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's teaching spread!). (CWS I: 560) As the Honganji-ha *monshu* explained in his recent book *Yo no naka an'on nare: gendai shakai to bukkō* 世のなか安穏なれ—現代社会と仏教, these words were used by Shinran during a period of uprisings to indicate to the *nenbutsu* followers a path toward a peaceful society. In the same manner they have been chosen by the denomination to commemorate Shinran's memorial in order to construct a peaceful society in this age of insecurity and anxiety.¹⁷ The pacifist stance is thus highlighted through these words and in the choice of this slogan.

However, these words were also used during times of war and in periods of crisis for supporting imperialism and the state policy. Just to cite an example, in "Yo ga shakaishugi" 余が社会主義 ("My Socialism"), an Ōtani-ha priest and an opponent of Japanese imperialism, Takagi Kenmyō 高木顕明 (1864-1914), referring to Shinran's passage in his letters, said that it was "(often) quoted in pro-war arguments." He wrote that, "Although the passage above is a gospel for peace, have people mistaken it for the sound of a bugle commanding us to attack the enemy?" (Takagi 2001: 60)

In the Meiji period, an age of institutional and national crisis that also affected the Honganji-ha and Buddhism in general,¹⁸ Shinran's words were employed by the

memorial at the Ōtani sōbyō (April 1958). See *Jōdo Shinshū no seikatsu shinjō* 浄土真宗の生活信条 (*Jōdo Shinshū's Principles of Life*). (Ōtani Kōshō 1958) <http://www.hongwanji.or.jp/budlife/shinjo/images/seikatusinjo.pdf> (downloaded in July 2008).

15. Here, due to space restrictions, only those of the Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha will be explored. For the slogans of the other Shin Buddhist denominations see <http://www.shin.gr.jp/hoyo/index.html> (accessed in December 2008).
16. This is dated seventh month, 9th day. (CWS I: 560-561)
17. See Ōtani Kōshin (2007: 228). See also the message of the *monshu* on 9 January 2005, in which he stated: "During this opportunity [750th memorial], through reflecting on Shinran Shonin's hardships and achievements, praising his virtue while renewing our resolve, and sincerely receiving the Jodo Shinshu teaching, it is my hope that we will endeavor to widely transmit it as a beacon that guides us all in the contemporary world of confusion and turmoil." <http://www2.hongwanji.or.jp/english/message050109.html> (in English); the Japanese text is on http://www.hongwanji.or.jp/750houyou/info/050116go-shosoku/050109goshosoku_a.html (accessed in December 2008). As for this theme, see also several articles in *Shūhō* 宗報 (for example, June 2006: 18-19; June 2007: 19).
18. See, for example, the persecution of Buddhism (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈) and the

twentieth head priest, Kōnyo 広如 (1798-1871) in his well-known Testament *Kōnyo Shōnin goikun goshōsoku* 広如上人御遺訓御消息. Minor and Ann Rogers write that this “introduced the concept of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths (*shinzoku nitai*) as the dharma-principle defining the proper relationship of members of the Honganji to the state.”¹⁹ As they highlight, Kōnyo’s usage of Shinran’s words in his testament “implies that there should be no conflict or tension between religious community and state authority.”²⁰ Kōnyo’s passage reads:

Hence our founding master taught that “we should desire peace in the world and the spread of Buddha-dharma.” Given that, it is deplorable that [some people] are confused and think that if they just believe in Buddhist teachings, they can let mundane teachings be as they may. ...²¹

This and the use of other passages from Rennyo in Kōnyo’s testament (such as the sentence: “On your brow, wear imperial law; within the depths of your heart, treasure Buddha-dharma”), reveal his interpretation of the two truths as complementary.²² As Minor and Ann Rogers (1991: 324) have highlighted in this regard,

Honganji members fulfill their obligations to imperial law through loyalty and obedience to the emperor, and to Buddha-dharma through inner piety and devotion to Amida. Outer and inner truths, the mundane and the transcendent, mutually support each other.

They comment further upon the *shinzoku nitai* theory found in Kōnyo’s Testament, which they termed to be a “powerful religious symbol that ... was to shape the Honganji’s responses to the crises of modern Japanese history.” (Minor and Ann Rogers 1991: 325)

In 1909 the *shinzoku nitai* theory was presented as fundamental in the Shin Buddhist teachings in the *Shinshū hyakuwa* 真宗百話, a booklet containing questions and answers on the teachings which was translated into English under the title of *A Catechism of the Shin Sect (Buddhism)*. Here “the dominance achieved by the concept *shinzoku nitai* in Shinshū thought by the end of the Meiji period” is clear.²³ It is in the 33rd question that the “fundamental aim” of the Jōdo Shinshū teachings is highlighted:

decrees on the separation of Shintō and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) in the early Meiji period.

19. Minor and Ann Rogers (1991: 319-322; in particular 321).

20. Minor and Ann Rogers (1991: 324).

21. Trans. in Minor and Ann Rogers (1991: 321).

22. Zonkaku 存覚 (1290-1373) advocated the idea that “Buddha-dharma and imperial law are a pair of dharma.” Quoted in Minor and Ann Rogers (1991: 311). See also Dessì (2007: 56, 113).

23. See Minor and Ann Rogers (1991: 325 n). The English translation is by A.K.

33. *What doctrines does Shinshu teach?*

To put it briefly, the fundamental aim of Shinshu is to teach what is called *Shinzoku Nitai*. The term *Shinzoku Nitai* is one which is used by all Buddhist sects, but usually it signifies only the explanation of the Law of the Buddhas (i.e. the doctrines which deal with Religious Faith, Enlightenment, etc.); while in Shinshu alone the term designates teachings which show how religious faith and daily conduct of the believer as a citizen of this world may be made to harmonize. This is the peculiar merit of Shinshu.

“Conform to the laws of the king, be quick in charity and righteousness, and in your heart believe fully the Vows of Amida.” *Rennyō Daishi*. (Reischauer 1912: 358)²⁴

The “peculiar merit” of Shin Buddhism in comparison with the other Buddhist traditions, was thus “to harmonize” the mundane and the transcendent, the secular law and the Buddhist law, *ōbō* 王法 and *buppō* 佛法. Shin Buddhism was, at the time, facing the urgent problem of ‘surviving’ and maintaining its own religious authority through its collaboration with the imperial state, a collaboration which was destined to last until the end of World War II.²⁵

With regard to the Honganji-ha, in order to reinforce its partnership with the imperial state, thus its authority, it took measures to modify the scriptures in those passages considered “disrespectful of the emperor and the imperial state” and entire phrases were deleted from the texts. (Minor and Ann Rogers 1991: 328-329) Then in late 1941, the final step was taken toward “absolutizing the emperor’s authority,” and both Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha scholars developed wartime doctrines through which the institutions supported and required full participation of their adherents to the war effort. (Minor and Ann Rogers 1991: 331 ff.) Shinran’s teaching had been turned into “the handmaiden of imperial absolutism,” and to identify Amida’s benevolence with that of the emperor enabled to “sacralize every sacrifice as an act of piety,” which included to die for the imperial state. (Minor and Ann Rogers 1991: 333)

During Japan’s “Fifteen-year war” (1931-1945), the words *Yo no naka an'on nare*, *buppō hiromare* and the part of Shinran’s letter before them that states “... it would be splendid if all people who say the nembutsu,... do so not with thoughts of themselves, but for the sake of the imperial court and for the sake of the people of the country” (CWS I: 560) were used to promote imperialism and reverence to the imperial system and to justify war.

Reischauer (downloaded in December 2008 from http://www.archive.org/details/MN40132ucmf_0).

24. For the original Japanese text, see Nishimoto Ryūken 西元龍拳 (1909: 49-50).

25. On this issue see, for example, Shigaraki (2001: 46-47); Minor and Ann Rogers (1991: 325 ff); Ienaga (1965: 15 ff). Ienaga analyzes the support Buddhism gave to militarism and its cooperation “in driving the people to war” during the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. This cooperation “was maintained consistently up to the Pacific War.”

These, together with other slogans taken from both Shinran's and Rennyo's writings, were used as tools for promoting the wartime doctrine (*senji kyōgaku* 戦時教学). Sentences like *chōka no on tame no nenbutsu* 朝家の御為の念仏, "the nenbutsu for the imperial house;" *nenbutsu wa gokoku no seihō de aru* 念仏は護国の正法である, "the nenbutsu as the right law to protect the country," or *gokoku no seihō toshite nenbutsu* 護国の正法として念仏, "the nenbutsu as protector of the country" are often to be found in Honganji-ha documents of that time.²⁶

As emerges from these examples, Shinran's words and teachings have been adapted to fit with the demands of the times. In times of crisis, or of war, his words and those of other prominent figures, such as Rennyo's, were used as means of supporting the imperial and nationalistic system. The same words have been later used to acknowledge war responsibilities, condemn all sorts of conflicts and wars and to express pacifism.²⁷

Ōtani-ha Slogan

While the Honganji-ha slogan has a long and controversial history, the one chosen by the Ōtani-ha, *Ima, inochi ga anata o ikite iru* 今、いのちがあなたを生きている (official English translation: Now, life is living you) is new and not directly linked with Shinran's words.²⁸ In one of the official statements of the Ōtani-ha regarding Shinran's memorial, "The report of the committee regarding the theme of the memorial" (*Goenki tēma ni kansuru iinkai* 御遠忌テーマに関する委員会), the isolation and nihilism (*kodokukan to kyomukan [nibirizumu]* 孤独感と虚無感 [ニヒリズム]) which characterize today's individuals are emphasized. Therefore, it is claimed, people should regain possession of their own irreplaceable "now," awaken to the "life" which continuously flows into them, accomplish a life with others, which means overcoming oneself. The words of the slogan, it is further stated, are

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26. See Fukushima (1988; 1991; 1995. See, for example, 1995: 53, 299, 315, 321). For some examples regarding the sentence *yo no naka an'on nare, buppō hiromare*, see Fukushima (1995: 65, 106, 319, 320; and 1991: 99,116). The three volumes *Senji kyōgaku to Shinsū* 戦時教学と真宗 (Wartime doctrine and Shin Buddhism), edited by the Senji kyōgaku kenkyūkai of Ryūkyō University, collect original material related to the wartime doctrine of Nishi Hongan-ji.
27. See also the statement of Honganji-ha against sending Japan Self-Defense Forces' units to Iraq, in which Shinran's words are used to promote peace (*Honganji shinpō* 本願寺新報, 20 December 2003); and *Dai 225 kai shūkai ketsugi* 第225回宗会決議 (225th Resolution of the Honganji-ha Diet, 27 February 1991). See *Honganji shinpō*, 10 March 1991.
28. The concept behind the memorial is "Meeting the Founder, Shinran Shōnin" *Shūso toshite no Shinran shōnin ni au* 宗祖としての親鸞聖人に会う.

expressions of the *nenbutsu* itself, of the manifestation of Amida Nyorai's calling in this present world.²⁹

In the English leaflet available at the head temple the meaning of the slogan is explained by dividing it into three stages: Now 1) "'Now' is only here while you are reading this leaflet;" 2) Life is living you means that "'Life' is constantly, continuously and pervasively in the infinite universe. As conditions emerge, 'Life' works as one's body, mind and spirit." And finally, 3) "Now, life is living you" is explained as a calling to live one's life as one is, "regardless if life is going along with [one's] wish or not—happy or sad." The constant saying of Amida's name, the *nenbutsu*, "is the constant reminder of this calling."³⁰

The theme of "life" is crucial in contemporary Shin Buddhism and appears also in various joint declarations of the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō (Shin Buddhist Federation). In particular, in those issued on the occasions of its 20th, 30th, and 40th anniversaries.³¹ These documents are official statements issued at important events and are therefore significant for shedding light on the Shin Buddhist stance on problems related to contemporary society.³² What deserves attention here is the use of the word *inochi* in these declarations. We have mentioned earlier that the *Joint Declaration* for the 40th anniversary illustrates that in a world characterized by the isolation of human beings and competition in society, Buddhism (Shin Buddhism)

29. <http://higashihonganji.jp/goenki/5houkoku.html>.

30. Explanation on the leaflet by Akinori Imai (Bishop of Higashi Honganji North America and Hawaii Districts), Shinshū Otani-ha Shumusho (Higashi Honganji): November 2006. See also the other Japanese leaflets which deal with the issue of the immeasurable life of Amida Buddha in order to save all living beings (Ogawa Ichijō 小川一乗, *Anata wa donna 'inochi' o ikite ru no* あなたはどんな「いのち」を生きてるの, May 2006); or one entitled *Ikiru yori dokoro* 生きるよりどころ (Yoshida Kazuhiro 吉田和弘, April 2007), where the theme is paraphrased resulting in: *Ima, negai ga anata no naka ni ikite iru* 今、願いがあなたのなかに生きている and *Ima, anata wa negai no naka ni ikite iru* 今、あなたは願いのなかに生きている; or again the leaflets for children emphasize the equality of all living beings (see in particular the one dated November 2007 where it is stated that: *inochi wa mina umare tsuki byōdō da...* いのちはみな生まれつき平等だ。。。). All these leaflets are also available online at <http://www.higashihonganji.jp/goenki/2reaf.html> (accessed in December 2008).

31. See the *Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō kessei 20 shūnen kyōdō sengen* 真宗教団連合結成 20 周年共同宣言, 1989; the *Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō kessei 30 shūnen kyōdō sengen* 真宗教団連合結成 30 周年共同宣言, 2000; and the *Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 40 shūnen kyōdō sengen* 真宗教団連合 40 周年共同宣言, 2008. They can be downloaded from the official website of the Shin Buddhist Federation <http://www.shin.gr.jp/kyodan/102.html> (accessed in December 2008). I have briefly mentioned the joint declaration for the 40th anniversary above.

32. In this regard, cf. Dessì (2007: 137-140).

is the only way to overcome problems of excessive rationality in people (*Risei ni taisuru zettaiteki shinrai ni motozuite iru kindai gōrishugi* 理性に対する絶対的信頼に基づいている近代合理主義), and to break their isolation. Here, “life” (true “life”) is the working of Amida’s primal vow (*Amida Nyorai no hongan* 阿弥陀如来の本願). Such a dimension of “life” is exposed through the *nenbutsu* and this is “the precondition for a world free of conflicts and discrimination.” (Dessì 2007: 139) In this respect, if we consider the *Joint Declaration for the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Foundation of the Shin Buddhist Federation*, we can observe that the concept of “life” (*inochi*) is fundamental. As Ugo Dessì (2007: 139) has highlighted,

The core of this text lies in the articulation of the ideal of a true “life” (*inochi*) opposed to a “privatization of life” (*inochi no shiyūka*), along the lines provided by the co-dependent origination theory (*musū muryō no innen*) and its expression found in Shinran’s teaching through the ideal of “fellow companions and practitioners”—which is here intended to imply the equality of all beings.

It is to this true “life” that the slogan of the Ōtani-ha refers. However, while on one hand Shin Buddhist institutions are promoting a vision of the world based on the equality of all living beings, as well as aspiring to peace in the world, they reveal an exclusivist approach to contemporary problems when this concept of “life” and what lies behind it, is used to affirm an occidentalist stance. Such a stance advocates Buddhism as the only possible way to religious salvation. The (western) legacy of humanism is presented as a general negative counterpart which functions to enhance the prestige of Buddhism, and Shin Buddhism in particular, at the expense of other religious traditions and other cultures.³³ In the text analyzed above, the criticism of humanism occupies a central place and the “spirit of humanism” is taken as a monolithic block with no shadings, as a “homogeneous, negative ‘other’” which becomes “the premise for the affirmation of Buddhist spirituality as the exclusive solution to the problems of the contemporary world.” (Dessì 2007: 139; 140) A similar stance is also present in the *Joint Declaration for the Fortieth Anniversary of the Shin Buddhist Federation* in the section entitled *Han’ei to kodoku: kyōsō shakai ga motarashita mono* 繁栄と孤独—競争社会がもたらしたもの (Prosperity and Isolation: The Results of Competitive Society). Here, in the course of identifying the causes of an economy characterized by competition, of anxiety in society, of the increase of terrorism after the 9/11 events, of wars and conflicts in the work of human beings, the document claims the potentiality of Buddhism in solving the problems of contemporary society:

It is within modern rationalism itself, where human understanding has reached its dead end, that the darkness of the human mind—which Buddhism has faced as a

33. On the issue of the critique against humanism and anthropocentrism in Shin Buddhism see Dessì (2006; 2007: 131-140).

problem—is deeply rooted (*Ningen no chisei ga itari tsuita kindai gōrishugi no naka ni koso, bukkyō ga mondai to shite kita jinchi no yami ga fukaku ikizuite iru no desu* 人間の知性が至りつゝいた近代合理主義の中こそ、仏教が問題としてきた人知の闇が深く息づいて いるのです). (Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 22 April 2008)³⁴

Despite a generally open attitude towards other religions in Shin Buddhism, what emerges here is a recurrent theme used in a conservative way to oppose western thought and promote Buddhism. This approach reveals itself clearly in a recent publication of the Japan Buddhist Federation (JBF, *Zen nihon bukkyōkai* 全日本仏教会), to which the Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha are affiliated. In this guide (*A Guide to Japanese Buddhism*) which is addressed to a general English-reading audience, Buddhism stands above all other religious traditions, in particular Christianity and Islam. We can read that while these “tend to adhere to their own God as absolute and almighty” and “seem to disregard other religions as minor or inferior,” Buddhism, having a broader view which includes all sentient beings, is “relatively generous toward other religions.”³⁵ Here, however, while condemning Christianity and Islam for disregarding other religious traditions, the authors have remained entrapped in the same discriminatory mechanism. (Porcu 2008: 23) In terms of authority, such (mis)representations are useful to strengthen the prestige of the religious institutions involved. As I have examined elsewhere (Porcu 2008: 23 ff), past representations of Japanese religions and culture for a non-Japanese audience have been useful at the same time at the internal level. They functioned to strengthen the prestige of Japanese culture and religions abroad, as well as being tools in the struggle for power within Japan and in the Asian context, such as in the case of Japanese wartime ideology.

Turning our attention back to the slogans for Shinran’s 750th memorial, and considering their representational and authoritative functions, we may say that in the case of the Honganji-ha it is the direct connection with its founder’s words that validates the authority of the memorial service and indirectly of the institution itself. With regard to the slogan of the Ōtani-ha, although it does not employ Shinran’s words directly, its authoritative function resides in the concept that lies behind it, that is, the expression of the *nenbutsu* itself—as claimed by the institution—based on Shinran’s teachings, the reliance on Amida Buddha’s vow, the concept of true “life” (*inochi*) and the ideal of a religious community of *dōbō*. These are therefore expressions of an authoritative language through which the religious event finds self-validation, while the link between the institution and its followers strengthen. As a consequence, the religious authority of the institution consolidates itself.

In the next section the role of visual images in the promotion of Shin Buddhism and as a way to convey its teachings will be explored.

34. Cf. Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō (14 January 2000). See also Dessi (2007: 138).

35. See Matsunami (2004: vii); Porcu (2008: 23-24).

Shin Buddhism and Visual Media

The use of visual images to propagate religions can be found in various traditions and dates back to ancient times. We can take as primary examples the illustrated biographies of Hōnen (*Hōnen Shōnin eden* 法然上人絵伝) or of Shinran (*Shinran Shōnin eden* 親鸞聖人絵伝), or the *etoki* in medieval Japanese Buddhism employed for proselytization purposes. Ikumi Kaminishi (2006: 4) has spoken of Japanese Buddhism in the fourteenth century as “a visual cultural phenomenon,” because of its employment of *etoki* 絵解き, illustrated storytelling (literally: explanation through pictures, or picture explanation) regarding various Buddhist themes which were used as “a method of preaching with visual aids.” *Etoki* not only had educational aims but was also entertaining, a “form of medieval popular culture.”³⁶ (Kaminishi 2006: 5) To consider the use of “paintings and illustrated texts as visual props” (Ruch 1977: 288) for proselytization will serve here as a link to illustrate how Shin Buddhist institutions in contemporary Japan are making use of new media for this scope. Barbara Ruch has explicitly spoken of “new ‘media’ literature,” where “the visual illustration of literature and its oral delivery came to equal if not surpass in importance the text itself. Painting, story, chanter, and even the sounding of musical instruments... combined to create a total audio-visual experience.” (Ruch 1977: 288) This kind of literature, she has claimed, intended drawing the audience “deeply into an orally delivered narrative” and causing above all “an emotional response... in an audience.” (Ruch 1977: 284)

The Pure Land tradition employed the *etoki* performances to popularize the teachings.³⁷ The use of audio-visual means for this scope is thus an ancient practice within this religious tradition and we may see its use of modern ways of communication, such as the television media, internet and visual-verbal approaches (such as slogans), as a continuance of this ancient practice.

Similarly, in the field of Japanese religions, art and audio-visual media as ways for spreading the teachings have also been used by new religious movements. Nancy Stalker has analyzed the way of using art and what she calls “visual technologies of proselytization,” in Japanese new religious movements. Implying “the use of visual media, including art, exhibition, photos and film” to promote themselves and spread their “messages of social and spiritual reformation.” (Stalker 2003: 151) In this regard, she highlights the close link between life in modern industrialized

36. Barbara Ruch (1977: 288) has highlighted the importance of *etoki* in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries in the formation of Japan's national literature. Cf. Kaminishi (2006: 6). However, *etoki* performances were present as early as the tenth century. (Kaminishi 2006:19; cf. also Ruch 1977: 295). For an explanation of the word *etoki*, see Kaminishi (2006: 6).

37. See for example, Kaminishi (2006: 16; 74 ff).

societies and consumerism that does encompass religious practice, claiming that consumption for many is “an important form of self-representation.” In the case of new religions, she concludes, they “consume and display as part of their social identity and, in turn, adherents and potential adherents ‘consume’ the religion as part of their self-identity.” (Stalker 2003: 164)

These reflections can be aptly applied to established Buddhist denominations as well as to other religious traditions.³⁸ In the case of Shin Buddhism, “visual technologies of proselytization” have been used, and are still used, and consumption as a form of self-representation is also to be found.

Let us take into consideration the employment of new visual media by Shin Buddhist institutions to convey the teachings, which is also closely linked to a form of consumerism and commercial entertainment. This will be analyzed in the light of self-representational strategies on the occasion of the founder’s memorial.

In popular culture, the *manga* (Japanese comics) and *anime* (animation movies) industries in Japan have reached the proportions of a mass phenomenon, and productions featuring religious themes have found their place within it. For Rennyō’s 500th memorial (1998), the animation movie *Rennyō Monogatari* 蓮如物語 (Rennyō’s Story), based on a story by the best-selling writer Itsuki Hiroyuki 五木寛之 (b. 1932), was commissioned by the Ōtani-ha and directed by Kuzunishi Osamu 葛西治. In Kyoto it was shown from 25 April to 22 May 1998 and was presented as a big event.³⁹ More recently, the animation movie *Shinran sama: negai, soshite hikari* 親鸞さま—ねがい、そしてひかり (official English translation of the Hongwanji⁴⁰ Press: *Shinran-sama – His Wish and Light*) was released on DVD by commission of the Hongwanji-ha (March 2008) as one of the projects related to Shinran’s 750th memorial and is also recommended by the Japan Buddhist Federation and the Ōtani-ha.

As we can read in the booklet included in the DVD, this *anime* is conceived as one of the visual means used by the denomination to propagate its teachings. In their words: “Through animation and visual media, the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha denomination has sought to spread the word of Shinran’s teaching in an easy to understand format.” Moreover, this project spanning ten years was preceded by another nineteen animation movies, which were started in the 1980s and comprise a “Buddhist Story” series and a “Nembutsu Story” series. The denomination’s publishers consider these two series as “an epoch-making event in the history of Buddhist propagation” which established “such media [the *anime*] as an important

38. As for the commercial aspect in medieval Japanese religious world, see for example Ruch (1977: 303-304).

39. See Rennyō Shōnin Kenkyū Iinkai 蓮如上人研究委員会 (1998: 170-171).

40. The official romanization of Hongwanji-ha is Hongwanji-ha. Here, however, the modified Hepburn system is used, unless it is expressly indicated in English publications of the same institution.

means of propagating [the] denomination's teaching."⁴¹ *Shinran sama: negai, soshite hikari* is considered "the crowning achievement" of the two series mentioned above. Moreover, this work is presented as an "innovation" which is inserted in a "new current of visual propagation" and which allows the Honganji-ha "to present his [Shinran's] biography in a style never before attempted." (Hongwanji Press 2008: 11)

Shinran is presented here as a gentle old man and the overall image which emerges from this movie is emotional rather than intellectual. The director and the scriptwriter also aimed to depict a wonderful man (*subarashii hito* 素晴らしい人) in a gentle and natural way.⁴² The themes of the *anime* are "life" and the religious path indicated by Shinran.⁴³ One more characteristic, as told by the creators, is their wish to encounter the favor of followers of any generation, from children to elderly people.

The story covers Shinran's life and is narrated by Shinran himself to two children who lived in his neighborhood. Among the main episodes which appear in the movie are: Shinran's childhood; his 20 years of Tendai practice on Mt. Hiei; his following of Hōnen's teaching and the exile to the Echigo provinces (present-day Niigata prefecture) after the petition presented by the Kōfuku-ji 興福寺 in Nara, and the persecutions which followed; his engagement in the writing of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran's major doctrinal work; his activities for spreading the *nenbutsu*; and his return to Kyōto. Shinran is portrayed in a traditional way, and his reverence to Hōnen recurs throughout the *anime*. This can also be seen as paying homage to Shinran's master since Hōnen's 800th memorial will be in the same year as Shinran's. Furthermore the choice of the themes taken from the Shin Buddhist teachings and displayed in this movie is quite traditional. They express the Honganji-ha's official stance and represent the reassuring message it wishes to convey to their followers. The themes selected and commented upon in the booklet included in the DVD are: Amida Buddha's primal vow and the religious salvation of all sentient beings through it; Shinran's claim after his exile that he was neither a monk nor a layman (*hisō hizoku* 非僧非俗); the concept of birth in the Pure Land (*ōjō jōdo* 往生浄土) which can be achieved through the exclusive *nenbutsu* practice as taught by Hōnen (*senju nenbutsu* 専修念仏); and the concept of *akunin shōki* 悪人正機, the wicked person being the real object of Amida Buddha's vow.⁴⁴

41. Booklet included in the DVD *Shinran sama: negai, soshite hikari*. (Honganji Shuppansha 2008: 11)

42. See the interview in *Daijō* 大乘 (May 2008: 18-26).

43. See *Daijō* (May 2008: 21-22).

44. See the various scenes on the DVD and its commentary (Hongwanji Press 2008: 15-20; Jp. 6-9). Space here only permits me to mention these themes. However, I will analyze this and the Shin Buddhist use of the media in more detail in my article "Shin Buddhism and the Media: Communication Strategies in an Established Buddhist Denomination" (in preparation).

This relatively traditional approach is also a characteristic of the Honganji-ha's website dedicated to this event, in which tradition, depicted through the link with the ancient capital (Kyoto), the old image of Shinran and the choice of colors, prevails over modernity.⁴⁵

Closely linked with the *anime*, and with other activities related to the founder's 750th memorial is a series of souvenir items which are sold at the head temple in Kyoto: from pens to stickers, notepads to colored pencils all depicting the characters of the movie; or items displaying the word *Annon*⁴⁶ which appears in the slogan of the memorial and is used here as a keyword to be found on fans, rosaries (*juzu* 数珠), straps for mobile phones, aprons, eco bags, rice packs and so on. Even a special medical insurance called *Annon* and intended for the adherents of the denomination was launched on this occasion and advertised in both the abovementioned biannual journal *Annon* 安穩 and the official organ of the Honganji-ha, the *Honganji shinpō* 本願寺新報.

What emerges from the examples given above is a consumerist use of 'things' in the form of souvenir items, and the employment of new visual media linked to popular culture to promote religious institutions. We can see, therefore, that not only in the new religious movements, as highlighted by Stalker, but also in an established Buddhist denomination like Jōdo Shinshū—one of the largest in Japan—the close link between consumerism and religion is quite evident and the necessity to find new ways of propagating the teaching seems to be urgent in its contemporary development.

Other, more 'traditional' cultural forms have been useful tools to promote religions. In the case of Shin Buddhism, as is well known, the Hongan-ji has used traditional art forms like Nō theatre to promote its teachings since Rennyō's time, and within the Honganji-ha strong cultural ties with the Yabunouchi school of tea (*Yabunouchi ryū* 藪内流)⁴⁷ have been important elements in the development of this branch. Just to cite a few examples, still today at Nishi Hongan-ji the tea offered by the Yabunouchi school in the Hiunkaku 飛雲閣 (Flying Cloud Pavilion) and the Nō performance in the southern Nō stage during the celebrations for Shinran's birthday, Gotan'e 降誕会, in May attract a large audience of believers and non-believers alike.⁴⁸ It should be noted that this is also an occasion for many to visit

45. See <http://www2.honganji.or.jp/daionki/> (accessed in December 2008)

46. This is the romanization used by the Honganji-ha.

47. On this school of tea and its close connection with the Honganji-ha see Porcu (2008: Chap. 4).

48. This religious service started in 1874. In 2008 120,000 people visited the main temple. See *Honganji shinpō* (1 June 2008: 8). I, myself, have participated in and observed this service various times (both the Nō performance and the offering of tea) and saw the massive participation—mostly by (but not exclusively) Shin Buddhist followers—in these events.

the National Treasures in Nishi Hongan-ji, such as the Hiunkaku, the Hongan-ji Shoin 本願寺書院, as well as Important Cultural Assets such as the South Nō stage, or the fine dry landscape garden, Kokei no Niwa 虎溪の庭 (Tiger Canyon Garden).

With regard to theatre performances, on the occasion of Rennyo's 500th memorial, the drama *Rennyo*, originating from Itsuki Hiroyuki's play script *Rennyo: Ware fukaki fuchi yori* 蓮如—われ深き淵より (*Rennyo: From the Depths of My Abyss*, 1995), was staged by the theatre company Zenshinza 前進座 in July 1995 in Kyoto, and afterwards toured various theatres throughout Japan.⁴⁹ After more than 200 performances, it was restaged in 1998 and was highly recommended by both the Ōtani-ha and Honganji-ha.⁵⁰ More recently, on the occasion of Shinran's 750th memorial, and Hōnen's 800th memorial, the opening of the theatre play *Hōnen to Shinran* 法然と親鸞 (Hōnen and Shinran) was staged in Kyoto in July 2007 at the Minamiza theatre as the first of many performances which have taken place and will take place all over Japan in the coming years. The play has been promoted by both headquarters institutions and by their local temples.

It should be noted that all these presentations are aimed at a Japanese audience and that, while in Japan the use of cultural events to promote Shin Buddhism and as a way of proselytization seems to have been quite effective (as one of the largest traditions, in terms of both number of adherents and temples), it did not have a significant influence upon its exportation to Europe and America. Here, representations of Zen Buddhism have been most successful in their adaptation for a western audience, which included a strong promotion of its allegedly exclusive influence on Japanese culture, bringing about the marginalization of other schools. It is also through the use of Japanese culture that Zen Buddhism has obtained a great following outside Japan and has succeeded in adapting an authoritative language (that is, an expression of its own religious authority) to promote itself. On the contrary, this adaptation has not occurred in the case of Shin Buddhism, and as a consequence, its significant contribution to the development of Japanese culture has often been overlooked.⁵¹ While many events and projects are undertaken in connection with Shinran's 750th memorial within Japan and while the Japanese websites of both the Honganji-ha and Ōtani-ha are always updated with great attention given to them at the institutional level (also with the aim at attracting a large audience—as clearly admitted on various occasions)⁵² only scant attention

49. See also Hayashi (1999: 44 n).

50. Rennyo Shōnin Kenkyū Iinkai (1998: 105). In this same magazine, there is an interview with Itsuki Hiroyuki, pp. 106-111.

51. I have discussed this issue extensively in Porcu (2008).

52. See for example, http://www2.hongwanji.or.jp/daionki/sl_top.html where, with reference to the Honganji-ha's slogan, it is stated that it was decided and established in order to forge an appeal to great portions of society. (accessed in December 2008)

is given to their English-speaking audience. The English web pages of both institutions are not updated and very few English materials are available. This can be indicative of the fact that Jōdo Shinshū self-representational strategies are mainly—if not exclusively—intended for an internal, Japanese, use. This may also be seen as one of the reasons for the lack of popularity of this influential religious tradition outside its Japanese boundaries.

Conclusions

An examination of self-representational strategies used on the occasion of important religious events, in the form of slogans and visual media, has been made. These strategies emerge as attempts by institutions to reach large audiences of followers—and possibly to acquire new adherents—mainly through traditional patterns, such as the link with tradition as self-validation of authority (as in the case of the slogan of Honganji-ha) and the use of traditional Japanese culture (Nō theatre, the tea ceremony), which enhance the prestige of the institutions themselves. On the other hand, the Shin Buddhist institutions taken into consideration here have represented themselves through forms of popular culture (even though, we must add, with quite traditional contents) and new media to face societal changes. As well as conveying the teachings through modern visual media, such as *anime*, Shin Buddhist institutions address their adherents and potential adherents through the lure of consumerism, in the form of souvenir items displaying the characters of the *anime* itself. Shinran and his teachings become a form of ‘religious’ entertainment, which attempts to meet the needs of a consumerist society.

With regard to the religious institutions’ reactions to different period of crisis, the use of the Honganji-ha slogan *Yo no naka an'on nare* has been explored. Significantly, observing the adaptation strategies in the development of Shin Buddhism within Japan, where this tradition was struggling for its own survival and to maintain its religious authority, has been of great interest. The slogan of the Ōtani-ha with its emphasis on *inochi*, the true “life,” revealed the denomination’s stance on both problems in contemporary society and religious doctrines other than Buddhism. Among other things, these, and some of the official statements of the Shin Buddhist Federation, have shown an occidentalist approach and the advocacy of the superiority of Buddhism over other religious traditions, through which their religious authority is affirmed. On the other hand, however, the Shin Buddhist institutions have demonstrated an open attitude towards other religions and strongly promoted their anti-war stance, which has implied a process of critical rethinking of their past war responsibilities.

In conclusion, communication strategies are fundamental aspects of religious proselytization, and institutions aim to adapt them to social and economic changes. As has emerged from the examples provided in this article, these strategies are

even more relevant on the occasion of religious ceremonies for founders and other prominent religious figures, which constitute a stage for the religious institutions to represent themselves publicly. These are therefore mirrors reflecting the institutions' worldview and attitudes regarding urgent issues to a large audience of followers and potential followers, also in the attempt to maintain, and possibly enhance, their own religious authority.

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