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Editorial Note

Kenichi Wakita

Director, Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures

The Research Centre for World Buddhist Cultures (RCWBC) hosted many national and international scholars, collaborated with several domestic and overseas research institutions, and successfully organized as many as forty-five academic events, including special lectures and international seminars, symposia, forums, and workshops during the 2022-2023 academic year. Some of them were in-person events, while many were conducted in hybrid formats. We strongly believe that it was only due to the active support of all the stakeholders that we at RCWBC were successful in organizing such a large number of academic events.

With great pleasure, we present the seventh volume of the *Journal of World Buddhist Cultures*. The journal upholds the rigorous standards of a peer-review process. We are very proud of the articles that have been included in this volume and would like to thank all the reviewers for their kind and thoughtful comments. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to all the contributors.

One of the main objectives of our center is to make RCWBC an international hub for Buddhist studies. Together with all the stakeholders from all over the world, we will continue to make every effort to promote Buddhist studies. We look forward to your continued support in the future.

発刊の辞

協田 健一
世界仏教文化研究センター長

2023年度、龍谷大学 世界仏教文化研究センターでは、国内・国外の講師を招いて、また、学内外の研究機関と連携して、特別講演会や国際研究セミナーをはじめ、シンポジウム、フォーラム、ワークショップなど、45件の研究事業を開催いたしました。対面、オンライン、また2つを合わせたハイブリッド形式など、開催形式は様々ですが、このように充実した研究活動が展開できましたことは、関係者の皆様のご尽力の賜物と考えております。

さて、このような活発な研究活動を通して、『世界仏教文化研究』第7号を皆様のお手元にお届けできることを心より喜んでおります。本誌は学内外の査読者による厳しい審査を設けており、今号に掲載された学術論文は、そのような査読を通過した優れた水準を持つものと自負しております。査読いただきました皆様方には、心より御礼申し上げます。

世界仏教文化研究センターのミッションのひとつは、仏教研究の国際的なハブを構築することにあります。世界各地の皆様と共に仏教研究を推進していけるよう、今後とも努力をして参りたいと考えております。何卒、よろしく願いいたします。

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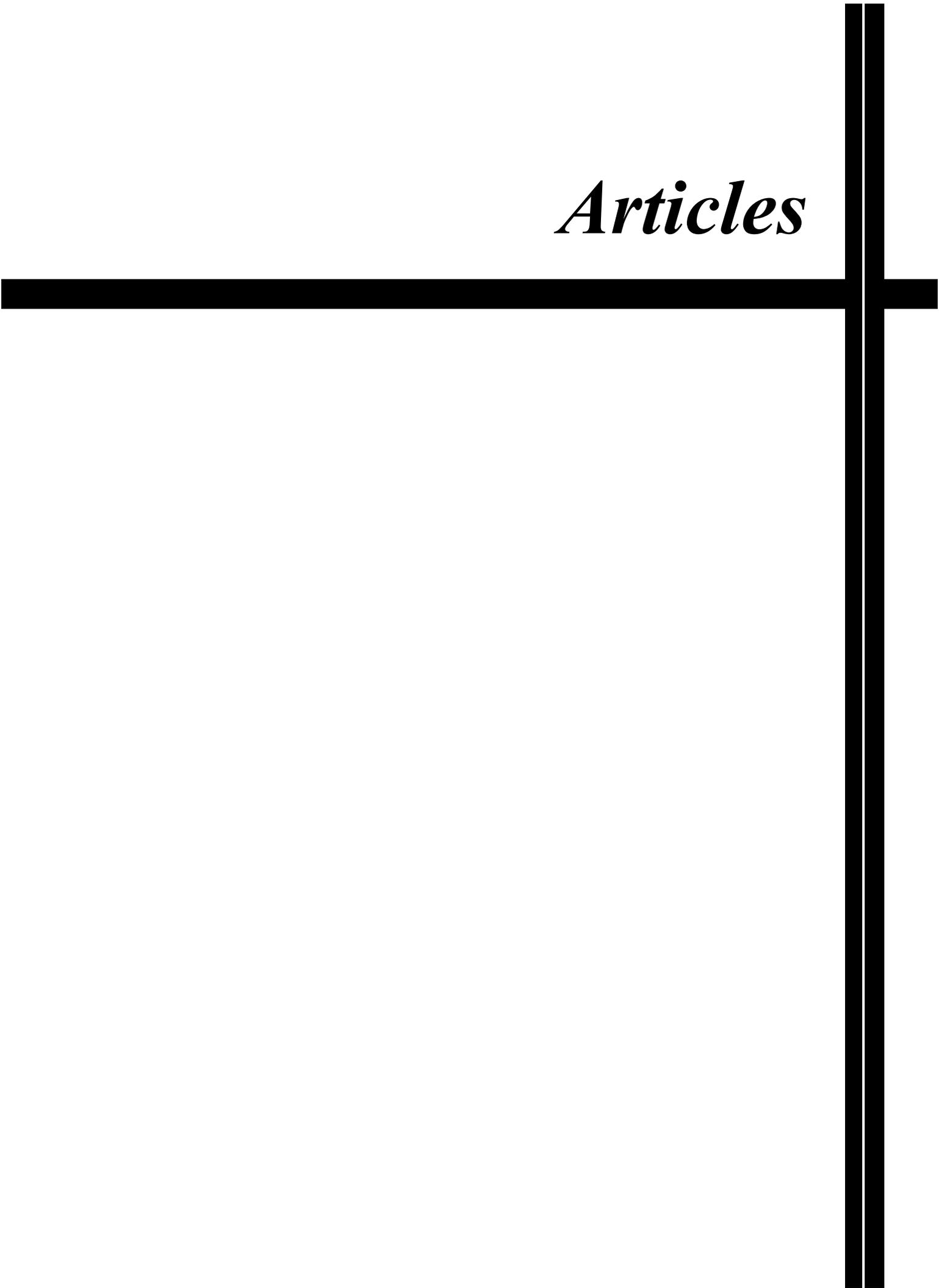
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凡 例

- 1, 本誌は、英語を主言語とするが、日本語による投稿もさまたげない。したがって、目次、巻末執筆者等は、英語と日本語を併記する。
- 2, 漢字表記については、翻訳を含む日本語原稿の場合、一部の人名、書名を除き、原則、常用漢字に統一する。
- 3, 本誌中に使用されている図版の無断コピーは固く禁ずる。

Articles



“I did not kill Kyaw Zin Win....”:

Queer Suicide and Buddhist Social Thought

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Abstract

This article examines the intersection between LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex, queer and questioning) subjectivities and mental health and suicidal tendencies; furthermore, it discusses the supposedly positive influence of religiosity on mental health; Buddhist perspective on suicide; and avenues to emancipatory practices (liberation “dharmology”).

Departing from the example of the suicide of Kyaw Zin Win, a 26-year-old gay Burmese librarian taunted by religious homophobia, the question arises as to how Buddhist traditions have conceptually, socially, and systemically contributed to LGBTIQ+ suffering and suicidality.

First, trauma, suicidal ideations, and ‘self-completed death’/‘murders’ are framed within wider social justice parameters before queer mental distress and religiosity are laid out and the assumption that religiosity has an inoculative effect against suicidality is questioned and complicated. Buddhist thought and subjectivities are introduced in relation to trans- and queerness as well as with self-completed deaths. The complexity and ambiguity of the Buddhist perspectives on sexual and gender diversity as well as on suicide are demonstrated to be co-productive factors of cultural expectations and normative scripts.

Through critical hermeneutics (textual, historical-contextual, anthropological, and conceptual hermeneutics), possibilities for engaged Buddhist inclusive social justice practices are revealed; Buddhist perspectives on LGBTIQ+ discrimination and suicidality can thus be critically questioned and reconsidered, utilizing five steps of Buddhist liberation dharmology.

“I did not kill Kyaw Zin Win....”:

Queer Suicide and Buddhist Social Thought *

Bee SCHERER

Keywords: Buddhism and Social Justice, Buddhist and LGBT, Buddhism and Suicide, Hermeneutics, Dharmology

1. Introduction

On 23 June 2019, 26-year-old Kyaw Zin Win, a gay librarian working at a university in Yangon, Myanmar, killed himself after having suffered prolonged homophobic bullying.¹ His death started a conversation about the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex, queer and questioning (LGBTIQ+) people in the predominantly Buddhist country that has an alarmingly high suicide rate.² Shortly after Kyaw Zin Win’s death, Ashin Asayar, a senior Buddhist monk (*sayadaw*), was recorded performing a two-minute stand-up routine during a dharma talk, in which he not only mocked Kyaw Zin Win but also called for all homosexuals to be shot in state-sanctioned killings and to be beaten to death by lynch mobs.³

The recording of a senior Buddhist monks’ homophobic hate speech makes for chilling viewing and provides a necessary reminder of the plight of LGBTIQ+ people in majority Buddhist countries. Far from the Western, rose-tinted orientalist imaginary of the peaceful and inclusive Buddhist Other, the reality and the lived experience of religion in Buddhist majority countries is far too often blighted by a vast array of hateful, right-wing, nationalist, and militarist religious fanatics. Therefore, discussing vulnerable groups and suicidality from a Buddhist perspective cannot ignore the injustices and oppression supported and actively propagated by Buddhist leaders such as Ashin Asayar and his followers.

* This is a slightly revised version of an original manuscript completed in 2019 for a volume on Japanese Buddhism and suicide prevention, edited by Jonathan Watts (Tokyo); given the uncertain publication of the Japanese edited volume, Dr. Watts kindly permitted the (pre-)publication in other venues.

¹ *Myanmar Mix*, 2019.

² WHO figures put Myanmar at 0.0131 percent (13.1/100,000) suicide rate as compared to the global average of 0.0114 (11.4/100,000) percent (Htwe and Thi 2018).

³ *Equality Myanmar*, 2019.

2. Social Injustice, Mental Distress, and Suicidality

There is a pandemic experience of social injustice among marginalized groups, resulting in sustained mental distress, suicidal ideations and ‘self-completed deaths.’⁴ Already Émile Durkheim,⁵ in his examination of the social conditions of self-completed deaths, pointed to the fact that the act of taking one’s own life cannot simply be reduced to individual pathology without social (justice) contexts. The messiness of our human experience and our—for the most part, bumbling—negotiation of individuation with the—often contradictory—societal scripts and value systems usually causes mental distress to everyone at some stage in one’s life. Following on from mental distress, suicidal ideations are also common occurrences within the whole populace at some point in an individual’s life. However, the frequency and intensity of mental distress, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and self-completed deaths are statistically far more endemic within those marginalized populations who struggle with particular tensions and clashes with the dominant hegemonic societal scripts. These blueprints of social expectation and regulation function, in Lakoffian terms, as the almost universal societal “prototype”⁶. This “prototype” acts as an unobtainable and symbolic, yet inescapably powerful and oppressive, *ideal* against which all members of society have to negotiate and perform their own individuations and identitarian expressions within ethnocentric/racist, classist, body-normative, neuro-normative/sanist, ableist, and cis-heterosexist patriarchy. As a consequence, large segments of society find themselves unable to perform their social roles and their interpellated identities within a vicinity sufficiently close to the Lakoffian center—that creates abject margins—to safeguard their stable mental well-being. The unjust social orders inherently produce various and often intersecting degrees of abjection for a wide range of persons:

- color and ethnic diversity
- the poor and working class
- physical and/or neural atypical persons (including anyone shamed as “old”, “fat”, “ugly”, “insane”, etc.)
- variously able (“variable”) persons⁷
- trans*, intersex, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer
- women, who in patriarchal thought constitute the inferior human in relation to the male default.⁸

In fact, recently, the academic study of suicide—suicidology—has taken a Social Justice

⁴ I argue this terminology to be more just and fitting than the term ‘suicide’ (‘self-killing’, as in the Chinese and Japanese term 自殺 *zishā/jisatsu*), see Scherer, “I am a Suicide,” 2020b. Similarly, cp. the usage of the more neutral term 自死 (*jjishi*) in Japanese.

⁵ Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, [1897] 1951/2005.

⁶ Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 1987, see Scherer, “Atypical Bodies,” 2020a, p.28.

⁷ The terms “variability”, “variable”, etc. are more just and empowering substitutes for “disability”, “disabled”, etc.; see Mounsey, “Introduction,” 2014; Scherer, “Atypical Bodies,” 2020a, pp. 20–21.

⁸ See Scherer, “Beyond Heteropatriachal Oppression,” 2018, “Atypical Bodies,” 2020a, and “I am a Suicide,” 2020b.

turn in the form of Critical Suicidology.⁹ If Buddhists can accept the predominance of social conditions for the *concrete experience of suffering*¹⁰ in mental distress and suicidality, they will also reject the neoliberal, late-capitalist smokescreens that compartmentalize, individualize, and pathologize suffering in order to produce a firewall for maintaining inherent systemic injustices and structural violence.

3. *LGBTIQ+ people, Mental Health & Suicidality, and Religiosity*

In the wake of the “era of enlightenment”, the scientification of socio-legal discourses in Europe and North America in the 19th century—around 1870, as Michel Foucault famously argues—led to the invention of the “homosexual” as an essentialized identity within Euro-American medical circles. Equally, as its counterpart, “heterosexuality” emerged as an essentialized category.¹¹

LGBTIQ+ people consistently show a higher prevalence of mental distress and suicidality, not due to intrinsic psychiatric disorders but rather to societal stigma.¹² Suicidality is particularly virulent among the younger (under 25) LGBTIQ+ populace.¹³ The phenomenology of queer suicidality has also been recognized within the Japanese context.¹⁴ The extent of the problem is well documented in the case of trans* people. A recent meta-analysis of trans* mental health surveys from the Global North demonstrates alarming statistics of various mental distress and suicidality indicators.¹⁵ Between 65-75% of trans* identified individuals report harassment and direct discrimination. Most trans* people experience a daily onslaught of systemic and structural oppression leading to a high prevalence of depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation, attempts, and completions. Research clearly shows that the trans* populace is not, as is sometimes still claimed in trans-hostile discourses, simply mentally ill.¹⁶ This trope is merely a contemporary incarnation of the early psychiatric invention of the “suicidal homosexual” as a pathologized stereotype in sexological discourses of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁷ Rather, the research consensus points at societal stigma and marginalization as the key factors of worse mental health among LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁸

⁹ Marsh, “Critical Suicidology,” 2015; Widger, “Suicidology as a Social Practice,” 2015; White, “Shaking Up Suicidology,” 2015; White et.al. eds., *Critical Suicidology*, 2016; Button and Marsh eds., *Suicide and Social Justice*, 2020.

¹⁰ Skt. *duḥkha-duḥkhatā*, Pāli *dukkha-dukkhatā*, Chin. 苦苦: *Sangīti Sūtra/Sutta* DĀ Skt. 3, Chin. 9: T. 1 50b12; DN 33: iii 216 PTS, cp. *Visuddhimagga* xvi, 35 (32-60).

¹¹ Cp. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1978:43; Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, 1995; Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 1996, pp. 10–16.

¹² See Cheng, “Being Different,” 2018, pp. 1–2 for ample references to social science and psychological research.

¹³ See, e.g., Gibbs and Goldbach, “Religious Conflict,” 2015; PACE 2015, *The RaRE Research Report*, pp. 13-17; 71-73 and Trevor Project, “National Survey on LGBTQ,” 2019.

¹⁴ Hidaka and Operario, “Attempted Suicide.” 2006.

¹⁵ Scherer, “Beyond Heteropatriachal,” 2018: 67-73.

¹⁶ The World Health Organization (WHO) no longer lists “gender identity disorder” as a mental illness in the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD); instead, the WHO now describes “gender incongruence” (also known as “gender dysphoria”) under the section on sexual health (Lewis 2019).

¹⁷ Marsh, “Queering Suicide,” 2010.

¹⁸ Pascoe and Smart Richman, “Perceived discrimination,” 2009.

Still, it is often claimed rather simplistically that “religiosity” in general inoculates to a certain degree from suicidality, although the evidence for this claim is weak and contradictory.¹⁹ Currently, research into this topic is in its infancy, lacking complexity and, for the most part, intersectional analyses.²⁰ Without carefully considering the specific religious contexts, the usefulness of sociological studies claiming to address such far-reaching conceptual questions is highly doubtful. Unsurprisingly, hence, there is a clear indication that “religion” can function equally as either a risk factor or as an inoculation for LGBTIQ+ individuals.²¹ In other words, it is complicated and context-dependent. The effect of Buddhist forms of religiosity on suicidality is still insufficiently researched, despite the oft-repeated claim that practicing Buddhism protects against suicidal ideations and actions.²² Recently, researchers have started to develop a specifically Buddhist perspective on suicide prevention.²³ For Japan – a country with significantly higher suicide rates compared to other countries with significant Mahāyāna Buddhist populations (disregarding contemporary South Korea which is dominated by Neo-Confucian/secular-capitalist paradigms and has a higher Christian than Buddhist populace) – the inoculative effect of Buddhist thought and teaching appears has been questioned.²⁴ However, it could be argued that, for many Japanese, Buddhism, rather than being an immersed and lived practice, is merely a cultural-traditional context just as are Neo-Confucianism and Shintoism; secondly it cannot be denied that Buddhist-driven ‘suicide prevention’ movements with their successful mobilization of Buddhist priests and media exposure are having significant effects.²⁵

4. Uneasy Bedfellows: LGBTIQ+ people and Buddhist Traditions

The intersection “queer/religion” is highly problematic both in religious and queer-activist discourses. While religions as vestigial forms of governmentality²⁶ offer

¹⁹ See the recent studies by Gearing and Lizardi, “Religion and Suicide,” 2009; Nelson et al., “Protective Functions,” 2012; Gibbs and Goldbach, “Religious Conflict,” 2015; Lester, “Does Religiosity Predict Suicidal Behavior,” 2017; Lew et al. “Religious Orientation,” 2018; Mason, Martin, and Kim, “Suicidal Ideation,” 2018; Kryszynska et al., “Does Religion/Spirituality,” 2018; see also Cheng, “Being Different,” 2018, pp. 2–3.

²⁰ Some studies have started to address particular intersectionalities, e.g., Leong et al. “Suicide among Asian Americans,” 2007; Nelson et al. “Protective Functions,” 2012; Lizardi and Gearing, “Religion and Suicide,” 2010; Stack, “Religious Activities,” 2018.

²¹ Kralovec et al., “Religion and Suicide,” 2014.

²² Such claims can be found in Tzeng and Lipson, “The Cultural Context,” 2004; Wangmo and Valk, “Under the Influence of Buddhism,” 2012; Han et al., “Qualitative Research,” 2013; however, see Vijayakumar et al. “Socio-economic,” 2008, p. 25. The limited qualitative study by Cheng (2018) appears to project an aspiration (rather than a reality) of Buddhist inclusiveness while based on an insufficient data set and lack of intersectional triangulations. Still, Chang recounts the suicide of a gay Buddhist due to direct rejection by a Buddhist preceptor (p. 5).

²³ E.g., Teerawutgulrag, “The Developed Buddhist,” 2006; Disayavanish and Disayavanish, “A Buddhist Approach,” 2007; Takahashi et al., “Educating Gatekeepers,” 2008; Hirono, “The Role of Religious Leaders,” 2013.

²⁴ Kawamoto, “Buddhism and Suicide,” 2008.

²⁵ See, e.g., Watts, “The ‘Suicide Priests’ of Japan,” 2008 and the forthcoming edited volume *Buddhism and Suicide Prevention*, edited by Jonathan Watts. Dr Kanae Kawamoto (Tokyo) is currently conducting in depth research into Japanese clerical suicide prevention.

²⁶ Goldenberg, “Write: The Category of Religion,” 2015.

belonging in exchange for regulation, queer liberation has often dogmatically constructed the Western category of “religion” as an enemy of LGBTIQ+ expressions, identity performances, and rights. In this “homosecularism,” “queer” and “religious” are construed as antithetic and mutually exclusive.²⁷

Any attempt to counter this homosecular impulse within LGBTIQ+ rights advocacy is hampered by the abundant popular homo- and trans-phobic rhetoric used within conservative Buddhist organizations and by Buddhist leaders in traditionally Buddhist countries in Asia. Within transnational modernist/Westernized Buddhist circles, the responses to questions around sexual and gender diversity can also range from outright condemnation to well-meaning indifference to full embrace of the LGBTIQ+ community. Just as it is the case in contemporary Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu discourses, the anti-LGBTIQ+ proof-texting of premodern scriptures constitutes a key factor in contemporary Buddhist homo- and trans-phobia and LGBTIQ+ discrimination and stigmatization. Proof-texting refers to the finding of decontextualized authoritative quotations in aid of a preconceived position (e.g., the condemnation of homosexuality) rather than careful hermeneutical exegesis in the form of interpreting authoritative texts (such as the Buddhist suttas) in context to arrive at a position. During such proof-texting exercises, influential conservative Buddhist leaders and thinkers conflate the complex and inherently alien categories of sex/gender/sexual behavior variance found in Buddhist canonical and commentarial literature with contemporary performances of queerness. Such proof-texting in homiletic and doctrinal contexts is, at its best, hermeneutically insincere and misleading, and, at worst, simply the *dharma*-splaining of one’s own homophobia and transphobia.

Buddhist anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses overlook the complexity of Buddhist traditions which have espoused multiple, often contradictory perspectives on (trans* and) queerness, through time (diachronically) and in various cultural spheres (synchronically), i.e. through the ages and the various (g)local adaptations of Buddhist traditions.²⁸ However, it is necessary to highlight that pre-modern Buddhist traditions did not essentialize sexual orientation as an identity—as European discourses of the 19th century did. Further, the modern Global Northern LGBTIQ+ categories only uncomfortably map onto premodern and indigenous Buddhist and Asian concepts regarding sex/gender and sexual behavior.

It can be argued that, at its most basic philosophical level, Buddhist thought regards sexual activities as actualizations of an attachment in the form of sensuality (*rāga*) and, as such, counts among the core afflicting emotions that form obstacles to liberation and enlightenment. However, this does not render all Buddhist traditions “sex-negative”. Afflicting emotions such as desire, anger, and confusion are always opportunities for the cultivation of the right conduct and right mindfulness.

For the ordained, the monastic code (*vinaya*) prominently prescribes celibacy. In

²⁷ Scherer, “*Queer Thinking Religion*,” 2017.

²⁸ See Zwilling, “Homosexuality as Seen,” 1992; Cabezón, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, 1993; Sweet and Zwilling, “The First Medicalization,” 1993; Jackson, “Male Homosexuality,” 1998; Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 2000, pp. 411–434; Sweet and Zwilling, “The Evolution of Third-Sex,” 2000; Scherer, “Gender Transformed,” 2006; Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 2009, pp. 93–95; Scherer, “Variant Dharma,” 2016.

Early Buddhism, socio-legal prohibitions existed against any breach of celibacy for monastics—with varying consequences ranging from expulsion to degrees of repentances. The *Vinaya* also prevented the ancient South Asian third and fourth sex/gender categories (apart from male and female) from full participation and ordination in the monastic community (Sangha, *saṃgha*). These abject categories were the *paṇḍaka* (roughly: ‘gender-deficient’) ²⁹ and *ubhatobyañjanaka* (roughly: ‘both-sexed’, often rendered ‘hermaphrodite’ and most likely denoting a specific intersex condition). *Paṇḍakas* and *ubhatobyañjanakas* were barred from the Sangha in order to avert any social stigma associated with and corresponding to the prevalent discriminatory views in the contemporaneous South Asian society of non-normative sex/gender/sexualities. However, these social-*saṃsāric* attitudes within Early Buddhism are not necessarily reflective of the soteriological-*nirvāṇic* attitude. In liberation and cessation (i.e., *nirvāṇa*), there is not only the falling away of all “defilements” such as desires but there is also no sex/gender. The tension in Buddhist traditions between *saṃsāra*-karmic and bodhi-*nirvāṇic* orientations ³⁰ is perfectly illustrated in the example of Buddhist attitudes towards gender equality, ³¹ espousing on the *saṃsāra*-karmic level traditionally starkly patriarchal-oppressive views on the unfavorable female birth. For instance, the early, influential paracanonical Pāli treatise *Questions of King Menander (Milindapañhā)* states with rhetoric playfulness that being a woman (*ittha*) means inferiority (*ittaratā*) ³² and monastic thinkers such as Buddhaghosa (5th c. CE) regularly emphasize the lesser (*hīna*) value of womanhood. ³³ At the same time, Early Buddhism accepted—even on a socio-pragmatic level—that sex/gender is *not* static even within one single lifetime; sex/gender can, indeed, change. For instance, the *Milindapañhā* enumerates sex/gender change among a long list of phenomena that regularly occur in the world. ³⁴ Importantly, early Buddhist monastic regulations (*vinaya*) accept this fluidity and the change of sex/gender. ³⁵ Sex/gender-changing monastics are pragmatically confirmed by the Buddha and re-directed to their new sex/gender community. When the ‘sign’ (*liṅga*) of a woman (*itthi*) or of a man (*puriso*) appeared in a monastic, the Buddha explicitly confirmed the retaining of the preceptor, ordination validity and seniority of sex/gender changing monastics (iii

²⁹ Older literature uses the misleading translation “eunuch”. Zwilling problematically described *paṇḍakas* as “a socially stigmatized class of passive, probably transvestite, homosexuals” (1992, p. 209, but see Scherer 2016, pp. 257–258), while Powers (2009, pp. pp. 82–85) calls *paṇḍakas* “sexual deviants”, and Cabezón 2017 uses the—despite of his justification p. 13 problematic—term “queer” for *paṇḍaka*. Generally, on the *paṇḍakas* and their five sub-categories, see Welzer 1998; Powers 2009, pp. 82–85 (calling *paṇḍakas* “sexual deviants”); Scherer 2016, pp. 254–260; and Cabezón 2017, pp. 407–410. On *paṇḍaka* as the “neither -nor” category of a fourfold sex/gender paradigm, see Scherer, 2006, pp. 68–69 and Scherer, 2016, pp. 254–260.

³⁰ Adapting terminologies established fifty years ago by Melford E. Spiro and later Geoffrey Samuels, see Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, 1996, p. 49.

³¹ Sponberg, “Attitudes toward Women,” 1992.

³² As stated by the interlocutor Kong Milinda in the paracanonical *Questions of Menander (Milindapañhā)* in the introduction to the *meṇḍaka-pañha* (‘solving of dilemmas’) section, Miln. 89–90.

³³ Cp. Buddhaghosa, *Atthasālinī* (Commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgani*) 322 PTS Müller; Cabezón 2017, p. 363.

³⁴ Miln. 267 = *Dilemmas*, division 7, point 4 “What there is Nothing of in the World.”

³⁵ See Scherer, “Gender Transformed,” 2006; Anderson, “Changing Sex in Pāli Buddhist,” 2016 and “Changing Sex or Changing Gender,” 2017; Kieffer-Pülz, “Sex-change in Buddhist Legal Literature,” 2018.

35 PTS). Moreover, a past sex/gender change in itself was not seen as an ordination impediment; the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* even explicates that an ordination impediment only occurs after the third (!) sex/gender change.³⁶ On this basis alone, trans* individuals should be safe from religious discrimination in Buddhist traditions.

In terms of lay sexual ethics, the universal application of the liberatory Buddhist dharma (teaching) was not affected by the early socio-legal marginalizing regulations. Of course, Early Buddhist sources frame the culturally specific *paṇḍaka* and *ubhatobyañjanaka* in terms of karmic obstacles to practicing the Buddhist path towards liberation and enlightenment. For example, Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya* denies lay person status to any *śandha* (impotent/asexual) and *paṇḍaka*.³⁷ But there is also clear evidence of soteriological overriding of socio-bio-political stigmatization of the third and fourth sex/genders. One such example can be found in the tradition of the influential *Brahma-Net (Brahmajāla) Sūtra* (梵網經; fàn wǎng jīng; T. 1484; early 5th c. CE). This Mahāyāna discourse formulates a universal Bodhisattva ethics by explicitly affirming the enlightenment potential of all sexes/genders. Rule 40³⁸ appears to acknowledge the societal stigmatization faced by *paṇḍakas* (黃門 huáng mén)³⁹ but uses the marginalization in order to stress the universally liberatory efficacy of the precepts (*śīla*: 戒 jiè): whether royals, monastics, or Human abjects; gods, ghosts, or animals – the precepts equally transform all into beings of highest purity (一清淨者 yī qīng jìng zhě).

The stigmatization of same-sex sexual activities developed in many Buddhist cultures only during and after the Kuṣāṇa period of South Asian history in the first four centuries CE.⁴⁰ Sources such as Buddhagosa’s *Dīghanikāya commentary* (D-a 853 ad D III 70) and the somewhat obscure *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* quoted in Śāntideva’s *Śikṣāsamuccaya* evidence the condemnation of male-male sexual contacts as sexual wrong-doing; yet these fifth century CE texts slightly postdate Kuṣāṇa era systematisations in *abhidharma* and Yogācāra philosophy.

Two influential *abhidharma* compendia of the 4th c. CE, Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya* & its commentary and the *Abhidharmakośa* & its commentary by Vasubandhu expand to lay people and systematize the definition of “sexual wrong-doing” (*kāmesu micchācāra*, “misconduct in sexual matters”), i.e. the ‘third precept’ of Buddhist ethical conduct.⁴¹ Vasubandhu explicitly lists opposite-sex anal and oral sex as prohibited also for lay people: “or when one has intercourse, even with one’s own wife, by an ‘un-bodily’ (unnatural) body part such as the mouth or the anus.”⁴² This passage prohibits all penetrative sex acts that except (heteronormative) penile-vaginal penetration

³⁶ See Gyatso, “One Plus One,” 2003, p. 111.

³⁷ *Abhidharmasamuccaya* 57, 13-16, see Bayer, *The Theory of Karman*, 2010, p. 216.

³⁸ Fauré, *The Red Thread*, 1998, pp. 92-93; Scherer, “Beyond Heteropatriarchal Oppression,” 2018, p. 261.

³⁹ While one early Chinese translation for *paṇḍaka* is literally ‘non-male’ (不男, bù nán), the most common term in Chinese Buddhist texts, 黃門 huáng mén (‘yellow door’) is derived from the later Han court harem area (Charles Muller, “黃門,” *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*).

⁴⁰ The following is partially adapted from Scherer, “Variant Dharma,” 2016, pp. 263–266.

⁴¹ Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 2000, pp. 71-74

⁴² anaṅge vā gacchati svāmapi bhāryām apāne mukhe vā, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* at 4, 74a-b (p. 244 Pradhan); my translation.

excluding hence by analogy non-heterosexual penetration. Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya commentary* explicitly mention from a typical androcentric perspective all other males and 'non-males' (*napuṃsaka*, i.e., *paṇḍakas* and *ubhatobyañjanakas*) as forbidden partners for sexual 'joining' (*dvayadvayasamāpatti*).⁴³

The encyclopedic treatise of the Yogācāra school of Buddhist thought, the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*⁴⁴ explicitly classifies in its second section—the section on doctrinal interpretation (*Viniścaya-saṃgrahānī*)—not only any non-vaginal penetration as “sexual wrong-doing” but also more generally any sexual acts with (other) men and with *paṇḍakas*.⁴⁵ The following East Asian commentarial traditions mainstream and codify this interpretation of Buddhist ethical precepts for the East Asian Buddhist traditions henceforth. The aforementioned influential Chinese *Brahmajāla Sūtra* and its precept manual section, the **Mahāyāna-pratimokṣa* with its authoritative commentary Beommanggyeong gojeokgi (梵網經古迹記 T. 1815) by the eighth century Korean scholar Taehyeon (Daehyeon) 太賢 (大賢) played a decisive role in this process. For the Tibetan tradition the same text appears to be equally foundational.

It becomes clear that(post-) Kuṣāṇa era Indic nucleolar heteronormative, procreative value productions around sexuality in the traditions of influential Buddhist compendia and their commentaries, such as the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* and *Abhidharma* textual traditions, spawned the sex-negative and queer-phobic attitudes that took hold and prevailed in Tibet and upon meeting (neo-)Confucian family values in Chinese and Korean Buddhism. Japanese Buddhist traditions developed conflicting attitudes towards same-sex relations, which included prominently the extolling of age-structured intra-gender relations between monks and novices, in particular within the medieval Shingon (真言) tradition.⁴⁶

In the Global North, some LGBTIQ+ people have consciously embraced various forms of Buddhist traditions and (post-) Buddhist meditation practices as a means of addressing spiritual and psychological needs with various success. There is also an increase of inclusive voices and openly LGBTIQ+ teachers in multiple Buddhist modernist traditions. Far from being merely a project of global, transnational and/or 'White'/'convert' Buddhist modernism, queer-inclusive voices and practices have increasingly emerged within 'socially engaged', 'progressive' and/or 'humanistic Buddhist' (人間佛教, rén jiān fó jiào).⁴⁷ Among contemporary Sinophone Buddhists, the Taiwanese Ven. Chao-Hwei (昭慧, Zhāo Hui) features prominently in her unwavering support for the LGBT community; in 2014, she performed the first Buddhist same-sex wedding in Taiwan.⁴⁸ In Thailand, an outspoken reformist Buddhist monk, Phra Waradhammo พระธรรมธรรม, has developed a dedicated 'neobuddhism' blogspot for queer practitioners; in Japan, a Jōdo Shū priest, Kōdō Nishimura 西村 宏堂 (*1989) who

⁴³ *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* 63, 25-26 at AS 53, 10-13, see Bayer, *The Theory of Karman*, 2010, p. 139.

⁴⁴ 瑜伽師地論 yú qié shī dì lùn [Yü-ch'ieh shih-ti lun] T. 1579, translated into Chinese by Xuanzang 玄奘 from 646-648 CE; composed in India in the first half of the 4. th c. CE.

⁴⁵ 一切男及不男 [...] 皆不應行 YBh 631b14|15 "anything with a man or a paṇḍaka | is called wrong practice."

⁴⁶ Schalow, "Kūkai and the Tradition of Male Love," 1992; Fauré, *The Red Thread*, 1998, pp. 233–240.

⁴⁷ For more details, analysis and references see Scherer, "Queering Buddhist Traditions," 2021.

⁴⁸ Hu, "Buddhism and Sexual Orientation," 2017, p. 663.

doubles as a make-up artist has become the international queer face of Japanese Buddhism. Japanese-derived transnational Buddhist movements—such as SGI (Sōka Gakkai International 創価学会インタナショナル), the US American branch of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha (浄土真宗本願寺派 Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha) Pure Land tradition called the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA, 米国仏教団)—count among the most LGBTIQ+ inclusive contemporary forms of Buddhism.

It can be argued that such examples of vocal Buddhist queer-inclusive voices and queer Buddhist visibility are crucial to suicide (self-death) prevention among LGBTOQ+ Buddhists.

5. Buddhist Perspectives on Suicide and LGBTIQ+ Suicidality: Liberatory Practices as Social Justice Action Dharma

Self-completed death and self-killing have been widely debated in Buddhist ethics.⁴⁹ Traditional Buddhist views on self-completed death generally condemn ending one’s own life as an action against the first of the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*), non-harming/-killing (*ahiṃsā*). However, the canonical texts report cases of those who had realized enlightenment (*arhats*) taking their own lives.⁵⁰ Further, corresponding to Durkheim’s category of virtuous “altruistic suicide”, the voluntary death/self-sacrifice of a highly realized being, such as a bodhisattva, for the benefit of others is found in Indic Buddhist texts.⁵¹ Such cases are usually narrated as a sign of accomplished detachment from the body and/or as an ultimate act of generosity (*dāna*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). In East Asia, a tradition of altruistic self-immolation emerged in the reception of, among other scriptures, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (SDP, *Lotus Sūtra*), Chapter 23 (=22 in the Sanskrit versions). This chapter relates the story of the compassionate self-immolation of a bodhisattva called “Pleasant to Behold by All Beings” (Sarvasattvapriyadarśana), who will later become the Buddha “Medicine King” (Bhaiṣajya-rāja).⁵² This scriptural paradigm regained power in modern times as a form of social-activist protest during the Vietnam War. It has further gathered traction since 2008 among Tibetan communities in the Chinese-controlled Tibetan regions and exile.⁵³ For Japan, Mark Blum has identified

⁴⁹ On Buddhism and Suicide see Becker, “Buddhist Views of Suicide,” 1990; Keown, “Suicide, Assisted Suicide,” 1998 (responses: Florida, 1998 and Harvey, 1998); Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 2000, pp. 286–291; Delhey, “Buddhismus und Selbstötung,” 2002; “Zum Verständnis der Selbstötung,” 2006a; “Views on Suicide in Buddhism,” 2006b.

⁵⁰ The following cases are discussed in the Early Buddhist *suttas/sūtras* of the monks Channa (MN 144 SĀ 1266); Vakkali (SN 22, 87 SĀ 1265 EĀ 26, 10) and Godhika (SN 4, 23 [=4, 3, 3] SĀ 1091) see Wiltshire, “The Suicide Problem,” 1983; Lamotte, “Religious Suicide in Early Buddhism,” 1987; on the Channa, see Keown, “Buddhism and Suicide,” 1996; Anālayo, “Channa’s Suicide,” 2010, 125–137; on Vakkali, see Delhey, “Vakkali: A New Interpretation,” 2009; Anālayo, “Vakkali’s Suicide,” 2011; on Godhika see Anālayo, “Vakkali’s Suicide,” 2011, pp. 162–163.

⁵¹ See overview in Blum, “Collective Suicide,” 2009, pp. 142–145.

⁵² Benn, “Where Text Meets Flesh,” 1998; *Burning for the Buddha*, 2007; “The *Lotus Sūtra* and Self-Immolation,” 2009; Kelly, “Self-immolation, Suicide,” 2011; Halkias, “The Self-immolation of Kalanos,” 2015.

⁵³ For Vietnam, see Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed*, 2002, pp. 133–136 and *passim*; for Tibet see Buffetrille, “Self-Immolation in Tibet,” 2012.

three legitimization discourses around self-killing:⁵⁴ 1) the Indic Buddhist ambivalence around suicide; 2) suicide as a means of entering the Pure Land (*jigai ōjō* 自害往生); and 3) the Confucian traditions around “loyalty self-killing” (*junshi* 殉死), such as a samurai’s ritual cutting open of the belly (*seppuku* 切腹).

For the specific question around queer mental distress, suicidality, and self-completed murders/deaths, the potentially ambiguous Buddhist ethical views on self-completed deaths play a less pronounced role; from the perspective of “Buddhist liberation dharmology” the key to preventing any of the violent mental imprints and the wider suffering associated with self-killing is, indeed, changing societal and individual attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people.

Following on from Roger Corless’ ‘Queer Dharmology’ and Jose Cabezón’s “Buddhist Theology of Sexuality,” I propose rethinking Buddhist perspectives on LGBTIQ+ discrimination and suicidality by mindfully accepting the contextual limitations of scriptural and traditional prejudices, carefully re-reading scriptural evidence, and in the manner of public dharmology, re-applying into contemporary contexts the liberatory impulses for inclusion and social justice. Those marginalized and suffering deserve deep and mindful acceptance and loving action by Buddhists to aid in alleviating both individual pain and systemic discrimination and suffering.

The pivotal starting point for queer Buddhist liberation is to acknowledge the societal and structural dimensions of *karma* (業 *yè*)—action—and to reaffirm karma’s relation to the Right View (*samyak-dṛṣṭi* 正見) of no-self (*anātman* 無我) and, more pronounced in Mahāyāna philosophy, of the emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā* 空) of inherent existence of all phenomena, including persons (*pudgaladharmanairātmya* 人法無我).⁵⁵ Where traditional and vernacular Buddhism Traditions accommodate queerness, it is usually done without challenging the simplistic notion of ‘bad karma.’ For instance, in Myanmar, while Ashin Asayar’s homophobic and violent-inciting reaction to the gay Burmese suicide might constitute the extreme of the spectrum; yet even the most open-minded traditional Burmese Buddhist monks permitting the *kaṭhina* donations by organized, openly gay Burmese practitioners practice their queer-inclusiveness with reference to notions of ‘bad karma’ which needs to be overcome.⁵⁶ Queer-inclusive Buddhist thinkers such as Ven. Chao-Hwei and Phra Waradhammo stress the importance of challenging deeply ingrained simplistic views on ‘bad’ *karma* in relation to LGBTIQ+ subjectivities and belongings. Acknowledging the deadly force of societal stigmatization of LGBTIQ+ people, Ven. Chao-Hwei quotes the popular Chinese saying “I did not kill Boren, but Boren is dead because of me.”⁵⁷ This saying is a quote from the *Biography of Zhou Yi* (周顛傳) in volume 69 of the *Book of Jin* (晉書, compiled 648 CE). Yi (alias: 伯仁 *Bórén*) was murdered by his cousin while his friend stood by and did nothing. The saying in this context points to the (in Buddhist terms: karmic) responsibility of those

⁵⁴ Blum, “Collective Suicide,” 2009, p. 140 and in detail 142–153.

⁵⁵ This is the terminology used in the traditions of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (T. 670 & 672) and *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (T. 677).

⁵⁶ Thant, “Choosing to Be LGBT,” 2017, pp. 17-20.

⁵⁷ 我不殺伯仁，伯仁因我而死 *wǒ bù shā bó rén, bó rén yīn wǒ ér sǐ*; Chao-Hwei, “Why must LGBT,” 2006.

who do not stop the killings: the LGBTIQ+ self-deaths due to systemic societal oppression. Indeed, simplistic *karma*-bashing constitutes the core of Buddhist anti-LGBTIQ+ *dharma*-splaining, spiritual bypassing, and spiritual harming. Despite the complex tenets of no-self and emptiness, “past actions” that led to phenomena and experiences today (colloquially denoted as “past karma”) often become in popular simplistic Buddhist discourse judgmentally essentialized (e.g., as “gay”, “disabled” etc.). They are frozen upon an individual without any regard for the deeper philosophical understanding that the manifestation of any “birth” and re-becoming in Buddhist thought is necessarily an expression of *continuity without identity*. The empirical person or subject in their current and fluid manifestation simply expresses karmic continuations of past possibilities and is personally neither accountable, nor blamable, nor to be morally judged for past “lives.” Any human manifestation needs to be examined as a precious opportunity for subject-contextual merit rather than regarding every person as duly limited and blueprinted by pre-scripted societal expectations. Societal scripts present in Buddhist societies and traditions are accessories and contexts of the *dharma*; they are not the *dharma* itself. This is also true in the case of the *patriarchal nucleolar heteronorm*, more theoretically discussed above, which formulates the concrete and normative expectation on Buddhist lay people to establish male-dominated, gender-binary, heterosexual procreative-reproductive relationships and hierarchical clan/family structures (i.e., compulsory cisgender, heterosexuality and procreative monogamous marriages). Notable Buddhist feminists such as Rita Gross and her student Hsiao-Lan Hu have successfully challenged the patriarchal paradigms in Buddhist traditions.⁵⁸ Here, Queer Theory is helpful for excavating and challenging harmful societal scripts around sex/gender/sexuality normativities (and beyond). Judith Butler’s notion of performativity⁵⁹ is particularly receptive to Buddhist philosophical readings. Both Butler’s Queer Theory and Buddhist philosophies insist on a non-essentialist view of human identity and stress the context-dependent ever-changing nature of human experiences and their negotiations of relationships. In Buddhist terms, we might rephrase this as the condition-dependent ever-changing nature of *samsāric* experiences and their inter/co-dependent arisings.

Where these scripts cause, contribute, and/or lead to suffering and self-completed deaths, the act of suicide cannot conveniently be located in the individual, at least not exclusively. Stigmatization and marginalization feature as decisive factors in the contextual nexus of decision-making and agency.

The various Buddhist *karma* theories stress the immaterial and ethical dimension of action as opposed to material and merely ritualistic-transactional aspects. Hence, *karma* in Buddhist thought is usually fully “ethicized”⁶⁰ and there is a continuous need

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 1993 and Hu, *This Worldly Nibbāna*, 2011.

⁵⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990.

⁶⁰ Cp. Ramanujan’s categories in Doniger, “Karma and Rebirth,” 1980, p. xi. Vedic pre-Upaniṣadic ritualistic *karma* theory and the determinist Ājīvika concept of rebirth lack ethicization of *karma*, which first occurs in the Upaniṣads e.g., in *Bṛhad Ārāṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3, 2, 3: *pūnyah pūnyena kārmaṇā bhavati pāpāḥ pāpēna* “merit is produced by a meritorious action, demerit by a demeritorious action”.

to re-ethicize karma for social justice,⁶¹ i.e., to challenge popular karma discourses in vernacular Buddhist traditions on aspects of reductionist individual determinism and the lack of complexity and actor (intention) focus. Such challenges to prevalent determinist and reductionist notions around the relationship between cause and effect (*karma-phala-saṃbandha*) stand in the long tradition of philosophical discussions of Buddhist *karma*. The popular notion of any linearity and personal ownership of karma was rejected early on (cp. *Milindapañhā*, ii. 1).⁶² One of the most famous philosophical refutations is found in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (17, 6-12).⁶³ It is good to be reminded that *karman* (in its causal aspect) is defined as “intention” (*cetanā*), e.g., in the *Deep Penetration of Wisdom Sutta (Nibbedhikasutta)* of the Aṅguttara-Nikāya:⁶⁴ *cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi* “Monks, I state that karma is intention.”

In fact, Buddhist “karma” is intention-dependent to such a degree that accidental or even ignorant actions cause no offence (*Milindapañhā*, iv. 2. 27) and/or that non-intentional karma does not cause grave negative results (Harivarman, *Satyasiddhiśāstra* 2, 84).⁶⁵ On the other hand, *cetanā* as *karma* means also that those who plan, preach, and practice (“think–say–do”)⁶⁶ exclusion, even if they do so in the name of (ill-understood) *dharma*, co-produce, and share in the karma of the LGBTIQ+ experience of concrete suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*). It is, therefore, an ethical imperative for Buddhists to actively co-create inclusive societal parameters and to oppose those societal scripts that cause discrimination and systemic suffering.

This can easily happen within the wide frameworks of early (*sūtric*) lay Buddhist sexual ethics—with the focus on equality of power balance, non-coercion, and respect for existing commitments among adult partners—rather than relying on later-added interpretations that merely conformed to prevalent societal prejudices.⁶⁷ Equally, the Right View on the inherent emptiness of phenomena, their interdependence, and processuality and fluidity should allow a truly non-judgmental acceptance of gender performances, expression, subjectivities, and belonging beyond the dominant male–female binary, particularly in view of the Buddha's pragmatic reaction to sex-changing monastics. Trans* Buddhists can utilize the powerful paradigms of sex/gender-changing realized beings⁶⁸ to recognize both the inherent emptiness of gender categories and to accept the occurrence of physical-mental gender incongruence or fluidity as simply one of the experiences that occur naturally in *samsāra*.⁶⁹

⁶¹ See Watts, *Rethinking Karma*, 2009.

⁶² Cp. e.g., Bayer, *The Theory of Karman*, 2010, pp. 46-47.

⁶³ See Kragh, *Early Buddhist Theories*, 2006.

⁶⁴ Cp. AN iii 415, cp. Abhidharmakośa iv, 1b.

⁶⁵ This feature of Early Buddhist karma theory was severely criticised by the Jainas (e.g., *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* 2.6.26-8), cp. Krishan, *The Doctrine of Karma*, 1997, pp. 62-66.

⁶⁶ Corresponding to the factors of karma production body, speech, and mind (*kāya-vāk-citta* 身口意); cp. the popular Fo Guang Shan motto *Do Good Things, Speak Good Words, Think Good Thoughts* 做好事、說好話、存好心.

⁶⁷ See Scherer, “Variant Dharma,” 2016, p. 260-266. On emerging sexual ethics in contemporary western /American Buddhism see Kaza, “Finding Safe Harbor,” 2004.

⁶⁸ See Scherer, “Gender Transformed,” 2006; on the utilization of Guayin as male-to-female trans* Buddhist icon, see Bailey, “Embracing the Icon,” 2009.

⁶⁹ Cp. Miln. 267 *Dilemmas*, division 7.4 where sex-change is listed among the phenomena regularly occurring in the

6. Conclusion: Five Steps Towards Healing Queer Buddhist Systemic Suffering

I have suggested that Queer Dharmology or rather any Socially Engaged Buddhist Liberation Praxis might operate from a fivefold parameter:⁷⁰

1. reflexivity and positionality
2. engaged hermeneutics for the oppressed
3. (re-)conceptualization of Buddhist thought
4. (re-)signification of paradigms for the liberation of the marginalized
5. application of liberatory practices

Applying these five steps to the question of queer suicidality, we can note first (i) that Buddhist care for LGBTIQ+ lives needs to start from a position of reflection on our own intersectional privileges and disadvantages and reflect on our altruistic intention as Buddhist practitioners. Standing by while our friends complete the murder committed through structural oppression is not an option. Therefore, we need to start to *queer*—challenge— the harmful karma reductionism that abounds in popular and vernacular Buddhist contexts, as exemplified above. We need to do so textual-hermeneutically (ii) by re-reading, contextualizing, acknowledging discriminatory hegemonic scripts and excavating liberatory and ‘queer’ voices; we then need to transpose and reframe the findings conceptually (iii) so that the discourse that provides a dharmic justification for the self-completed murders ceases. Universal altruistic soteriology needs to be highlighted above oppressive temporal and cultural norm scripts which are merely accessories of the dharma. (iv) Instead of justifying the individual onus of marginalization, stigmatization, mental distress, and suicidal ideation caused by systemic oppression we need to excavate queer Buddhist paradigms and role models and provide and support queer visibility of openly LGBTIQ+ Buddhist teachers, leaders, and practitioners so that (v) inclusive spaces and practices can emerge—as evidenced in the work and communities of Ven. Chao-Wei’s, Phra Waradhammo, Lama Rod Owens, and increasing numbers of other influential Buddhist voices.

It is my radical engaged Buddhist view that all those who do not proactively work for social justice share in the karmic consequences of the suffering that social injustice brings. Where we are placed in a position of power and influence that we can counter oppressive normativities and scripts, doing so is our responsibility and privilege; thus, we become vehicles of Bodhisattva activity, true to the universal aspiration (*praṇidhāna*) of tireless altruism in selfless gratitude to the precious opportunity afforded to us. To lessen and to heal the systemic suffering of the marginalized constitutes meritorious and liberatory action dharma.

world.

⁷⁰ Scherer, “Queering Buddhist Traditions,” 2021.

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Mrigendra PRATAP

The Emergence and Evolution of the “Neither Monk nor Layman” View in Shinran,
Ambedkar, and Sangharakshita's Work

❖ *Articles 2* ❖

**The Emergence and Evolution of the “Neither Monk
nor Layman” View in Shinran, Ambedkar, and
Sangharakshita’s Work**

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Abstract

In the annals of Buddhist history, the terminology of “neither monk nor layman” first found articulation through the teachings of Shinran (1173-1263), the venerable founder of *Jōdo Shinshū*, a prominent Buddhist tradition in Japan. Notably, during the 20th century, this very notion resurfaced in the modern context in the discourses of two eminent Buddhist leaders, B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) and Ugyen Sangharakshita (1925-2018), who adeptly incorporated it into their works and propagated its relevance within their respective Buddhist movements. This scholarly inquiry explores the historical origins and evolution of the “neither monk nor layman” view within the *Jōdo Shinshū* tradition. It also examines how this view has developed in modern Japanese Buddhism. Additionally, this study explores similar ideas within contemporary Indian Buddhist movements, particularly those promoted by B. R. Ambedkar and Ugyen Sangharakshita. The analytical foundation of this article is built upon the meticulous examination of English translations of Shinran’s primary treatises and supplementary scholarly works related to his literary corpus. Moreover, this study draws upon primary and secondary source materials derived from the oeuvres of Ambedkar and Sangharakshita, enhancing the comprehensive understanding of the term “neither monk nor layman.”

The Emergence and Evolution of the “Neither Monk nor Layman” View in Shinran, Ambedkar, and Sangharakshita’s Work *

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Keywords: Jōdo Shinshū, neither monk nor layman, Shinran, Ambedkar, Sangharakshita

1. Introduction

Within the annals of Buddhist history, the term “neither monk nor layman” can be attributed to Shinran (1173-1263),¹ the esteemed progenitor of *Jōdo Shinshū*, an influential Buddhist tradition originating in Japan.² Shinran’s teachings dispelled the notion that a layman’s life represented an impediment to the pursuit of spiritual progress, laying the foundation for the enduring idea of “neither monk nor layman” within the *Jōdo Shinshū* tradition.³ This innovative term, which essentially posits the equivalency of monastic and lay practitioners, has, over time, become a hallmark of Modern Buddhism in Japan, India, and the broader Buddhist world.

It is paramount to recognize that this paradigm of “neither monk nor layman” did not remain confined to the precincts of *Jōdo Shinshū*. It found resonance and reinterpretation in diverse Buddhist contexts, epitomized by the discerning insights of two towering Buddhist leaders, B. R. Ambedkar and Ugyen Sangharakshita. In his profound exploration of Buddhist principles, Ambedkar advanced a concept akin to “Japanese married Buddhist priests.”⁴ When Ambedkar embraced Buddhism with millions of followers on October 14, 1956, we observed a shift where lay Buddhist movements gained more popularity than monastic Buddhism in India.

At the same time, Ugyen Sangharakshita deftly employed the “neither monastic

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¹ Shinran, *The Collected Works of Shinran* (vol. II), p. 11.

² Hongwanji, *Jodo Shinshu A Guide*, p. 45.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

⁴ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (Vol.17, Part I), p. 447.

nor lay” term in his doctrinal treatises and endeavored to weave it seamlessly into the tapestry of his Buddhist movement. Sangharakshita has made an invaluable contribution to the contemporary world by creating the modern *saṅgha*. This community transcends traditional distinctions between monastic and lay life, making it accessible and relevant in today’s context. Typically, the term “*saṅgha*” denotes the Buddhist monastic Order, separate from the laity (*upāsaka*). Nevertheless, Sangharakshita’s modern *saṅgha*, represented by the Triratna Buddhist Community, is well-suited for Buddhists of all walks of life, regardless of their chosen lifestyle.⁵

This article begins by exploring the view of “neither monk nor layman” in *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhist literature and its relevance to the ideas of Shinran, Ambedkar, and Sangharakshita. Secondly, it aims to examine the emergence and development of the “neither monk nor layman” view in *Jōdo Shinshū* and its parallel in modern Japanese and Indian Buddhism.

2. The Historical Context of the “Neither Monk nor Layman” View in Buddhist Literature

In a superficial examination, the view of “neither monk nor layman” may lead to misconceptions, such as equating it solely with married or meat-eating monks. However, this terminology underscores a fundamental principle that lay life is not intrinsically inferior to monastic life in terms of comprehending and practicing the teachings of the Buddha. A closer examination of the historical establishment of monastic and lay communities reveals that the Buddha accorded nearly equal significance to the lay *saṅgha* during his era.

While it is often assumed that the Buddha focused more on forming a monastic *saṅgha*, it becomes evident that establishing a devoted lay following was equally imperative. It is documented in the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinayapiṭaka* that the news of wealthy merchant Yasa’s ordination reverberated throughout the city of Benares. Subsequently, four householder merchant friends⁶ and their fifty friends⁷ approached the Buddha, and they all joined the *saṅgha* and attained the *arahantship*.

Nonetheless, the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinayapiṭaka* does not provide any details regarding the familial background of the fifty-four merchants who attained the status of *arahants*. It stands to reason that the family members of these fifty-four perfected ones (*arhats*), who were close associates of Venerable Yasa, likely sought an audience with the Buddha. It is plausible that the Buddha imparted similar teachings and instructions to these family members, akin to his guidance provided to Venerable Yasa’s family.

According to the *Vinayapiṭaka*, there is a documented account of Venerable Yasa’s family approaching the Buddha and receiving his teachings.⁸ Remarkably, these teachings fostered a profound comprehension of the Buddha and his doctrinal teachings and instigated a transformative process within them. Importantly, it is noteworthy that

⁵ Pratap, *A Critical Study of Modern Buddhist Literature of Venerable Sangharakshita*, p. 203.

⁶ Horner, (tr.). *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-piṭaka)*, vol. IV, p. 27.

⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

Venerable Yasa’s parents and former wife did not express opposition to his decision to ordain as a monk (*bhikkhu*). They entered the “stream-enterer” (*sotāpanna*), leading to *nibbāna* after listening to the Buddha. They have eradicated the first three fetters (*saṃyojana*) that bind beings to the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). This event holds substantial significance in providing valuable insights into the Buddha’s pedagogical methods for imparting the teachings (*dhamma*). This historical account underscores the vital role played by committed lay followers in the early propagation of Buddhism, highlighting their equal potential for spiritual attainment alongside their monastic counterparts.⁹

A pivotal aspect is that a family unit represents an integral component of the broader societal structure. When a family embraces and begins to adhere to the teachings, exemplified by the observance of principles such as the five precepts, it is not only the family that reaps the rewards. Instead, the broader society also stands to benefit significantly. In this manner, the socially engaged facet of the Buddha’s teachings comes to fruition and manifests its impact on the collective welfare of society.

Hence, it is entirely plausible that the Buddha maintained a substantial contingent of dedicated lay adherents who provided unwavering support to both the Buddha himself and the monastic community (*saṅgha*). While the Buddha directed a significant portion of his attention and teachings toward the committed *arhats* and monastic community, it is evident that he did not neglect the lay followers. Instead, it appears that the Buddha placed a heightened seriousness on those followers who committed to supporting the monastic community (*saṅgha*) throughout their lives.

During the era of the Buddha, historical accounts chronicled in both *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhist literature illuminate the presence of exceptional lay followers. One such exemplar is found in the *Citta-saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, where the householder Citta is portrayed as imparting doctrinal teachings to esteemed gatherings of senior monks and lay disciples of the Buddha. “The portrait of Citta we find in this chapter evinces a genuine historical personality, a layman with a wide knowledge of the teaching, deep experience in meditation, sharp wisdom, and a mischievous sense of humour.”¹⁰ Citta, a layperson, earned the distinction from the Buddha as the foremost male lay disciple among those “proficient in expounding the Dhamma” (*dhammakathika*).¹¹

An illustrative instance from *Mahāyāna* scripture, namely the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, serves to exemplify the reticence of *Bodhisattvas* and *Arhats* in approaching the household of Vimalakīrti, a layperson distinguished for his profound understanding of the *Buddhadharma*.¹² In this narrative, both Citta and Vimalakīrti, despite their non-monastic status, emerge as luminaries whose wisdom surpasses that of ordained monks and lay individuals. Furthermore, this thematic strand of “neither monk nor layman” is discernible in various Buddhist literary works, wherein eminent lay practitioners, including Citta and Vimalakīrti, offer compelling embodiments of this view. These

⁹ Horner, (tr.). *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-piṭaka)*, vol. IV, pp. 21-28.

¹⁰ Bodhi, (tr.). *The Connected Discourse (Saṃyutta Nikāya)*, vol. 2, pp. 1130-1131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1130.

¹² Robert, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*, pp. 24-41.

remarkable householders exemplify the view that transcends conventional monastic and lay distinctions, resonating across diverse epochs in Buddhist history, from antiquity to the medieval and modern eras.

3. The Evolution of “Neither Monk nor Layman” in *Jōdo Shinshū*

Shinran was born into the Hino family in 1173 in Kyoto. At age nine, Shinran commenced his monastic journey within the *Tendai* sect at Mt. Hiei, Kyoto. Despite two decades of dedicated practice as a monk, he still needs to realize *Buddhahood*. In 1201, Shinran decided to depart from Mt. Hiei and undertook a solitary retreat lasting one hundred days at Rokkaku-dō in Kyoto. During this seclusion, he experienced a revelatory dream featuring Prince Shōtoku, who conveyed that the *Bodhisattva* Kannon would serve as Shinran’s spiritual companion and guide him toward Pure Land Buddhism.¹³

Galvanized by this visionary encounter, Shinran became a disciple of Honen (1133-1212), a former *Tendai* monk who founded the inaugural Pure Land school (*Jōdo Shu* in Japan). Hōnen’s teachings, characterized as non-orthodox, garnered criticism from the *Tendai* sect and other Buddhist denominations. The repercussions of this criticism became pronounced in 1207 when the ruling authorities compelled Hōnen and his followers, including Shinran, to renounce their monastic affiliations. As part of the punitive measures, the status of monkhood was rescinded, and they were subjected to exile. This pivotal event marked a turning point in Shinran’s spiritual journey, setting the stage for the subsequent development of his distinctive interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism within *Jōdo Shinshū*.

Shinran introduced the term “neither monk nor layman” during a pivotal period when his monastic status was revoked as part of efforts to suppress the *nembutsu*¹⁴ teaching.¹⁵ During Shinran’s exile, deep reflection led him to adopt the self-reference “Gutoku,” signifying an “ignorant, stubble-haired one.” Positioned neither as a recognized monk by the Imperial Court nor an ordinary layperson, Shinran embraced the *nembutsu* truth independent of courtly or religious affiliations.¹⁶ During this phase, Shinran chose to live among ordinary people, an experience that afforded him profound insights into their spiritual needs and aspirations. Subsequently, Shinran consciously decided to enter into marriage and establish a family. Remarkably, even after the conclusion of his exile, he opted not to return to monastic life. Instead, through innovative thinking, a distinctive lifestyle, and an evolving religious identity, he forged a unique path within Pure Land Buddhism (*Jodo kyo*), *Jōdo Shinshū*, which translates to “The True Essence of Pure Land Buddhism.” Shinran’s profound belief that lay life presented no

¹³ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism*, p. 50.

¹⁴ The term “*nembutsu*,” or “*Namu-amida-butsu*,” carries multiple meanings in Buddhist history, derived from various interpretations of “*nen*” (meditating, thinking, pronouncing). These interpretations encompass meditating on the Buddha’s features, maintaining thoughts of the Buddha, and vocalizing the Buddha’s name. Honen emphasizes *nembutsu* as the vocalization of the Name, considering it the core of the Pure Land path. Shinran extends this, teaching that reciting the Name is synonymous with the Name itself (the call of *Amida*), actively working within individuals and awakening *shinjin* (deep faith) in them. As individuals realize *shinjin*, it naturally results in the spontaneous recitation of the *nembutsu* (Shinran, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. II, p. 195).

¹⁵ Hongwanji, *Jodo Shinshu A Guide*, p. 45.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

intrinsic impediment to spiritual advancement was central to this new paradigm.

Shinran realized that, as a layperson, he possessed more opportunities to disseminate the *nembutsu* teaching than a monk confined to the confines of a monastery.¹⁷ Shinran’s deliberate choice to marry and identify himself as “neither monk nor layman” represented a pioneering path toward establishing a non-monastic variant of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. This conceptual framework also served as a means of addressing the dual challenges of embodying the ideal qualities of a priest while remaining a fully engaged member of society.¹⁸ By adopting this distinctive identity, he fostered a deeper connection with ordinary individuals, effectively bridging the gap between himself and his audience. Shinran’s approach entailed living among the people, emulating their way of life, and, in doing so, he effectively propagated *Amida* Buddhism. It is irrefutable that *nembutsu* teaching proved exceedingly productive within this context.

Nonetheless, Shinran’s deliberate self-identification as “neither a monk nor a layman” held profound implications and resonated significantly within the consciousness of the populace. As a result, individuals from diverse backgrounds, without regard to social discrimination, were drawn to the fold of *Jōdo Shinshū*. Following Shinran’s passing, Kakunyo (1270-1351) assumed a central role in establishing the Hongan-ji Temple, overseeing and formalizing the development of *Jōdo Shinshū*. Subsequently, Rennyo (1415-1499) undertook a transformative role in revitalizing the Hongan-ji Temple and laying the foundational framework for the modern Hongan-ji Order,¹⁹ which burgeoned into one of the largest Buddhist sects in Japan.²⁰ As Jaffe aptly observed, “In contrast to clergy in many other Buddhist denominations, Shin clerics traditionally embraced marital life and openly practiced the patrilineal inheritance of the *dōjō*, which functioned as the epicenters of Shin religious activity.”²¹

“Neither Monk nor Layman” challenges the conventional binary distinction observed in many Buddhist traditions between monastic clergy and lay non-clergy. Within traditional Buddhist contexts, a pronounced demarcation exists between monastic practitioners, comprising monks and nuns, who commit themselves to religious pursuits within the confines of monastic life and lay practitioners, who navigate secular existence while concurrently engaging in Buddhist practices. Monastic adherents adhere to stringent codes of conduct, engage in intensive meditation, and frequently forsake worldly attachments. Conversely, lay practitioners simultaneously manage familial, occupational, and worldly commitments, varying in the degree to which they incorporate Buddhist practices into their lives.

The notion of “Neither Monk nor Layman” challenges this traditional bifurcation by underscoring that one’s spiritual journey is not exclusively contingent upon external roles or social standing. Within the framework of *Jōdo Shinshū*, it is posited that all sentient beings, irrespective of their monastic or lay roles, find themselves equally

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁸ Borup, *Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Religions*, p. 126.

¹⁹ Blum, Yasutomi, *Rennyo and the Roots of Modern Japanese Buddhism*, p. 164.

²⁰ Dobbins, *The Biography of Shinran: Apotheosis of a Japanese Buddhist Visionary*, p. 192.

²¹ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism*, p. 37.

enveloped by the boundless compassion of *Amida* Buddha and can attain liberation through genuine entrustment in *Amida*'s vow.²²

Shinran notably accentuated the inherent inability of individuals to attain enlightenment through their endeavors, asserting that it is solely through the benevolence of *Amida* Buddha that they may experience rebirth in the Pure Land—a realm uniquely conducive to the realization of enlightenment. This doctrine effectively diminishes the significance of one's monastic or lay status while accentuating the importance of cultivating profound faith and unwavering trust in *Amida*'s vow.²³

Essentially, the concept of “Neither Monk nor Layman” within the context of *Jōdo Shinshū* underscores the fundamental insignificance of conventional distinctions and divisions when confronted with the boundless compassion of *Amida* Buddha and the journey toward enlightenment. It posits that every individual, irrespective of their societal roles, possesses the inherent capacity to achieve liberation through the transformative influence of *Amida*'s vow and the sincerity of their entrusting heart, often referred to as “*shinjin*.”²⁴ This perspective challenges hierarchical paradigms and fosters a broader, more inclusive, and egalitarian framework for approaching spiritual practice and the quest for awakening.

4. The View of “Neither Monk nor Layman” in Modern Japan

During the Meiji period (1868–1912), Japan underwent a profound transformation as it opened its doors to the world and grappled with the influences of Western culture and technology. The Meiji Restoration sought to reconfigure Buddhist institutions, altering monastic norms and precepts while bolstering native *Shinto* practices to serve nationalist aspirations. In a pivotal development in 1872, the “*nikujiki saitai*” law was enacted, which stipulated that “From now on, Buddhist clerics shall be free to eat meat, marry, grow their hair, and so on. Furthermore, they are permitted to wear ordinary clothing when not engaged in religious activities.”²⁵ Notably, one of the pivotal figures involved in the decriminalization of “*nikujiki saitai*” was Ōtori Sessō (1814–1904), representing the *Sōtō* school of Buddhism. Jaffe's analysis underscores that Ōtori Sessō's endeavors aimed to harmonize Buddhist practice with the imperatives of modernity and human adaptability.²⁶

Notably, this legal development was met with diverse responses from Buddhist leadership. Figures like Fukuda Gyōkai, Shaku Unshō, and Nishiari Bokusan initially opposed this law. Conversely, others endeavored to reconcile Buddhist doctrine and practice with modernist discourses encompassing science, sexuality, individual rights, and nationalism.²⁷ The ongoing debate surrounding the “*nikujiki saitai*” law reverberates within Japanese society.

However, in contemporary Japan, decriminalizing “*nikujiki saitai*,” along with the

²² Shinran, *The Collected Works of Shinran* (vol. II), pp. 84-85.

²³ Hongwanji, *Jodo Shinshu A Guide*, p. 73.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁵ Jaffe, *Neither Monk nor Layman: Clerical Marriage in Modern Japanese Buddhism*, p. 72.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

practice of marriage by Buddhist clerics, has become a defining feature of Japanese Buddhism. Remarkably, approximately 90 percent of the Buddhist clergy in Japan are married.²⁸ This paradigm shift demonstrates how the idea of “neither monk nor layman,” initially introduced by Shinran in Japan, has served as a wellspring of inspiration, directly or indirectly, prompting individuals to align with this concept during the modern era.

5. The Emergence of the View of “Neither Monk nor Layman” in Modern Buddhism

In the mid-19th century, traditional Buddhist societies found themselves confronted with the challenges posed by colonialism and the arrival of Christian missionaries, and in response to these profound shifts, scholars, monks, and leaders representing various sects within traditional Buddhism initiated efforts to harness the capabilities and resources of their respective traditions. These endeavors were aimed at effectively addressing the encroachment of modernity and safeguarding their religious heritage. Consequently, this period marked the genesis of what we now recognize as Modern Buddhism.²⁹

It is noteworthy that Modern Buddhism did not seek to eliminate monastic concerns. Instead, it excelled in narrowing the gap between monastic and lay adherents, as evidenced by the notable increase in lay individuals actively engaging in the study and interpretation of Buddhist scriptures, as well as the practice of Buddhism itself. In this manner, Modern Buddhism shifted its focus, making the layperson the central figure, as opposed to the traditional emphasis on the monastic community.

6. Modern Buddhism in India

Following a prolonged period of obscurity, Buddhism experienced a renaissance as archaeologists and scholars began unearthing its concealed treasures in India during the mid-nineteenth century. This intellectual and archaeological revival set the stage for Anāgārika Dharmapāla, a missionary hailing from Sri Lanka, who arrived at Bodh Gaya in 1891, spearheading an active resurgence of Buddhism within India. From 1891 to 1955, the revival movement progressed at a measured pace, gradually gaining momentum. However, it took a monumental leap forward when B. R. Ambedkar and millions of followers embraced Buddhism on October 14, 1956. After this watershed moment, it became evident that lay Buddhist movements gained ascendancy and popularity in India, eclipsing the prominence of monastic Buddhism.

7. B. R. Ambedkar’s Path to Buddhism

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, renowned as Dr. Babāsāheb Ambedkar, was born on April 14, 1891, into a modest yet educated *Mahāra* family, formerly categorized as untouchables in the Indian caste system. Ambedkar’s intellectual journey unfolded across two significant phases: first, his extensive studies in India, and later, his scholarly pursuits in

²⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁹ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p. 7.

the United States and England, spanning the years 1908 to 1923.³⁰ This period is a testament to his comprehensive intellectual development, during which he acquired profound knowledge encompassing Buddhism and global history, including Japan.

Upon returning to India, Ambedkar initiated a series of movements to challenge the entrenched practice of untouchability and the systemic injustices ingrained in Indian society. He launched campaigns advocating for the rights of untouchables to access Hindu places of worship, exemplified by the Kalaram Temple in Nashik, and to utilize public tanks and wells, notably the Chowdar Tank in Mahad.³¹ In 1927, he posited that *Brahmins* were unlikely to rebel against the caste system, given the privileges and pre-eminence it bestowed upon them within the hierarchical structure of Hinduism. Ambedkar said, “It would be too much to expect them to resign all their privileges as the ‘Samurais’ of Japan did.”³²

Ambedkar’s astute observations extended beyond the boundaries of India. In his 1945 work, “What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables,” he provided an in-depth examination of the four social classes in Japanese society, offering the opinion that the governing class in India was in stark contrast to its Japanese counterpart, asserting that the latter embraced a more egalitarian ethos.³³ These statements offer compelling evidence of Ambedkar’s familiarity with Japanese history and admiration for its societal structures.

In 1935, recognizing the insurmountable challenges in reforming the restrictive, unjust, and illogical aspects of Hinduism, B. R. Ambedkar made the pivotal decision to disengage from Hinduism and embark on a quest to identify an authentic spiritual path.³⁴ Notably, Ambedkar convened a conference, known as the Presidency *Mahāra* Conference, on May 31, 1936, to deliberate upon the declaration of his intent to convert, a declaration he had initially made in 1935. During this conference, he delivered a renowned address titled “What Way to Liberation,” citing a notable passage from the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*.³⁵ Concluding his speech, Ambedkar invoked the guidance of the Buddha to his disciple Anand, encouraging his followers to “be their refuge, with no other refuge.”³⁶ This reference serves as a testament to Ambedkar’s profound understanding of Buddhism and illuminates his contemplation regarding which religious path would be most suitable for himself and his followers.

Between 1948 and 1950, it became evident that B. R. Ambedkar had firmly resolved to embrace Buddhism as his chosen path, excluding any consideration of other religions. In 1948, Ambedkar took the initiative to republish P. L. Narasu’s work, titled “The Essence of Buddhism,” and composed a preface in which he lauded Narasu’s insightful comprehension of Buddhism.³⁷ He also commended Narasu’s active involvement in the “National Fund and Industrial Association,” an organization dedicated

³⁰ Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, pp. 51-52.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³² Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 17 Part I), p. 23.

³³ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 9), pp. 225-226.

³⁴ Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, pp. 60-61.

³⁵ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 17 Part III), p. 147.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 17, Part II), p. 86.

to assisting students aspiring to pursue advanced technical education abroad.³⁸

Notably, Ambedkar praises Narasu’s understanding of Buddhism and active participation in the “National Fund and Industrial Association,” which helped students particularly drawn to Japan.³⁹ This nation appealed to aspiring students eager to acquire expertise in various small-scale industries and manufacturing processes. These pursuits encompassed areas such as soap production, enameling techniques, paint manufacturing, and other related endeavors.⁴⁰ This reference underscores the prevailing enthusiasm of the era for acquiring technical knowledge and skills in Japan, which played a significant role in Ambedkar’s intellectual journey and his growing affinity for Buddhism.⁴¹

It becomes evident that B. R. Ambedkar developed his comprehension of Buddhism with the primary aim of revitalizing it within the contemporary context during the 1950s. His awareness extended to Japanese society and modern Buddhist scholars and leaders, both in India and across the globe, whether through direct or indirect channels. Ambedkar’s authorship of the preface to Narasu’s book, “The Essence of Buddhism,” is a notable instance of his engagement with modern Buddhist literature.⁴² Additionally, Anāgārika Dharmapāla had previously advocated for using this text in Ceylon, further illustrating its influence within the Buddhist community.⁴³

The dissemination of Buddhist thought was connected to modern Buddhist leaders from the USA, India, and Japan, where D.T. Suzuki, a disciple of Shāku Soen, translated Narasu’s text into Japanese. This translated work eventually found its place within the curriculum of the Tokyo Imperial University.⁴⁴ Notably, D.T. Suzuki’s intellectual development had been significantly shaped by his studies with Paul Carus in La Salle. Many of Suzuki’s perspectives on topics, such as the Compatibility of Buddhism and Science, as well as the absence of ritual and the supernatural in Zen, were influenced by the teachings of Paul Carus.⁴⁵ Dwight Goddard, in turn, dedicated his work, “A Buddhist Bible,” to D. T. Suzuki. Ambedkar displayed a comprehensive knowledge of the writings of modern Buddhist scholars, including Paul Carus’s “The Gospel of Buddha” (1894) and Dwight Goddard’s “A Buddhist Bible” (1932).

Sangharakshita, a prominent figure in Modern Buddhism, identified several noteworthy similarities between Paul Carus’s “The Gospel of Buddha” and B. R. Ambedkar’s *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.⁴⁶ This alignment of ideas is further underscored by including Dwight Goddard’s name in the epilogue of *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.⁴⁷ This interconnectivity among Modern Buddhist leaders is symbolic of the reciprocal influence they exerted on each other’s literary works, philosophical

³⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 17, Part II), pp. 86-88.

⁴³ Narasu, *Essence of Buddhism*, p. vii.

⁴⁴ Donald, *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, p. 147.

⁴⁷ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 11), p. 597.

outlooks, and activities, finding inspiration in the contributions of their peers.

B. R. Ambedkar profoundly understood a pivotal hallmark of modern Buddhism: its orientation towards the laity. This orientation, which emphasizes the active participation of lay individuals in Buddhist practice and dissemination, aligns well with the needs and sensibilities of contemporary Indian society, rendering it more suitable and palatable within this modern context.

7.1 The Idea of “Japanese Married Buddhist Priests” in Ambedkar’s Writings and Movement

In the writings and movement of Ambedkar, the concept of married Buddhist priests emerges as a significant idea. In 1950, Ambedkar proposed a “three-step formula” for spreading Buddhism in the modern world. These steps encompassed:

- (i) The creation of a Buddhist Bible containing the fundamental tenets of Buddhism.
- (ii) The restructuring of the organizational framework and the redefinition of objectives within the *Bhikkhu Saṅgha*.
- (iii) Establishing a global Buddhist Mission aimed at disseminating Buddhism worldwide.⁴⁸

Ambedkar’s vision included the formation of an exemplary Buddhist *saṅgha* or community that would embody the principles of Buddhism and serve as a model for laypeople. Subsequently, he authored his magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, drawing inspiration from these three-step formulas.

Following a mass conversion event, Ambedkar responded to a letter from Venerable Valisinha, the General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. Ambedkar articulated the importance of disseminating knowledge of Buddhism among the newly converted masses in his reply. He emphasized, “We have to consider ways and means of imparting knowledge of Buddhism to the masses who have accepted His Dhamma — We should no doubt train a large number of workers to teach Dhamma to the people, but the best agents for carrying out the same are the Bhikkhus.”⁴⁹

Further, he says, “The only difficulty with the Bhikkhus is that they don’t care to learn the language of the people. I am afraid the Sangh will have to modify its outlook, and instead of becoming recluses, they should become like ... the social workers and social preachers. As I told you today, they are neither Arhats nor useful members of society. This fact must be hammered into them and make them realise that they could serve the Buddha well by becoming preachers of His Dhamma.”⁵⁰

Additionally, Ambedkar pointed out, “So far as my reading of the mind of the Indian youth is concerned, it is very difficult to make them turn to learn the monastic ideals. The best way is that we can create like Japanese married priests For that, we shall have to find means for their support during their educational period and after they go out public life as priests.”⁵¹

The citations within Ambedkar’s works suggest his anticipation of an active role

⁴⁸ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 17, Part II), pp. 105-108.

⁴⁹ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (Vol.17, Part I), pp. 446-447.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

for the laity in disseminating Buddhist teachings. In his perspective, the laity would serve not only as adherents but also as exemplary figures and preachers. Demonstrating an informed awareness of the roles undertaken by “married Buddhist priests in Japan,” Ambedkar characterized them as social workers and preachers. This characterization suggests a potential influence from the “neither monk nor layman” concept intrinsic to *Jōdo Shinshū*, initiated by Shinran and evolving in modern Japan. It appears plausible that during his academic vocations in the USA and the UK, Ambedkar may have engaged with and found resonance in the notion of a “married Buddhist priest” and the concept of “neither monk nor layman” in Japan. He mentioned that while studying in the USA, he took his studies of Buddhism seriously, which likely allowed him to understand the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism more deeply.⁵² Furthermore, Ambedkar’s participation in the World Fellowship of Buddhists during the 1950s is noteworthy,⁵³ where Japanese master Ven. Riri Nakayama also participated in the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Sri Lanka in 1950.

Ambedkar delineated two distinct categories of conversion, namely the conversion of the *Bhikkhus* and the conversion of the *Upāsakas*. He emphasized a significant disparity between them, noting that the absence of a formal ceremony for the laity or *Upāsaka* distinguished the latter. In his analysis, Ambedkar attributed the gradual decline of Buddhism in India to the lack of a distinct identity among the laity or *Upāsakas* as Buddhists.⁵⁴ Consequently, during the momentous mass conversion event in 1956, Ambedkar sought to reconcile this division by formulating a list of 22 vows administered to his adherents. Notably, he accorded nearly equal importance to the conversion of the *Upāsakas* and the *Bhikkhus* in his efforts.

From Ambedkar’s perspective, there exists no distinction in the mode of living between the *Bhikkhu* and the *Upāsaka*. Ambedkar, asserting the fundamental unity of the entire Buddhist spiritual community, administered the “Three Refuges” and “Five Precepts” to his adherents. Furthermore, he integrated the twenty-two vows as an essential component of the conversion ceremony.⁵⁵

Ambedkar references *Amitābha*’s Western Pure Land (*Sukhāvātī*) in his work, notably in the Epilogue section of his book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. The composition titled “A Vow to Spread His Dhamma” is extracted from the *Mahāyāna-sūtras*, specifically the renowned four-fold Vow of the *Bodhisattva*. Sangharakshita elucidates that this vow encapsulates Ambedkar’s commitment to liberate all beings from suffering, eradicate all passions, master the teachings of the Buddha, and attain Supreme Enlightenment.⁵⁶

The prayer, a devotional chant dedicated to Buddha *Amitābha*, finds its roots in Venerable Vasubandhu’s commentary, “*Sukhāvātīvyūha-sūtra*,” also known as the “Array of the Happy Land” *sūtra*. Sangharakshita notes a distinction in Ambedkar’s depiction of

⁵² Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 18, Part III), p. 427.

⁵³ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 17, Part III), p. 407.

⁵⁴ Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches* (vol. 11), p. 451.

⁵⁵ Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, p. 141.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Sukhāvātī, aligning it with India rather than the traditionally associated Western Pure Land of *Amitābha*. Sangharakshita further asserts that Ambedkar’s utilization of Venerable Vasubandhu’s aspirations for rebirth and propagation of the Truth mirrors his profound desire to be reborn in his homeland and persist in advancing the revival of Buddhism in India. This Vow, as interpreted by Sangharakshita, manifests Ambedkar’s patriotism for his country and his enduring commitment to the future of the *Dhamma* in India.⁵⁷ However, it is evident that Ambedkar found merit in the concept of *Sukhāvātī*, underscoring his affiliation with *Amida* Buddha and Japanese and *Mahāyāna* Buddhist ideals.

7.2 A Married Buddhist Priest, *Bauddhācārya*: Neither Monks nor Layman

In 1955, Ambedkar founded the “Buddhist Society of India,” a social, cultural, and religious organization to spread and promote Buddhism across India.⁵⁸ Among its ten objectives was establishing a new order of priests if necessary. Following Ambedkar’s passing, his son Yashwant Ambedkar assumed the presidency of the Buddhist Society of India. Under his leadership, the society introduced a new order of priests, called *Bauddhācāryas*, in 1968.⁵⁹ These married, trained Buddhist priests were tasked with performing Buddhist rites and rituals to foster Buddhist culture within the Ambedkarite Buddhist community.

In the contemporary landscape, this organization plays an instrumental role in the ongoing *Dhamma* revolution throughout the country. The married Buddhist priests, *Bauddhācāryas*, and, subsequently, an independent monastic order have been established with the aim of promoting Buddhism within society. Notably, the married Buddhist priests, the *Bauddhācāryas*, are observed to be particularly active.

This initiative by Ambedkar and the Buddhist Society of India reflects a deliberate effort to cultivate lay-married *Dhamma* preachers inspired by Japanese Buddhism tailored to both Indian and modern contexts, embodying a distinctive identity that is “neither monks nor laymen.”

8. The Concept of “Neither Monk nor Layman” in the Works and Movement of Sangharakshita

8.1 The Life of Sangharakshita

Buddhist leaders have historically endeavored to contribute to the modern Buddhist movement by reinterpreting the teachings of the Buddha in alignment with their understanding. Ugyen Sangharakshita occupies a distinctive position among these leaders, as some of his interpretations of the *dhamma* (the teachings of the Buddha) are both extraordinary and unparalleled. Born in London, U.K., in 1925, Sangharakshita’s early affinity for Eastern culture and philosophy was crucial in shaping his spiritual journey. His definitive identification as a Buddhist crystallized during his formative years

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 480.

⁵⁹ Ambedkar, *Bauddha Jivana Saṃskāra Pāṭha*, p. 7.

upon encountering the *Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Diamond Sutra).⁶⁰

He embarked on a journey to India, where he immersed himself in the life of an itinerant mendicant for two years. Subsequently, Sangharakshita underwent ordination as a *Therāvadin* Buddhist monk under the guidance of *Bhikkhu* U Chandramani.⁶¹ His initial mentor in this transformative phase was *Bhikkhu* Jagdish Kashyap, from whom Sangharakshita acquired proficiency in *Pāli*, *Abhidhamma*, and logic.⁶² Following this training period, *Bhikkhu* Jagdish Kashyap parted ways with Sangharakshita in Kalimpong, West Bengal, India, advising him to dedicate himself to the cause of Buddhism.⁶³

For the ensuing 14 years, Sangharakshita resided in the Himalayan town of Kalimpong, where he not only delved into the teachings of Tibetan Buddhist instructors but also engaged in comprehensive studies under seven eminent Tibetan teachers representing diverse Buddhist sects. During this tenure, Sangharakshita underwent initiation rites from the *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* sects, garnering inspiration from the breadth of Buddhist philosophical perspectives.⁶⁴

After spending two decades in India, Sangharakshita returned to the United Kingdom to disseminate Buddhist teachings. His seminal contribution to Modern Buddhism manifested in establishing a new Buddhist movement named the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order in 1967⁶⁵ (later renamed the Triratna Buddhist Order/Community). This movement garnered widespread acclaim and extended its influence globally. In 1978, the Triratna Buddhist Order's branch, *Trailokya Bauddha Mahāsaṅgha Sahāyaka Gaṇa* (TBMSG), was inaugurated in India,⁶⁶ actively endorsing Ambedkarite Buddhism in the country. Sangharakshita's endeavors significantly contributed to the resurgence of Buddhism in India, particularly among the adherents of Ambedkar.

Sangharakshita's literary legacy includes over 50 books, complemented by more than 200 lectures elucidating Buddhist teachings from a contemporary perspective for Western audiences. He founded the Triratna Buddhist Community/Order (TBC/TBO) by applying fundamental Buddhist principles adapted to the demands of the modern world.⁶⁷

8.2 Factors Influencing the Development of Sangharakshita's Modern Buddhist Ideology

Sangharakshita's conceptual evolution unfolded in three discernible phases.⁶⁸ The initial phase comprised a brief residence in India alongside spiritual companions and mentors, during which he assumed the role of a wanderer. This period gave him profound insights into the intrinsic mechanisms of Indian spirituality, philosophy, and culture, laying a

⁶⁰ Subhuti, *Bringing Buddhism to the West: A Life of Sangharakshita*, p. 24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 76-85.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁶⁷ Subhuti, *A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Pratap, *A Critical Study of Modern Buddhist Literature of Venerable Sangharakshita*, pp. 221-222.

foundation for his comprehension of Indian Buddhism.

The second phase of Sangharakshita's intellectual journey transpired during his extended stay in India after his formal ordination into Buddhism. This interval, centered in Kalimpong, West Bengal, witnessed his maturation as a Buddhist educator. Here, he actively engaged in diverse roles as a practitioner, scholar, leader, and editor of various Buddhist publications.

The third and pivotal phase of his doctrinal framework, notably the concept of "neither monk nor lay," crystallized entirely in the United Kingdom following the establishment of his Buddhist movement, the Triratna Buddhist Community. This phase marked the formalization and articulation of key aspects of his modern Buddhist ideology.

8.3 The View of "Neither Monk nor Layman" in Triratna Buddhist Order

Sangharakshita's contemplations on his *Śrāmaṇer* (novice) and *Bhikkhu* ordinations led him to critically examine the conventional understanding of Going for Refuge (*triśaraṇa-gamana*) within the framework of *Theravāda* Buddhism. Central to Sangharakshita's perspective is that "Going for Refuge" constitutes a fundamental aspect of every Buddhist's life. He offered a critique of orthodox Buddhism, contending that undue emphasis was placed on the lifestyle of monks and nuns at the expense of acknowledging the significance of the lives of lay individuals or *upāsakas/upāsikās*. According to Sangharakshita, whether one adopts the monastic or layperson's lifestyle is inconsequential; what matters is the extent to which an individual prioritizes the act of "Going for Refuge" in their life.⁶⁹ He explicitly stated, "Commitment to the Three Jewels is primary; the leading of a particular lifestyle is secondary."⁷⁰ Sangharakshita's nuanced reinterpretation of Going for Refuge (*triśaraṇa-gamana*) harmonizes traditional with experiential insights, significantly contributing to understanding the "neither monk nor layman" notion.

In 1961 and 1962, Sangharakshita penned two articles in *The Mahā Bodhi* journal titled "Wanted: A New Type of *Bhikkhu*" and "Wanted: A New Type of *Upāsaka*."⁷¹ He advocated for a new generation of *Bhikkhus* and *Upāsakas* in these articles, asserting their necessity for Buddhism's global survival and dissemination. In retrospect, these articles serve as precursors to his conceptualization of "neither monk nor layman" and lay the groundwork for his modern Buddhist movement, the Triratna Buddhist Community.

A paramount contribution by Sangharakshita to the modern world lies in the establishment of a modern *saṅgha*. This distinctive assembly transcends the traditional dichotomy of monastic and lay distinctions and is designed to be accessible and relevant in a contemporary context. Traditionally, the term "*saṅgha*" has denoted the Buddhist monastic Order, restricted from the laity. Contrary to this conventional understanding, Sangharakshita's conceptualization of the modern *saṅgha*, exemplified by the Triratna Buddhist Community, is conceived as an inclusive and ideal community for Buddhists, irrespective of their chosen lifestyle. The trajectory of training, study, and practice,

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

⁷⁰ Sangharakshita, *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, p. 115.

⁷¹ Sangharakshita, *Beating the Drum*, pp. 269-276.

commencing from the *Mitra*⁷² phase and progressing through *Dhammacārī/Dhammacāriṇī*⁷³/*Anāgārika/Anāgārikā*⁷⁴ stages, is meticulously designed by Sangharakshita. Through this structured progression, Sangharakshita endeavors to cultivate committed Buddhists who aspire to tread the path of a *Bodhisattva*, actively engaged in their spiritual development and that of others. The spiritual hierarchy within the Triratna Buddhist Community (TBC) is delineated among the *Mitras*, *Dhammacārīs*, *Dhammacāriṇīs*, and *Anāgārikas* based on their levels of commitment, knowledge, and experiences about the act of Going for Refuge (*triśaraṇa-gamana*). This community functions as a collective, with its members—*Mitras*, *Dhammacārīs*, *Dhammacāriṇīs*, and *Anāgārikas*—engaging in shared *Dhamma* practices. They collaboratively support and encourage each other, striving to foster conditions conducive to their collective spiritual advancement. In this context, the Triratna Buddhist Community exemplifies Shinran’s concept of “neither monk nor layman” in a modern context.

Sangharakshita crafted a “Refuge Tree” specifically for members of the Order, incorporating Shinran among the inspirational Buddhist figures for the movement.⁷⁵ Within the Triratna Order, there is a significant emphasis on the devotional aspects of Buddhism. In his autobiography, Sangharakshita acknowledged that his decision to undergo ordination was influenced by a visionary experience of *Amitābha* Buddha, which transpired during a meditation session in a cave in South India.⁷⁶ Members of the Triratna Buddhist Order (TBO) adorn themselves with a *kesa* (stole) around their necks, reminiscent of the *kesa* (*hogu*) worn by *Shin* priests in *Jōdo Shinshū*. Sangharakshita drew inspiration from and sought guidance across the entire spectrum of the Buddhist tradition, encompassing *Jōdo Shinshū*. Sangharakshita’s conceptualization of “neither monk nor layman” reflects the influence of Shinran, and this notion finds exemplification in the members of his *saṅgha*, notably the *Dhammacārīs* and *Dhammacāriṇīs*, who actively embody this concept in both Indian and Western contexts.

9. Conclusion

Shinran, facing persecution and the revocation of his monastic status during exile, conceptualized the idea of “neither monk nor layman” in response. This concept held profound significance for Shinran, evident in his decision not to return to monastic life

⁷² *Mitras* publicly declare their commitment to Buddhism in a ceremonial setting and demonstrate a sincere desire to adhere to the ethical precepts known as the five *sīla*. They perceive the Triratna Buddhist Community/Order as a fitting spiritual community supporting and aligning with their aspirations.

⁷³ Following the *Mitra* stage, the *Dhammacārī/Dhammacāriṇī* ordination represents a lifelong commitment. This commitment necessitates substantial self-awareness, significant experience along the Buddhist path, and the establishment of meaningful friendships with Order Members. Each Order member solemnly vows to adhere to a set of 10 *sīlas* (precepts) governing actions of the body, speech, and mind. During the ordination ceremony, every new Order member receives a new name derived from Sanskrit or Pāli. Notably, a common practice among Order members is wearing a white “*kesa*.”

⁷⁴ If any Order member, whether a *Dhammacārī* or *Dhammacāriṇī*, opts for a celibate lifestyle, they will assume the designation of “*Anāgārika/Anāgārikā*.” An “*Anāgārika/Anāgārikā*” distinguishes themselves by wearing a golden-yellow “*kesa*” around their neck, symbolizing their public commitment to a celibate way of life.

⁷⁵ Kulananda, *Teachings of Enlightenment*, p. 220.

⁷⁶ Sangharakshita, *The Rainbow Road*, p. 338.

after exile. Shinran's contemplation on *Mahāyāna* Pure Land scriptures in Buddhist literature led him to embrace the role of "neither monk nor layman" for his spiritual progress and that of ordinary people. This notion subsequently became integral to *Jōdo Shinshū* and, over time, gained acceptance in various Buddhist sects, evolving into a fundamental aspect of modern Japanese Buddhism. This is exemplified by the widespread acceptance of marriage among Buddhist priests in contemporary times, inspiring modern Buddhists to practice Buddhism as lay followers rather than monks worldwide.

Following a comprehensive examination of traditional and contemporary Buddhism, Ambedkar sought solutions to the problems of his marginalized community and, overall, the development within the Buddhist framework. His conclusion favored the practicality of "married Buddhist priests in Japan," a concept initially introduced by Shinran. This perspective led Ambedkar to envision a new Buddhist Order, and later, his son, Yashwant Ambedkar, the president of the Buddhist Society of India, actualized this vision by creating a new order of priests, the *Bauddhācāryas*. These priests were married and trained Buddhists. They were neither monks nor laymen but were tasked with performing rites and rituals to foster Buddhist culture within the Ambedkarite Buddhist community. This approach was considered more viable than the role of ordained priests in Indian society.

Drawing from his experiences as a monk in diverse Buddhist schools, Sangharakshita established Buddhism in the U.K. in the 1960s. Perceiving the limitations of the traditional Buddhist *saṅgha* for modern individuals, he emphasized the importance of commitment to the three jewels over specific lifestyle choices. Consequently, he formulated a novel Buddhist order — "neither monastic nor lay," known as *Dhammacārīs* and *Dhammacāriṇīs* — designed to be accessible and applicable in a modern context. This innovative approach reflects a shift in focus from traditional distinctions to a more inclusive and adaptable model for contemporary practitioners.

In summary, Shinran, Ambedkar, and Sangharakshita, each emerging in distinct temporal and geographical contexts, significantly contributed to the evolution of Buddhist concepts and practices rooted in traditions tailored for their respective societies and followers. A unifying theme among these three Buddhist luminaries is the notion of "neither monk nor layman." This shared thread underscores a collective emphasis on the importance of commitment within Buddhism, transcending conventional distinctions of monkhood or laymanship. The commonality among their teachings lies in the recognition that dedication to Buddhist principles holds greater significance than adherence to a specific monastic or lay lifestyle.

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Avery MORROW

The Traces of Ippen Shōnin: Healing, Contagion, and the Disputed Legacy of a
Wandering Saint

❖ *Articles 3* ❖

The Traces of Ippen Shōnin:

Healing, Contagion, and the Disputed Legacy of a Wandering Saint

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Abstract

Ippen Shōnin (1234–1289) was a preacher of Pure Land Buddhism who traveled throughout the country offering tokens of rebirth in the Pure Land. Although he insisted that he had no personal power to guarantee good rebirth, the historical record seems ambiguous on this point. To analyze this, I first examine stories in the scroll *Ippen hijiri-e* attributing magical powers to Ippen. Ippen is sometimes described as if people saw him as a miracle worker, with descriptions of purple clouds and flowers falling from the sky, but the *Hijiri-e* depicts this with a deceptive agnosticism, as if its authors were unclear to whom the miracles ought to be attributed. I then look at two caricature scrolls critical of Ippen which provide records of a man manipulating the people around him. Ippen's ecstatic *nembutsu* dances are illustrated in an antagonistic way, and he is described as using his own urine as medicine, with the implication that he was defrauding his followers. These caricature scrolls were long considered irrelevant to Japanese scholarship on Ippen, until a radical outside interpretation forced scholars to consider them seriously. Viewed together, the caricatures and the *Hijiri-e* present Japanese high society conflicted over Ippen's legacy, unsure whether they had witnessed a madman or a god-man.

The Traces of Ippen Shōnin:

Healing, Contagion, and the Disputed Legacy of a Wandering Saint

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Keywords: Pure Land Buddhism, Kamakura period, picture scrolls, contagion, urine therapy

1. Denials and Erasures

Ippen (一遍, 1234–1289) was a medieval Japanese preacher of the *nembutsu* 念仏, calling on the name of Amida Buddha for salvation. Large crowds would gather around him in marketplaces as he handed out paper slips called *fuda* 札 bearing Amida’s name, which scholar Ōhashi Shunnō memorably dubbed “tickets to heaven.” His followers, called Ji-shū 時衆 or “people of the hours” after their regular *nembutsu* chanting sessions, danced ecstatically with him in public spaces to celebrate Amida’s gift of salvation. Ippen intended to leave no impression on the world except for reciting the *nembutsu*, and he instructed the Ji-shū to only continue that great work and do nothing to remember him. Yet those who knew him well were unable to erase his memory from their thoughts and deeds, and he became a posthumous star. His half-brother Shōkai (聖戒, 1261–1323) memorialized his life in a set of twelve scrolls called the *Ippen hijiri-e* (一遍聖絵, 1299), which is considered a masterpiece of medieval art, perhaps even the greatest landscape painting made by any human being of the thirteenth century.¹

The *Hijiri-e* always shows Ippen as a small, sometimes hard-to-distinguish figure in a vast landscape. It never portrays him doing anything extraordinary, even when depicting a miracle.² Shōkai’s accompanying text similarly describes the locations Ippen visited as well as Ippen’s own words and contains frequent digressions unrelated to Ippen. The scroll visually and textually tries to honor Ippen’s desire to erase his uniqueness, even as it follows his life for twelve gorgeous volumes. Both text and art seem to struggle with what they are trying to accomplish. If the *Hijiri-e* is to be respectful and conscientious in its tribute to Ippen, it must deny that it is part of Ippen’s legacy, because he desired to have no legacy, as described in an anecdote handed down by his followers:

Someone asked: What have you decided should be done to preserve traces of yourself after your demise?

¹ Foard, “Ippen Shonin and Popular Buddhism”, p. 72, citing Toda, *Japanese Scroll Painting*, pp. 105-6.

² Foxwell, “The Pulled Back View: The *Illustrated Life of Ippen* and the Visibility of Karma in Medieval Japan,” p. 31.

Ippen answered: After my death, the absence of traces shall be my traces. What does it mean to leave traces behind? I have no idea. The traces of people in worldly life are treasures and property. Since they make traces into objects of attachment, these become sources of error. I have no treasures or property. I take leave of any mind of attachment. My traces lie solely where the nembutsu is said by all sentient beings. *Namu-amida-butsu*.³

In this answer, Ippen oscillates between hope that his absence of traces will become a legacy in itself, and uncertainty, not knowing what it means to leave or not leave a trace. Is it really possible to erase every trace of oneself? It appears that Ippen was at least willing to try, since he burned whatever works he had with him in the final weeks of his life. The *Hijiri-e* contains the following explanation for why he did so:

Ippen gave a few of the sutras he possessed to a monk from Mount Shosha. He had always said, “My propagation is for this lifetime only,” and now, while chanting the Amida Sutra, he burned the writings he possessed with his own hands. Seeing this, people deeply grieved that there was no one to transmit the teaching and that it would perish with the teacher, but Ippen said, “All the sacred teachings of Shakyamuni’s lifetime have wholly become *Namu-amida-butsu*,” in the spirit [of the statement in the Pure Land classic *Fashizan* 法事讚] that “when Shakyamuni finished his sermon, out of his kindness he bequeathed *Namu-amida-butsu* [to future generations],” for “in the age of *mappō* 末法 many will doubt and slander the Buddha’s teachings, and monastics and laypeople will dislike the Dharma and not bother to listen to it.” [Ippen] taught [us] this point well.⁴

The burned texts might have been other sutras, as Tachibana Shundō argues,⁵ or they might have been manuscripts written by Ippen, which the *Hijiri-e* is analogizing to the Buddha’s own teaching through the above *Fashizan* quotation. The mention of “a monk from Mount Shosha” spiring away certain texts out of the hands of Ippen’s followers, and the explicit reference to the failure to name a successor “to transmit the teaching,” implies a concern by Ippen that his more ambitious followers would show off books once possessed by Ippen as proof that they were operating as his successor, rather than using them as texts to read. We can therefore read this statement alongside what the *Hijiri-e* claims to be Ippen’s desires for his own burial:

After I die, my disciples are not to mourn with funeral rites. I should be exposed in the open fields [for animals to feed on]. There is no need, however, to apply this prohibition to laypeople who seek to effect bonds with Dharma [by holding a funeral].⁶

³ Fujiwara, *Ippen Shōnin goroku*, 92-3. Translation adapted from Hirota, *No Abode*, p. 117. This anecdote is only found in *Goroku*.

⁴ *Ippen hijiri-e*, section 45 (scroll 11), text given in Tachibana, *Ippen shōnin zenshū*, 109. First half of translation is adapted from Dennis Hirota, “The Illustrated Biography of Ippen,” in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 577.

⁵ Tachibana, “Ippen to shinbutsu shūgō,” p. 4.

⁶ *Ippen hijiri-e*, section 48 (scroll 12), text given in Tachibana, *Ippen shōnin zenshū*, 118. Translation adapted from Hirota, *No Abode*, p. 124.

No funeral meant no chosen successor to officiate; a body left in a field meant no gravestone to build a temple around. But Shōkai, the author of the *Hijiri-e* who attended to Ippen at his deathbed, made full use of the supposed exemption for laypeople, granting a group of local devout laity the right to officiate over a formal funeral and cremation. The final panel of the massive scroll shows monks bowing and chanting before two objects of worship: Ippen's bones enshrined in a stone pagoda, and what appears to be Ippen himself standing inside a small structure, probably representing a painted statue of him but with an uncanny vividness, as if he were still alive. Was it really Ippen's will to allow the laity to create such a legacy for him, an eternal resting place for a lifelong wanderer?

Ippen desired to erase his own record and deny the ambitious among his followers an inheritance to build on or claim legitimacy from. The *Hijiri-e* acknowledges this and is carefully written so that none of the acts taken by his followers after his death seem to run directly against his will. But in the end, despite his protest that "my propagation is for this lifetime only," a new sect of Buddhism was eventually founded, the Ji-shū 時宗. This presents us with a problem. With Ippen's confidence in his own salvation and the salvation of those he was able to present with *fuda*, why did he worry about questions of succession and inheritance? Were there indeed traces of himself that he regretted and wished to extinguish? Despite the *Hijiri-e*'s acclaimed realism, does it conceal such traces?

In this essay I will argue for the existence of such traces and the instability that they created for his followers. First, I will look at the way in which the world of the *Hijiri-e* seems to derive some enchantment from Ippen's presence, ensuring that the embers of his saintly mark would still burn in Japanese society after his departure. Following this, I will look at two caricature scrolls critical of Ippen that seem to have been produced based on eyewitness accounts. These caricatures record an Ippen whose power is twisting the behaviors of people around him. Viewed together, the caricatures and the *Hijiri-e* present Japanese high society conflicted over Ippen's legacy, unsure whether they had witnessed a madman or a god-man.

2. Explaining the Enchanted World

Ippen's desire was for salvation to be a matter of simple fact, originating from neither specific activities nor a heart of pure faith. For this reason, the *Hijiri-e* records him as rejecting the appearance of purple clouds above him and flowers falling from the sky, which in the symbolism of the time would have served as proof that he was destined for the Pure Land. The text describes the purple clouds but does not depict them visually, and offers an explanation from Ippen as follows:

Someone asked anxiously about their significance. Ippen replied, “concerning the flowers, ask the flowers, about purple clouds ask the clouds: I do not know.”⁷

In a letter attributed to Ippen, he elaborates: “Further, do not purple clouds and flowers falling from the heavens ... lie beyond the reckoning and comprehension of foolish beings?”⁸ The *Hijiri-e* does not omit the story of the purple clouds, but rather offers both the clouds and his agnostic reaction to them. His concern seems to be that relying on outward signs of salvation would lessen the undeniable, natural fact of rebirth in the Pure Land.

In 1998, James Foard offered an excellent theoretical argument on the specific contribution that Ippen made to Buddhism of his time. Rather than simply reject the overeager 20th-century analogy between New Kamakura Buddhism and the Protestant Reformation, Foard closely investigated the types of changes being made. Showing how Ippen decided to offer a *fuda* to a monk who read many Buddhist texts and had come to disbelieve the nembutsu, and how the deity of Kumano appeared before Ippen to affirm the correctness of this decision, Foard found that Ippen was thus given the authority to reject “both an expressive and an instrumental understanding of nembutsu practice.”⁹

Foard points out that when Ippen decided to offer this *fuda* to someone with no faith, he is disavowing the idea that salvation comes from expression of faith. Instead, Ippen “presents the *nembutsu* as a ritual that is done for itself and that expresses itself, and in this sense only is instrumental and expressive. It has no other end or reference.”¹⁰ This image of the “nembutsu expressing itself” is virtually drawn from Ippen’s own words: “Saying the Name from moment to moment, then, is the nembutsu saying the nembutsu.”¹¹ One modern writer, Watanabe Yoshikatsu 渡辺喜勝, distinguishes Ippen from the other famous Kamakura Pure Land preachers in this way: Hōnen saw the nembutsu as man crying out for Amida, Shinran saw it as Amida crying out to man (hence the emphasis on not saying but “hearing the nembutsu” among Shin Buddhists), but Ippen saw it as Amida speaking to himself.¹²

If we take this to be an accurate summary of Ippen’s beliefs, then his ideal holy man would be not different from Amida in any way, and would not leave behind any traces that did not come from Amida. Certainly, one whose very teachings dissolved into *namu-amida-butsu* would not be generating any sanctity from his own person other than that which originated in Amida. In agreement with this reading, Foard observes that in the *Hijiri-e*, sacred locations retain the ability to produce miracles only because Ippen is able to summon the miraculous power of the *nembutsu*.¹³ He concludes that Ippen’s mission was to detach Buddhism from sacred locations and feudal patronage to make it universally accessible: “the replacement of localized hierarchies with some systematic,

⁷ *Ippen hijiri-e*, section 22 (scroll 6), text given in Tachibana, *Ippen shōnin zenshū*, 43-4; translation adapted from Hirota, *No Abode*, p. 121.

⁸ *Ippen Shōnin goroku*, translated in Hirota, *No Abode*, p. 31.

⁹ Foard, “What One Kamakura Story Does: Practice, Place, and Text in the Account of Ippen at Kumano,” p. 106.

¹⁰ Foard, “What One Kamakura Story Does,” pp. 107-9.

¹¹ *Ippen Shōnin goroku*, translated in Hirota, *No Abode*, p. 79.

¹² Nagashima, “Nenbutsu ga nenbutsu o mōsu shinkō,” p. 66.

¹³ Foard, “What One Kamakura Story Does,” p. 111.

ahistorical, replicable means of salvation.”¹⁴ Describing this as the “delocation” of Buddhism, he analogizes it not to the Protestant Reformation, but to the rise of Christianity in late antiquity.

The truth of Foard’s assertion about the “delocation” of salvation is borne out in Ippen’s wanderings throughout the country and his ability to bring enlightenment to every type of place, but parts of this analogy apply better to other Kamakura Buddhists than they do to Ippen. Christianity really did *replace* and *displace* prior beliefs about localized spirits and deities with the power to punish and reward, by providing Europeans with a new, universal, replicable soteriology. Nichiren, and to a lesser extent Hōnen, pushed for a similar displacement. These monks considered their own practices to be the “exclusive” road to salvation—Foard here offers the Japanese keyword *senju* as an equivalent.

But the *Hijiri-e* is written from a different angle. As it tells the story of Ippen, it illustrates the shrines and temples he visited and goes to seemingly unnecessary length to tell stories of their miraculous origins (*engi*), reaffirming the sanctity of these preexisting places and the miracles associated with them. Since these details do not tell us anything new about Ippen, it feels as if the author and artist are protesting against an unspoken claim of “delocation” by their contemporaries.¹⁵

While the *Hijiri-e*’s Ippen is radically destructive in his desire to erase social distinctions and his own traces, crediting every miracle to Amida, he is also radically affirmative. He brings the power of the *nembutsu* out of the temples and into the marketplace, but he also acknowledges the residences of the kami in the ancient shrines, and the kami come to greet him, especially the deity of the Kumano shrine whose descent from above is actually illustrated in the scroll. The *Hijiri-e* shows Ippen visiting eighteen shrines in total, praying at each one. He also affirms the meaning of temples and reawakens the Buddhas living within them.

In 1293 Ippen visited the Shingon temple Jimoku-ji 甚目寺, located in Ama City, and began a seven-day fast in front of the golden Kannon. As the fast neared its conclusion his followers’ health began to fail, but he promised them that they would not die. Scroll 6 of the *Hijiri-e* explains what happened next.

That night, two lay believers sleeping in the Kiyosu inn had the same dream. The Bishamon statue next to the Kannon came to their inn and announced, “These visitors are dear to me. You must make an offering.” [The next day,] when they came with an offering of food and liquor, a breeze blew away the curtain and they were shocked to see that just as in their dream, the Bishamon statue had left his seat and was now in a standing position.¹⁶

The *Hijiri-e* illustration shows Ippen’s followers amazed to see the statue standing upright. We can see, through the resistance against showing Ippen effecting some miraculous change on the world or summoning purple clouds above him, something that

¹⁴ Foard, “What One Kamakura Story Does,” p. 114.

¹⁵ Kaufman, “Nature, Courtly Imagery, and Sacred Meaning in the *Ippen Hijiri-e*,” p. 64.

¹⁶ Tachibana, *Ippen shōnin zenshū*, p. 52, my translation.

superficially resembles a modern naturalism or agnosticism: the miracle is presented in the text, the artist portrays the incident with naturalism, and the reader is permitted to view Ippen from a serene, objective distance and consider the miracle as an example of the saving power of the nembutsu.

But it would be incorrect to see Ippen and his Ji-shū as cool, disinterested preachers of salvation, and we can see this in the way another category of miracle is systematically downplayed or omitted from the text: the type seen as emanating from Ippen himself. Tales of such occurrences may have accounted for some of Ippen's popularity among common people, but before a Canadian First Nations activist brought it to the attention of Japanese scholars in 1987, this category of miracle was scarcely taken seriously as a reading of Ippen.

3. Miracles of the Body

Our story begins with a rather crude caricature of Ippen in the comic scroll *Tengu zōshi* 天狗草紙, which may have been completed as early as 1296, before the *Hijiri-e* itself. The scroll, which is still extant today, depicts Ippen dropping his robes to urinate into a tube being held by one of his followers, while a crowd reacts in a delightful variety of ways. A nun covers her eyes, but two monks look on gleefully. Other townspeople turn to look at the scene with astonishment, and the author has clearly relished writing up imaginary conversations around their heads like a modern-day comic book:

“Look at all these people begging for some piss!”
 “This is Ippen Shōnin’s beloved piss, it cures every ailment!”
 “What a crowd! I hope he’s got a full bladder!”
 “The nun can’t see, so she’ll wash her eyes [with piss]!”
 “I’m drinking Shōnin’s piss for my stomach issues.”
 “Hey, this man needs some too!”¹⁷

Tengu zōshi is one of two contemporary texts offering a critical view of Ippen, calling his Ji-shū movement “the height of stupidity” (the other, *Nomori kagami* 野守鏡, refers to him more plainly as a “madman”). It vividly illustrates the Ji-shū’s *nembutsu* dances to show the crazed effect Ippen had on uneducated people around him.¹⁸ It was basically hot off the press as soon as Ippen died, and was in fact produced in the same studio that made Ji-shū’s official narrative scroll, the *Yugyō Shōnin engi e* (遊行上人縁起絵, circa 1303-07).¹⁹

It is not quite accurate to say that *Tengu zōshi* and *Nomori kagami* were totally unknown to modern Ippen scholars. A study authored during World War II used *Tengu zōshi*’s wild portrayals of Ippen and the Ji-shū in order to dismiss the movement as a disorderly abuse of Buddhism. However, after the war, new interpretations emerged,

¹⁷ Translated from Sunagawa, *Ippen Hijiri-e kenkyū*, 177, compared with suggested readings from Kanai, “Ippen Shōnin no nyōryōhō”.

¹⁸ Kuroda, *Sugata to shigusa no chūseishi: ezu to emaki no fūkei kara*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Tsuchiya, “*Tengu zōshi* no sakuga kōbō”.

seeing Ippen as a dramatic figure and the Ji-shū as influential to the reform and revival of medieval Buddhism.²⁰ During this period, Ippen scholars conspicuously ignored *Tengu zōshi*, despite the fact that it is a primary source that possibly predates the *Hijiri-e*. Foard's 1977 dissertation, written in consultation with Japanese Ippen scholars, omits it entirely from his list of biographical sources for Ippen, even though he lists a source that he finds "virtually useless" for the sake of completeness.²¹ Evidently it was seen as a meaningless and baseless slander.

The coming of a paradigm shift could be seen in 1986, when the historian Kuroda Hideo (黒田日出男, b. 1943) started to look more closely at the meaning of the caricature as part of a study of illustrated scrolls.²² But it was an article in *Daihōrin* magazine by a non-academic named Miyamatsu Hiroyuki (宮松宏至, b. 1940) that forced the hand of scholars. Miyamatsu argued that urine therapy was common in premodern times and was mentioned in religious texts such as the New Testament. Critiquing a description of *Tengu zōshi* given by an academic biographer, he reasoned that Ippen could not have been such a "rock star" based on his chanting and dancing alone and suggested that the Ji-shū frequently drank Ippen's urine for health purposes just as the scroll depicts, and that this was simply omitted from the major hagiographical sources by elite monks who found it embarrassing or inconvenient.²³

Some Ippen scholars refer to Miyamatsu Hiroyuki as a "doctor" but this is not technically true. Miyamatsu is best described as an indigenous rights activist turned urine therapy advocate. Emerging as an activist from Japan's New Left student movement, he spent two years living with Asabiinyashkosiwagong people in Northwestern Ontario who suffered mercury poisoning from a Canadian factory upstream of their reservation. When poisoning victims came to him for medical advice due to their inability to access Canadian health care, he became invested in-home therapies. After initially opening a free acupuncture clinic, he learned about urine therapy from a Tanzanian refugee and began drinking his own urine while in Canada.²⁴ Encountering strong cultural resistance to this home remedy upon return to Japan, he spent some time researching premodern medicine. His article in *Daihōrin* makes a connection that prior scholars had missed, namely the prominence of urine therapy in an era when most people had few other medicines available to them, and extols Ippen's healing power.

It may seem dubious that such an eccentric individual was responsible for a major intervention in Ippen studies, so I will note that multiple Ippen specialists have acknowledged their thought was shaped by Miyamatsu's article, starting with Kanai Kiyomitsu in 1988, followed by Foard's mentor Ōhashi Shunnō in 2001, then Sunagawa

²⁰ Sakurai, *Ippen to Ji-shū no nazo*, pp. 22-37.

²¹ Foard, "Ippen Shonin and Popular Buddhism," p. 87. *Tengū zōshi* does receive mention in a footnote, at 259n51, as an example of popular literature mocking the dancing *nembutsu*.

²² Kuroda, *Sugata to shigusa*, pp. 15-29. Kuroda analyzes the urine distribution, but he devotes more space to a depiction of two Ji-shū women in an apparent lesbian relationship. As far as I can tell, of the later Ippen scholars only Sunagawa Hiroshi has read Kuroda's analysis closely.

²³ Miyamatsu, "Ippen Shōnin no myōyaku".

²⁴ Miyamatsu, *Start Your Day with a Glass of Urine*.

Hiroshi in 2002.²⁵ The magazine which published Miyamatsu, *Daihōrin*, was a non-sectarian space where Buddhist practitioners, spiritual seekers, and other kinds of believers could interact with sympathetic scholars; it was discontinued in July 2020.²⁶

The scholar Kanai Kiyomitsu (金井清光, 1922–2009) was the most openly enthusiastic about Miyamatsu’s article and urine therapy generally. Taking to the pages of *Daihōrin* to offer his assent, he declared that Miyamatsu has “raised a new problem in Ippen studies,” that *Tengu zōshi* is indeed based on real events, and that past scholars overlooked it only because of their squeamish modern sensibilities. As evidence, he provided medieval Japanese and Chinese medicine texts which discuss drinking the urine of children or babies to cure certain diseases.²⁷ Such medical texts were often preserved and used by Buddhist specialists and drew on Chinese and Indian knowledge. The use of excrement in particular was legitimated through Ayurvedic beliefs that anything can be used as medicine, although “there is ambiguity concerning the vile or unclean nature of these products in the Buddhist context.”²⁸

In 2001, Ōhashi Shunnō (大橋俊雄, 1925–2001) quoted from one of Kanai’s sources but jumped to a novel conclusion, saying that anyone’s urine would have worked equally well, so such medical practice would not have been so unusual at the time.²⁹ This does not seem like a natural conclusion to draw from the sources being discussed. Presumably, the texts specify children rather than adults because their urine was believed to have fewer impurities. Furthermore, *Tengu zōshi* portrays the practice in order to belittle Ippen and his followers, as if he was offering himself to them as a god-man whose waste fluids are not only pure but have healing properties.

In his initial response to the three preceding opinions, Sunagawa Hiroshi (砂川博, b. 1947) investigated *Tengu zōshi* more closely, finding that it associates four activities with Ippen: dancing *nembutsu*, *fuda* distribution, purple clouds and flowers from the heavens, and urine distribution. Because the other three incidents are affirmed by the *Hijiri-e*, and on the strength of Kanai’s argument that the blind, lepers, and other outcasts were likely seeking some physiological healing from Ippen, Sunagawa concluded that *Tengu zōshi*’s bawdy caricature probably expresses some “truth” that Ippen acquired knowledge of herbal medicine during his time in the mountains. Sunagawa also opined that this was omitted from the *Hijiri-e* because physiological medicine was considered in some sense an “unclean” activity for monks akin to drinking urine. He rejected the idea that Ippen actually offered his urine as a medicine, but he did not explain why.³⁰

Following his initial foray into the subject, which seems to me incomplete, Sunagawa wrote two further articles further investigating the reliability of *Tengu zōshi* and what conclusions can be reasonably drawn from it. Sunagawa points out that *Tengu zōshi* gets a number of basic facts wrong about Ippen. It refers to his followers “Ikkō-

²⁵ Imai, *Ippen*, 171, also refers to Miyamatsu in a more dismissive way.

²⁶ Tangentially, it is notable that the decline of such non-sectarian spaces has pushed people into sectarian spaces; as of 2024, Miyamatsu is now a member of the new religious group Happy Science, even as he continues his indigenous activism online.

²⁷ Kanai, “Nyōryōhō.”

²⁸ Despeux, “Chinese Medicinal Excrement,” p. 162.

²⁹ Ōhashi, *Ippen hijiri*, pp. 91–3.

³⁰ Sunagawa, *Hijiri-e kenkyū*, pp. 277–282.

shū” rather than Ji-shū, and incorrectly says that Ippen refused to pray at *kami* shrines. Both of these mistakes are casually confusing Ippen with other street preachers of the period. On the other hand, *Tengu zōshi* accurately portrays dancing *nembutsu*, which the Ji-shū seem to have deemphasized after Ippen’s death.³¹ We are led to wonder about the exact target of *Tengu zōshi*’s critique. Was it Ippen in particular, or unsettling new developments in Japanese Buddhism generally?

Haruko Wakabayashi’s (b. 1967) groundbreaking 2012 monograph on *Tengu zōshi* concludes that it is both. *Tengu zōshi* elaborates on the classical image of the *tengu*, an impure monster “associated with the privy and feces,” as well as the dark realm of *ma*, devils or delusion. While all of Japanese Buddhism is depicted as infested with *tengu*, Ippen in particular is portrayed as the “chief of the *tengu*” who deceives people with false miracles. His faith in Amida alone is portrayed as splitting Japanese Buddhism into sects, threatening the health and security of the nation. In essence, the authors of the *Tengu zōshi* sensed the coming of a disturbance in court Buddhism, and Ippen was the most prominent representative of this.³²

Wakabayashi sees urine distribution as central to *Tengu zōshi*’s attack on Ippen in two ways. First, it associates Ippen with the impurities of bodily waste, and thereby with *tengu*. Ippen is polluting the dharma by mixing purity with impurity. Second, urine distribution is contrasted against *fuda* distribution, which is caricatured elsewhere in the scroll with the same ironic tone. Wakabayashi sees *Tengu zōshi* as accusing Ippen of distributing *fuda* only to elites in a self-serving way, summarizing its depiction as follows: “To commoners he gives out his urine, to the wealthy he offers *fuda*.”³³

The anonymous creators of the *Tengu zōshi* scrolls were defenders of a court Buddhism that was on its way to anachronism. In the words of Abe Yasurō (阿部泰郎, b. 1953), they “belonged to a world that was collapsing from within.” The scrolls portray Japan’s Buddhist education and law as being established “through the vows of emperors,” and monks as transforming into *tengu* through lack of humility towards the court and self-centered arguments about the dharma.³⁴ In characterizing Ippen as “chief of the *tengu*,” the authors were aiming to situate him within this polemical worldview rather than making a faithful record of his actual stated beliefs or practices, and they indeed may have confused rumors about him with other preachers.

Nevertheless, Wakabayashi believes that urine distribution actually did happen, since other practices which *Tengu zōshi* attributes to Ippen have been borne out as correct.³⁵ For instance, the official record of Ippen’s sayings passed down by the Ji-shū did not mention Ippen’s ecstatic dances celebrating the *nembutsu*, suggesting that the sect was embarrassed by the practice.³⁶ The *Hijiri-e* corrects the record, giving a history lesson to readers by explaining that the dancing *nembutsu* was introduced by the ancient

³¹ Sunagawa, “Shōkai wa Ippen, Jishū hihan to dō mukiatta ka,” see pp. 6 and 16-18.

³² Wakabayashi, *Seven Tengu Scrolls*, see pp. 113, 116 and 167.

³³ Wakabayashi, *Seven Tengu Scrolls*, p. 116.

³⁴ Abe, “The Book of Tengu,” see pp. 216 and 225.

³⁵ Wakabayashi, *Seven Tengu Scrolls*, p. 116.

³⁶ Sunagawa, “Jishū hihan,” p. 6.

master Kūya, and that “Kūya’s words imbued [Ippen’s] heart and were constantly at his lips.”³⁷ Here, we can see how *Tengu zōshi* forced suppressed aspects of Ippen’s life into the foreground and seemingly engendered a response from the authors of the *Hijiri-e*, similar to the response that Miyamatsu’s quotations from *Tengu zōshi* elicited from Ippen scholars hundreds of years later.

I recognize two separate claims by which we can assess the reasonability of the *Tengu zōshi* caricature. The first is the generic association of Ippen’s form of Pure Land teachings with healing power. Sunagawa and other researchers have found that although the *Hijiri-e* never explicitly supports such an argument, it does give us circumstantial evidence that Ippen was seen as a healer. The second is a more specific claim that Ippen’s body was believed to be uniquely pure, so that contact with the traces of his body could heal disease. The Japanese scholars have not closely investigated this thread of the caricature, but I will show that this is also supported circumstantially by the *Hijiri-e*. I will argue that the embodied, karmic nature of purity, impurity, and contagion is in fact a key point of contention between the *Tengu zōshi* and the *Hijiri-e*.

4. Ippen the Healer?

Although Ippen is never described as healing anyone in the *Hijiri-e*, in a few instances the text implies that he was understood to have healing powers, while still leaving his agency in the healing ambiguous. First, it makes some pointed references to locations in Kyoto: a Yakushi temple named Inabadō 因幡堂 and a house of charity called Sanjō Hiden’in 三条悲田院. Ippen came to Inabadō and used it as a headquarters around 1279, and a monk who tried to keep him from lodging there was visited by the medicine Buddha Yakushi Nyorai in a dream, who warned that Ippen was a “valued guest.” Sunagawa argues that it would not have been lost on a period reader that Ippen was being favored by a Buddha associated with medicine. Furthermore, Sunagawa writes, it is notable that Ippen spent a day and night meditating in Sanjō Hiden’in, a charity house associated with the blind, lepers, and other people rendered impure through contagious illness. The text does not say that he met with any of the residents, but because he stayed the night, it is implied that he was not afraid of the contagion.³⁸

Another anecdote from the *Hijiri-e* tells of a specific healing incident. This story, found in scroll 5, runs as follows:

When he entered the land of Hitachi, there was a villainous samurai there who tried to rape one of the Ji-shū nuns [but failed to catch her and went home]. In a dream, the scoundrel saw a monk holding a split branch who said to him, “Unthinkable to impede a *nembutsu* practitioner!” and hit him with the branch. When he awoke he was paralyzed and could not make his body move. His father ran to Ippen and pleaded with him to rescue his son. Ippen said, “I don’t know anything about this; I will not interfere,” but the father pleaded again

³⁷ Hirota, *No Abode*, p. xxxvi, xxxix.

³⁸ Sunagawa, *Hijiri-e kenkyū*, pp. 273–5.

and again, so eventually Ippen said, “very well, let us go,” and upon arriving [at the house] the man's paralysis was quickly cured.³⁹

Sunagawa calls this story an affirmation of Ippen's healing powers, but as Caitilin Griffiths points out, another modern commentator, Shinmura Taku 新村拓, reads the text as affirming only the power of the *nembutsu* to punish those who impeded its practitioners.⁴⁰ The text is ambiguous, and when read carefully we see that it is structured to preserve the ambiguity. The scoundrel sees a “monk” in his dream, not a Buddha or bodhisattva, but it is unclear who the monk is, and Ippen denies that it was him. The father pleads with Ippen to provide healing, but it is unclear whether Ippen did any specific act to cure the paralysis or if Ippen's presence simply provided some emotional relief. We are led to believe that there is some sort of karmic punishment involved and that people believed Ippen could both inflict and cure severe maladies, but the text does not tell us whether this was actually the case.

All of this may sound deceptively modern and agnostic to our ears. The text's concern, however, is not to reject the idea of healing power. Rather, the author Shōkai is squeamish over explicitly asserting Ippen's agency. We see direct textual evidence of this squeamishness in scroll 5, which offers the story of a woman known as “the sister of Ōi no Tarō,” who invites Ippen to dance in her home, and of her eventual rebirth in the Pure Land:

Since several hundred people had danced round and round, they had trodden down and broken the floorboards. But when people said, “You had better repair them,” the sister replied, “These will be keepsakes of Ippen the holy man. I won't repair them,” and she left them as they were. We should consider this in the way that we consider that time long ago when Emperor Cheng of Han refused to repair the balustrade broken by Zhu [Yun], in order to remember the words of that loyal retainer. After this, that woman practiced only the *nembutsu* and in the end attained birth in the Pure Land.⁴¹

The broken floorboards leave a physical trace, but of what? According to the text, it is a “keepsake [*katami*] of Ippen the holy man [*hijiri*].” Laura Kaufman notes that in the illustration, above the scene flies a flock of wild geese, which provides a subtle symbolism: “the geese flying toward the house of Ōi no Tarō and his sister suggest their hopeless desire for Ippen's return.”⁴² Yet the text seems slightly hesitant to clarify the meaning of such “keepsakes.” Might this woman have seen Ippen's footprints as relics with special powers, like the Buddha's footprints? In the text, Shōkai offers an obscure Chinese analogue for using unrepaired broken objects to preserve a memory and explains the benefit to the householder in terms of her rebirth.

³⁹ *Ippen hijiri-e*, section 20 (scroll 5, section 4), original given in Tachibana, *Ippen shōnin zenshū*, 39, my translation.

⁴⁰ Griffiths, “Tracing the Itinerant Path: Jishū Nuns of Medieval Japan,” p. 70.

⁴¹ *Ippen hijiri-e* section 17 (scroll 5), Japanese text given in Tachibana, *Ippen shōnin zenshū*, 35-6, translation partially adapted from Kaufman, “Nature,” p. 55. (The Confucian analogy is my translation.)

⁴² Kaufman, “Nature,” p. 55.

Like the historical precedent, Shōkai cites for the dancing *nembutsu*, the purpose of this unexpected and jarring reference to Chinese history appears to be to make Ippen's footprints into a rational memento of virtue rather than one aspect of Ippen's traces that could provide a special power. The benefit of this memento is not physical healing but rebirth in the Pure Land, although one wonders how Shōkai is so confident of this, given Ippen's own skepticism of such signs as purple clouds and flowers. And as with the scoundrel of Hitachi and the two temples in Kyoto, the question of Ippen's own agency in bringing about that rebirth is carefully avoided.

Another, even more obscure moment in the *Hijiri-e* suggests that aspects of Ippen's healing power are being excluded from primary sources. A long-acknowledged mystery of the *Hijiri-e* is the unclear connection between Ippen and saunas. At the end of scroll 3, we see a depiction of a monk using a sauna at a point in the narrative corresponding to 1276. The *Hijiri-e* explains that when Ippen met his Pure Land teacher Shōdatsu in the city of Dazaifu, a few days' trip from the famous hot springs town of Beppu, a sauna was built for them, which they shared together while having long and happy conversations about Buddhist practice. At this point, the narrative leaves a gap of several months.⁴³ Following Ippen's death, his self-appointed successor Shinkyō became involved in managing saunas for the care of wounded samurai, and it is today claimed that Ippen founded an eponymous healing sauna in Beppu in this missing year 1276.⁴⁴ The earliest written record of this claim dates to 1742; it is not found in the *Hijiri-e* or other early texts (although the 1742 document predates one of the primary sources for Ippen, *Ippen Shōnin goroku*, by more than two decades). The sauna was said to have been "revived" by a Ji-shū leader in 1374, but we do not know if this was some kind of invention.⁴⁵

At this time, it was considered an act of Buddhist merit to fund public bathhouses for lepers and other karmically impure people, so if Ippen founded a healing sauna, its absence from the *Hijiri-e* is noteworthy.⁴⁶ Perhaps the discomfort lay in portraying Ippen using the sauna himself. A fear of contagion pervades the *Hijiri-e*, which earnestly mentions Ippen's stay in the house of charity and depicts lepers and outcasts among the Ji-shū following Ippen around but never shows them receiving a *fuda*.⁴⁷ We know that Ippen would have done nothing to prevent them from receiving one because he says to his Ji-shū followers in scroll 3 of the *Hijiri-e*:

Distribute your *fuda* regardless of whether people have faith or not, and without discriminating between the pure and the impure.⁴⁸

There is therefore an implication that ritually polluted were receiving *fuda* which is for some reason never actually portrayed in the scroll. If Ippen had founded a sauna, might the lepers have wanted to use it alongside him for a chance, no matter how slim, at being

⁴³ Tachibana, *Ippen shonin zenshu*, 23-4; Kohaku Tateya, "Ji-shū jiin Shōju-ji ni tsuite," p. 3.

⁴⁴ Kurita, *Ippen Shōnin: tabi no shisakusha*, p. 95.

⁴⁵ Kohaku, "Shōju-ji."

⁴⁶ Moerman, "The Buddha and the Bathwater," p. 80.

⁴⁷ Sunagawa, *Hijiri-e kenkyū*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Tachibana, *Ippen shonin zenshu*, 19, translated in Hirata, *No Abode*, p. xxxv.

cleansed of the untold centuries of karma that created their pollution, and perhaps healed of their worldly illness by the physical presence of his pure and powerful body? Besides Ippen's instructions regarding the *fuda*, we also have his deathbed statement that "among the five aggregates there is no sickness afflicting sentient beings," suggesting that he would not have prevented lepers from touching him.⁴⁹

We arrive, then, at one of the central tensions in depictions of Ippen as a healer: he was surrounded by people socially deemed impure, but he denied their impurity. If impurity was a contagion, he would get it on himself, which Shōkai would obviously reject. Contrariwise, if his *purity* was contagious, activities like distributing *fuda* to lepers, giving out his urine, or sharing a bath or sauna would distribute his purity to others—but depicting such a miraculous act of purification would run contrary to Ippen's own denial of miraculous powers.

It is easy to understand why this would have been a conundrum for Ippen's biographer Shōkai, and even perhaps for Ippen. Any depiction of Ippen that could be read as using his body to heal others could have led to a situation in which his traces, either his body or objects he had touched, could be used to offer or withhold healing from others, and thereby to accumulate personal power and displace the centrality of Amida. Hence the text must either erase such traces, as was perhaps done for the Beppu sauna or the urine distribution, or explicitly deny their meaning, as with the purple clouds, or finally render them ambiguous, as with the "keepsake" footprints and the healing of the Hitachi scoundrel. This strategy seen in the *Hijiri-e* may also explain Ippen's own decision to burn the books in his possession.

In order to ensure that the boundaries of karmic purity are not disturbed, the *Hijiri-e* cannot depict any activity which might imply that someone has changed states from impure to pure, or vice versa. Only at the very end of the final scroll is there an unwritten, but moving and bold, statement about such things. Here, after Ippen's death, we see a leper drown himself alongside four other Ji-shū. The suicidal believers' striking lack of concern for sharing the river with lepers is an affirmation of Ippen's own proclamation: Amida has opened a Pure Land to all, and worldly impurity will not follow one there. Yet this leap of faith is simultaneously a leap into death, and the *Hijiri-e* does not pass over the tragedy of this fact. Consistent with Ippen's teachings, the scroll does not portray the suicides as honorable martyrdoms. Rather, in a moving scene, it shows a group of young monks trying to physically prevent one of their friends from drowning himself. In the absence of Ippen's traces, the problem of whether the other Ji-shū will be afflicted by ritual or social impurity can be resolved only by the sorrowful termination of their worldly existence, and as we reach the very last image in the *Hijiri-e* scroll, this shocking recognition of the impossibility of overcoming worldly pollution and other karmic debts leads us to a depiction of monks throwing themselves at an image of Ippen, against his dying wishes.

⁴⁹ Tachibana, *Ippen shonin zenshu*, 108, translated in Hirota, *No Abode*, p. 35.

5. Conclusion: On the Regulation of Traces

Alongside his declaration that “the absence of traces shall be my traces,” his burning of books, and his request that his body be exposed to the elements without funeral rites, Ippen supposedly requested that his followers not commit suicide after his death. The *Hijiri-e* has him saying that “if your self-attachment has not been exhausted, you must not take your own life. It is rare and difficult to receive an existence in which you encounter the Buddha-way. How lamentable it would be to cast it away in vain!”⁵⁰

Like the association of relics with this-worldly attachment, this message reiterates standard Buddhist doctrine. Yet the *Hijiri-e* depicts that some Ji-shū did end up committing suicide. My reading suggests that among his followers were those who believed less that Amida had promised universal salvation, and more that Ippen’s embodied presence had purified them and readied them for the Pure Land, and that their continued existence after his death could only lead to an accumulation of impurities and karma. The *Hijiri-e* struggles to cope with this seemingly unintended legacy of Ippen’s. We may see that struggle as part of what compelled Shōkai to produce such a gorgeously detailed and realistic work.

Recent scholarship has suggested that the *Hijiri-e* is possibly a response to *Tengu zōshi*, or at least to the elite attitudes towards Ippen that it depicts. Such an explanation explains many mysteries about the text. For example, Abe Yasurō suggests that the *Hijiri-e*’s anomalous discussion of purple clouds and falling flowers, contradicting Ippen’s explicit protest that such phenomena are not necessarily connected to him, became necessary to answer *Tengu zōshi*’s depiction of Ippen and his *tengu* cronies manufacturing these miracles to deceive the public.⁵¹

Sunagawa points out how the *Hijiri-e* spends an extravagant amount of time on Ippen’s prayers at various *kami* shrines, numbering eighteen in total. This does not seem to give us much information about Ippen’s character, but it does effectively refute the charge made in *Tengu zōshi* that Ippen rejected *kami* worship, simultaneously asserting the orthodox nature of such worship by placing the shrines and their *engi* in a sacred landscape. The repetitive depiction of dancing nembutsu in various towns across the country, and *Hijiri-e*’s justification for the practice by reference to Kūya, may also be intended to refute *Tengu zōshi*’s accusation that such behaviors were disruptive and chaotic novelties, the repetition serving to normalize the dancing and reject the elite reflex for embarrassment.⁵²

The ridicule and contempt that *Tengu zōshi* has for Ippen, combined with the extreme amount of resources poured into the high-quality materials and design of the *Hijiri-e*, suggest a Kyoto intellectual world divided against itself in its opinion of Ippen. This does not tell us whether Ippen actually distributed his urine as medicine, a question that may never be resolved. But it does suggest anxieties lying behind both of these scrolls: the *Hijiri-e* suggests an anxiety that Ippen’s legacy of compassion and message

⁵⁰ Ippen *hijiri-e*, scroll 9, translated in Hirata, *No Abode*, p. xlv.

⁵¹ Abe, *Chūsei Nihon no sekaizō*, p. 478.

⁵² Sunagawa, “Jishū hihan.”

of salvation will be tarnished by small-minded detractors, and *Tengu zōshi* suggests a parallel anxiety that new Buddhist movements, accompanied by purple clouds, dancing, and other wild new practices, could displace the stable forms of court Buddhism. Following Ippen's death, the traces of an obscene god-man, a dangerous revolutionary, and a liberatory saint haunted the Kyoto imaginary in the form of these rival scrolls.

In the smoldering embers of this bitter battle over Ippen's legacy, one feels like we have a hint of why Ippen desired so strongly to destroy all traces of himself upon his death. The way in which Ippen would be remembered, as a saint or as a disruptive faith healer, could cause people to doubt the validity or applicability of his approach to Pure Land salvation. To me, there still remains a mystery of how Ippen believed that the way he would be remembered would relate to the security of being reborn. Did Ippen think that his traces were going to have an effect on his karma and his rebirth? Or was his concern purely a compassionate desire for the salvation of unseen others, whose understanding of their salvation in the Pure Land might be diminished by his own followers' misuse of his traces? Perhaps it is the latter, compassionate instinct that shook Ippen's aristocratic followers so deeply that they decided to create the *Hijiri-e*, pouring their souls into an epic work of art that affirms for all time the memory of a man who worked tirelessly for the salvation of all living beings. Yet beneath the *Hijiri-e*'s elaborate, beautiful portrayals of shrines, temples, and dancing nembutsu, there is still an argument being carried out with long-dead interlocutors, a whisper of a trace.

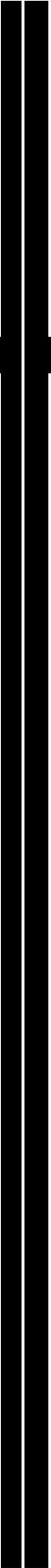
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Book Review



Book Review

Geismar, Haidy, Ton Otto, and Cameron David Warner, eds.,
Impermanence: Exploring continuous change across cultures.
 London: UCL Press, 2022, 364 pages
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The notion of impermanence (Pali: *anicca*, Sanskrit: *anitya*, Japanese: *mujō*) is a foundational principle in Buddhist discourse upon which complex metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology have developed over the last two millennia. Impermanence in Buddhism implies that all compounded phenomena are constantly in a state of flux and hence unreliable, unstable, and lacking substantiality. The English word “impermanence” may not sufficiently express the complete meaning with all its connotations, but it captures the notion’s core: that constant change constitutes a fundamental reality. There has been a whole body of literature within Buddhist philosophic traditions exploring various aspects of the notion. Likewise, there has been an equally large body of works in the various Asian literary and aesthetic fields exploring the notion as it appears in forms of poetry, prose, paintings, and other artistic genres.

In classical Japanese literature, there is an entire genre called *mujō bungaku* (無常文学, literature of impermanence), and the notion is found prominently in classical Indian and Sinitic literature too.¹ These artistic works portray phenomenal ephemerality, issues of attachment and nonattachment, and how to reconcile with constant change. As somebody with a keen interest in this theme, the present reviewer found the volume under review highly intriguing. This interest is not so much due to a new addition to the existing body of works on the issue but precisely due to the volume’s ambitious aim to complement the lack in the existing body of works. Edited by Haidy Geismar, Ton Otto, and Cameron David Warner *Impermanence: Exploring continuous change across cultures* carries the conceptual kernel from Buddhism but examines impermanence from fields as varied as anthropology, sociology, history, performing arts, museology, medical anthropology, digital humanities, poetry and so on which we usually don’t associate with the notion of impermanence. The book’s approach to the problem from a transdisciplinary schema makes this study unique.

¹ The pre-war Japan witnessed a sort of boom in both philosophical as well as literary debates concerning various aspects of *mujō* which continued well into the 1960s. Scholars from the Kyoto School (Kyōto-gakuha) like Nishida Kitarō, Kobayashi Hideo, Miki Kiyoshi, Karaki Junzō, and others took active interest in these debates.

Besides the exhaustive introduction and epilogue, this volume is constituted of nineteen chapters of which sixteen chapters are scholarly essays, and the rest three include an English translation of a Tibetan poetry, a Melanesian painting, and a cross-genre inspired fabric and embroidery artwork. Unlike the usual academic books, this volume includes both academic essays and artworks by artists. This is perhaps because this book resulted from a conference entitled “Inevitable Ends, Meditations on Impermanence,” held at Aarhus University in May 2019. Whether this is intentional or not, the format does offer a holistic vision of the notion of impermanence other than the usual Buddhist and is even useful to ponder over the issue of presenting research output in comprehensible formats.

The nineteen chapters are further clubbed into four thematic parts: 1. Living with and against impermanence, 2. States of being and becoming, 3. Structures and practices of care, and 4. Curating impermanence. The introduction sets the stage for the forthcoming chapters by offering a literature review of major theoretical frameworks, mainly from the fields of Buddhism, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy but also briefly touches upon psychoanalytic, biosemiotics, and other recent theoretical interventions, which help to sail through this otherwise voluminous volume.

The first part “Living with and against impermanence” includes four essays and one poem. The poem “Heavy curtains and deep sleep within darkness” by Tsering Woesser is followed by essays, which explore four different geographical areas of Tibet, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, and Tanzania and show how subjects from different parts of the world cope with constant flux, both material and spiritual, in their different life worlds. Carole McGranahan’s essay on Tibet offers a case study of a prominent Tibetan family’s sudden yet unprecedented rise followed by an abrupt fall from power and the way this intergenerational tragedy unfolds forcing the family members to handle the material change in rather paradoxical ways. Then Maria Louw studies how the new generation of Kyrgyzstan youths perceive their religious orientation and the way it shapes their views of their material and virtual afterlives. While the case study of a small community in Northern Thailand by Julia Cassaniti, explores a subject’s struggle with alcoholism, changing familial relationships, and gender orientation, the last essay in this part by Cecil Marie Schou Pallesen, investigates the way the Indian diaspora in Tanzania confronts the loss of property, negotiate their fleeting identities and more importantly, how these ruptures and momentary suspension of ordinary lives opens up other future avenues, the outcomes of which are contingent and open-ended.

The second part “States of being and becoming” includes one artwork, a Melanesian painting by New Papua Guinean artist Joe Nalo that appears to depict a complex interconnectedness between human and non-human beings, artifacts, and even science. The three essays in this part cover independent case studies but are closely linked to the theme of the state of being and becoming. Hermkens and Timmer’s essay explores the Asmat people for whom the act of destruction of material objects – like woodcarvings made for transporting the dead’s soul – has traditionally been a way of maintaining life forces but now increasingly becoming untenable as a result of colonization, the influence of western cultures and permeation of western emphasis on preservation and permanence.

Ton Otto in his Papua New Guinean case study employs the recent theoretical developments to understand the complicated conception of world-making. Otto demonstrates how subjectivity and world-making are dialogical rather than a dialectic process and “life is as an autopoietic process based on the principle of ‘changing to stay the same.’” (p.132). The following essay by Warner studies the contemporary Tibetan fashion designer’s conscious striving to simultaneously preserve Tibetan culture all the while embracing changes as a liberatory practice. In that sense, Warner’s aim is somewhat similar to Otto’s essay, for he too focuses on the way subjects with multiple identities try to maintain sameness and continuity by adopting changes.

The third part “Structures and practices of care” presents three essays and two artworks with explanatory notes. The essays are again independent studies of three different aspects of contemporary societies but are inextricably linked to the theme of care and ephemerality. Henry Llewellyn focuses on the theme of life and death from the perspective of oncology and palliative vision of care and invites us to ponder over the vital question of “recognition” of the inevitable and how reconciliation with reality shapes the way a subject chooses her vision of care. Unlike Llewellyn, in the following essay, Haidy Geismar moves her attention to non-human objects housed in museums and elsewhere. She argues that these objects are not mere material collectibles but things with immense immateriality requiring us to reconsider museums as “affective spaces” that are “committed to the notion of public sphere, social justice and identity construction.” (p. 207) Removed from an anthropocentric conception of temporality, Geismar’s arguments force us to rethink flux from the perspective of multiple conceptions of temporalities. Laura McAtackney then brings up a contentious part of human history, the Magdalene laundries of Ireland, and argues that “what remains of the Magdalene Laundries may have to change to facilitate a memorial function,” which will allow these historical sites “not simply become fossilised reliquaries but can be living meaningful memorials in the present and future.” (pp. 229-230)

The last part “Curating impermanence” includes four essays each of which in varying degrees discusses the themes of artwork, museums, art installation and exhibitions, artistic performances, and even digital humanities, and in so doing they approach the problem of impermanence from a perspective that we usually don’t associate with this notion. The essay by Pip Laurenson and Lucy Bayley on self-destructive artworks by Gustav Metzger shows the contradictions of an artist’s intention of producing an ephemeral piece of art that ironically found a permanent house in a museum resulting in diametrically opposite outcomes than what the artist envisioned. Martin Grünfeld’s essay questions our anthropocentric delusion to retain the “authenticity” of artifacts by forcibly blocking their natural life processes so that we can prolong their lives (p. 273), a practice still very normal in museums everywhere. Our obsession with prolonging artifacts’ lifespan is, more often than not, appropriated for commodification and nationalism. Grünfeld rather provocatively asks us to “rethink museum objects as parts of an all encompassing ecological cycle, and to consider whether the ‘end’ of these objects could be turned into a site for becoming and multiplication.” (p. 273)

The following essay by Winnie Soon and Sarah Schorr questions the issue of (im)permanence of digital objects from a “post-digital culture” (p.293) perspective in the backdrop of artistic creations and installations. In the penultimate chapter, Ulrik Høj Johnsen, Ton Otto, and Cameron David Warner, the curators of the exhibition “Museum of Impermanence: Stories from Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Tibet,” (Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, Denmark, 9 Feb - 19 May 2019), who are also the editors this volume, reflect on the said exhibition, its ambitions, design concepts, and future issues. The epilogue by Caitlin DeSilvey, who was also part of the above-mentioned exhibition and has worked extensively on the theme of the cultural significance of change and transformation, nicely closes the volume by mentioning that “moments of rupture and suspension can provide opportunities for radical reconfiguration,” with the further “possibility for the creation of new cultural forms, and new expressions of self,” (p 338). A “moment of suspension” like the one we experienced during COVID-19 made us realize that contingency is the only truth. COVID-19 not only laid bare the ephemerality of human existence but, above all, the socioeconomic systems and structures that we were always made to believe as impregnable and unshakable were too fragile and malleable to rely upon.

As the editors briefly mention in the introduction and then taken up further by some of the contributors, the conception of change is inextricably linked to the idea of temporality which makes this volume even more important in our highly commodified society where everyone is made to wrestle against time for more and more productivity. Rather than facilitating reconciliation with fluxes and contradictions, as Hegel has argued, our socioeconomic systems reward commodity fetishism and alienation. More worryingly, the conceptions of impermanence and change have now been appropriated and promoted by profit-seeking corporations as a life-enriching self-help habit to enhance employee productivity. The volume tries to tackle many such difficult questions that lead to further critical questions. How do we, for instance, articulate impermanence in a highly consumerist society in which big corporations not only decide product lifecycles but increasingly so of human and non-human organisms? Does impermanence have a practical utility in resisting the capitalist trap of unabated growth, endless desire, and ensuing suffering? Or is the human obsession for fixity and permanence a result of a Lacanian drive that brings a kind of *jouissance* or even deliverance from the very lack of the object’s substantiality and permanence?

Most of the studies covered in this book employ extensive field studies. All chapters are well annotated and come with an extensive bibliography that seasoned scholars, as well as students interested in social theory, anthropology, philosophy, and Buddhist studies, will find very useful. Even general readers might find some of the essays interesting. Each chapter has comprehensive explanatory notes and is well-referenced and the volume also has an index which is equally helpful to wade through key concepts and unfamiliar names. This book undoubtedly deserves a place in all university libraries.

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Journal of World Buddhist Cultures

Purpose of the Journal

The Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures at the Ryukoku University in Kyoto, Japan was established with the aim of forming an international research institute for Buddhism, which could respond to the serious challenges facing the modern world. An important mission of the center is to accomplish a wide variety of academic projects on Buddhism and thereby contribute to an increasingly globalized society. All knowledge is expected to be transformed into information in a globalized society. Thus, at its inauguration last year, the center also decided to publish an electronic journal to disseminate the center's research results more widely in order to fulfill its main purpose—in line with global trends of internationalization and informatization. Electronic journals have become indispensable platforms to interact with researchers, Buddhists, and adherents of other religious traditions outside Japan, and to cooperate with foreign universities and research institutes.

The Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures has started a new electronic journal, *Journal of World Buddhist Cultures*. In its long history, the Ryukoku University has accumulated a large body of knowledge on Buddhism. The center hopes to develop this knowledge further and actively disseminate it all over the world by means of this electronic journal, through which the center will also attempt to encourage international intellectual exchange and seek solutions to various problems facing people in contemporary society.

In contemporary society, people's values are significantly diversified and complicated, and we are indeed hardly able to recognize what is "true." *Journal of World Buddhist Cultures* will include not only scholarly articles on Buddhism, but also articles that respond as a guide to urgent problems that arise in every part of the world. Buddhism has been practiced all over the world for more than 2 500 years. The journal will invite submissions in which this universal religion is discussed from a global perspective.

In addition, *Journal of World Buddhist Culture* will also include reviews of books on Buddhism, records of lectures organized by the center, and a wide variety of translated works. It especially welcomes papers written in English. Through this electronic journal, the center hopes to establish an international platform for Buddhist studies and contribute to Buddhism's further development.

Objective of the Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures at Ryukoku University

1. Comprehensive Academic Research of Buddhism

Our objective is to contribute to the advancement of academic research on Buddhist philosophy, history, culture, and other relevant fields while searching for ways to respond to the challenges facing our modern world. By using effective and appropriate research methodologies, we aim to explore Buddhist topics that meet the needs and concerns of our modern world.

2. Interdisciplinary Research that Combines the Fields of Humanity, Science, and Religion and the Creation of New Wisdom

By combining the three fields of humanity, science, and religion, we will explore the prospects of creating a new wisdom for the 21st century. We will aim to become a global research hub where scholars from both Japan and abroad can converse and interact in order to provide guidelines that can help address social issues and global crises from a Buddhist perspective.

3. Building a Global Platform for Buddhist Studies

By collaborating with universities and research institutions in Asia, the Americas, and Europe, we will carry out projects with overseas scholars, Buddhist priests, and academics of religion. We will publish our research results through our website and publications and provide them in English and other languages. Also, by using information and communication technology (ICT), we will collaborate with overseas universities and research institutions in real time in both the graduate and undergraduate programs. In addition, we will build a system that can quickly respond to requests from overseas research institutions who may ask for information about local historical sites by employing various views from across the university.

4. Research Results that will Benefit the Undergraduate and Graduate Schools

By collaborating on the curriculum for each academic area, we aim to build an integrated program that spans across all the departments. We will also promote participation in educational collaboration programs—not only within our university, but with other educational institutions as well. We will recruit short-term research fellows from graduate and post-graduate programs in and outside of our university, by providing research grants (scholarships) and publishing their findings online or on print.

Significance of the Publication of *Journal of World Buddhist Cultures*

The Research Center for World Buddhist Cultures consists of following three research divisions: Basic Research, Applied Research, and International Research. Among them, the International Research Division plays a central role in the publication of the electronic journal.



International Research Division

The International Research Division will be responsible for sharing information about the activities of the center with the international community while continuing the project of translating and publishing Buddhist canons and texts that was originally carried out by the Research Institute for Buddhist Culture. In addition to the publication of the e-journal and the management of the center's website, the division will also promote exchanges with overseas scholars, other Buddhists, and religious specialists through ICT. The division will encourage collaboration with universities and research institutes in different parts of the world, and sponsor international symposiums and invite scholars from overseas to attend them.

As religion becomes more global and multi-dimensional in contemporary society, there has been a growing awareness of a need for inter-religious dialogue. The division will encourage these conversations and interactions by collaborating with various religious research institutions abroad. Under the theme "Inter-Faith Education" the division will carry out research at institutions of higher education.

In the international context of inter-religious dialogue, this division will explore how Japanese Buddhist ideology is viewed by the outside world and what Japanese Buddhism can do to contribute further to inter-religious education. Through these activities, the division's core focus will be to develop young scholars' understanding of the importance of having an international mindset and to facilitate global interaction between scholars.

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世界仏教文化研究

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❖ 書評 ❖

Review of *Impermanence: Exploring continuous change across cultures* Ed. by Haidy Geismar, Ton Otto and Cameron David Warner

Gouranga Charan PRADHAN