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CONTENTS

Note 1: 「How to become a true person in psychotherapy and religion」
……by Hisao Tomohisa……1
Note 2: An Approach to the Question of Human-ness in Contemporary Western Shin Buddhism
– the soteriological significance of disability……by David Matsumoto……26

◇Note 2

An Approach to the Question of Human-ness in Contemporary Western Shin Buddhism
– the soteriological significance of disability

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I. Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to offer a new approach to the field of Shin Buddhist Studies, one that I wish to call, "A Western Shin Buddhist Theology of Disabilities." This examination of the Shin Buddhist tradition and doctrine will involve two concerns: First, it will attempt to address the Shin Buddhist tradition with issues that arise out of and thus are important to the life experiences of persons with disabilities. Second, its goal is not simply to further theoretical speculation, but also to seek to help disabled and non-disabled persons realize the religious meaning, societal impact, and contemporary significance of Shin Buddhist path to enlightenment.

The central question raised by this study is, "What does it mean to be a human being?" By raising the question of "human-ness" in this context, we will come face-to-face with the fact that persons with disabilities have often suffered mistreatment because their "human-ness" has been brought into question. Thus along with the historical, sociological, legal and political aspects of this question, we must include a religious one as well, for religious traditions throughout the world and history have often contributed to the "de-humanization" of persons with disabilities.

Yet, an historical inquiry represents only part of this "theological" study, which will seek to refine the question of human-ness to be, "Might it be possible for persons to transcend disability and thereby realize a transformation of their human-ness?" This Western approach to Shin Buddhism will introduce disability as a primary category of analysis. By doing so, it will aim at bringing about a "critical transformation" of existing Shin theoretical perspectives regarding the meaning and significance of human-ness. In addition, it is hoped, a consideration of Shin Buddhism through a contemporary Western "contextual" perspective – that is, within the societal and individual experiences of persons with disabilities – will reveal the nature and potential that the Shin Buddhist path can bear for people in the West today. Finally, this study will suggest that the practical and reformative features of the Shin Buddhist tradition can offer much in the midst of the existential, intellectual, and societal conditions of the contemporary Western world.

II. Methodological Approach

This study will attempt to undertake a contemporary Western Shin Buddhist theology of disability. In so doing, it will seek to interpret the Shin Buddhist tradition – its texts, history, and community – from three standpoints: (1) the methodologies of *Shinshūgaku* as developed in Japanese academia, (2) the methodology and hermeneutics of contemporary, post-modern Western religious studies and theology, and (3) the existential and religious concerns that arise out of the life experiences of persons with disabilities.

While paying homage and attention to the traditional and contemporary methodological studies in Japanese Shinshūgaku, I will also take up the suggestion made by Ryūsei Takeda for a "new" Shin Buddhist Studies based on Western theology.[1] In that vein, this study will attempt to point out some of the doctrinal and methodological issues that have been raised by Western feminist approaches to the study of religion and by the brand-new area of a liberatory theology of disabilities.

Feminist approaches to the study of religion have, through the process of deconstruction, brought close scrutiny to all aspects of religion, including its symbolism, language, literature, history and doctrine. Such approaches challenge fixed categories of authority, as well as assumptions of academic objectivity. They demand a scholarship that is historically situated, self-critical, and resistant to the dominance of overarching theories or "meta-narratives." In other words, feminist approaches to religion represent more than objective analyses of the phenomenon of religion, for they challenge religion to define itself meaningfully in a contemporary pluralistic context and to confront the challenges of post-modernity.[2]

Christian theologies of disability take the perspective of persons with disabilities as they look into the bases of the Christian tradition. Disability is seen as an important theological category, which is able to confront current religious and theological presumptions. The experience of disability, it is said, touches directly on the identity of the community, the meaning of salvation, and the very image of God. It asks the questions such as, "What does it mean to be disabled?" and "What is the meaning of faith and belief?" For Christians, this leads to a profound reflection on what it means to be human as well as Christian.[3]

Recently, "liberatory theologies of disability," patterned on contemporary feminist theologies, have recently been developed. Nancy Eisland, for instance, emphasizes a methodology of "accessibility," which seeks to (1) enable persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life of the church, and (2) discover a means by which the church can gain access to the social-symbolic lives of persons with disabilities. This method involves a deliberate recognition of the lived experiences of persons with disabilities, as well as a questioning of scriptural ideologies, a critical theory of emancipation and enlightenment, and a social theory to transform institutional practices.[4]

In a similar way, this study will posit "disability" as a primary category for a contemporary hermeneutic of the Shin Buddhist tradition in the West. It will bring current societal, existential, and religious concerns of persons with disabilities in the West to Shin Buddhist ideas and practice, in order to take a new look at how questions such as the significance of human-ness, practice, realization, and salvation are treated in this tradition. Ideally, this study will focus on not only doctrinal developments, but also upon the real-life experiences and religious concerns of persons with disabilities. Finally, this study will also seek to point to the practical and reformative features of the Pure Land Buddhist and Shin Buddhist traditions.

The fundamental stance of this study is that a person possessing a physical or mental disability can view the sutras, commentaries, writings, and history of Pure Land Buddhism and the Shin Buddhist tradition from a unique and significant perspective. In other words, the soteriological significance of "disability" – that is, the questions of "human-ness" and "salvation" – will frame this study. Within that framework, three categories will be emphasized: First, "value," which leads to a discussion of the dualities of self & other, body & mind, and usefulness & uselessness; second, "boundaries," which points to a consideration of exclusion & inclusion, and access to & alienation from the community or path; and third, "potential," which leads to a re-examination of the meaning of consciousness & *shinjin*, salvation, transcendence and transformation on the Shin Buddhist path.

III. Questions of human-ness and salvation in the study of disabilities and religion

Disability Studies in the West

Disability is a universal human experience, one encountered by persons regardless of religious affiliation, nationality, cultural background, economic status or gender. It is estimated that in 2000 there were over 846 million people with disabilities worldwide; of them, approximately 80% were believed to have lived in developing countries.[5]

At the same time, however, there is no clear definition of "persons with disabilities." First of all, it is

necessary to distinguish between impairment, disability and handicap. Impairment refers to an abnormality or loss of physiological, cognitive or emotional function. Disability is the consequence of impairment, and handicap is the social disadvantage that results from a disability. Disability can arise from a wide variety of physical, psychological, and intellectual impairments, all differentially conditioned by factors such as health care, modes of intervention, or cultural bias. Levels of impairment often differ even within a single kind of disability. Disabilities may be static or progressive, congenital or acquired. Hence, the complexity of the situation makes a broad definition of "persons with disabilities" impossible.

However, a newly emerging academic field of Disability Studies is striving to determine a functional definition of disability. Traditionally, "disability" was considered to be a medical condition or psychological state, and persons with disabilities were viewed through medical models (They are sick and need to be cured) or psychological models (Their experiences are individual pathologies). Today, a predominant view in Western Disabilities Studies is that disability is a socially constructed category.[6] A social or political model for defining disability asserts that the problems of disabled persons are caused by society, not the individual. It follows that the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities cannot be solved by attempting to "fix" them. Rather, the barriers that limit their full access to and participation in society must be broken down. In this view "disability oppression" exists in the politico-economic and cultural dimensions of societies throughout the world. It results in discrimination, powerlessness and lack of access to society. This in turn brings about poverty, dependence, invisibility, isolation, degradation, vulnerability to violence, self-alienation, shame, contempt, pity, paternalism, and a false consciousness regarding what is normal or human.[7]

The field of Disabilities Studies arose out of the disability rights movement, initiated by persons with disabilities. Patterned after other movements for civil right, it embraces the concepts of empowerment and human rights, independence and integration, and self-help and self-determination. Hence, Disabilities Studies also takes a stance of activism and engagement in society, rather than mere academic detachment from the world. It seeks to consider all of the forces - political, societal, historical, economic, medical, cultural and religious - that affect persons with disabilities. It focuses on such issues as the language of disability, independence and interdependence, equality and difference, normalcy and deviancy, intrinsic value and instrumental value. Lately, studies of the experiences of persons with cognitive disabilities are challenging the field to reexamine its own biases and presumptions as well.[8]

The study of disability in Buddhism

Other recent studies have begun to investigate the role of religion in bringing about, and overcoming, disability. Historically, the hardship and discrimination suffered by persons with disabilities was often the result of religious beliefs that saw disability as an act of God punishing a person for things done in the past or as the result of evil karma committed in a past life. It was also the result of secular folk beliefs, stereotyping and intolerance, social attachment of stigmas, neglect, isolation, and paternalistic charity and control.

For the most part, however, the focus has been almost exclusively on Christianity and Judaism. There has been little treatment of the relationship between religion on persons with intellectual disabilities, and an almost total absence of studies done on Eastern religions, including Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism. It stands to reason that serious and critical examinations of non-western religious ideas, practices, and belief systems must be undertaken in order to understand their impact on the lives of persons with disabilities.

This study will summarize the diverse approaches to disability and persons with disabilities taken by a major eastern religion – Buddhism. The Buddhist tradition began with Gautama's encounter with sickness, disability and death, which let him to renounce his home and seek a reality beyond life-and-death. Hence, the Buddhist path to enlightenment is based on aspiration to become Buddha, in which one's limitations are realized, transcended and transformed into benefit for oneself and all beings.

A Buddhist approach to the question of "human-ness" can be seen, for example, in such early sutras as the *Visuddhimagga*, which seeks to answer it through explanations of concepts like the five aggregates, *paticca samupada*, and levels of consciousness (*manas*, *vijnana*, *citta*). By contrast, the *Anguttara Nikaya* offers the notion of karma (volitional, vocal, and physical action) and its results, which continue not only to the end of the present life, but even to the next lives until one exhausts the fruition of one's karma. This led to a fatalistic - and mistaken - belief that past karma results in the current conditions of one's life. In this sense, the Buddhist approach to disability was not very different from that seen in other religious traditions. Disability was not a primary factor in that attainment of realization. Rather, it was seen as a misfortune, or retribution for offenses committed by the individual or someone close to him in the past. Thus, it was viewed as a hindrance or obstacle

to enlightenment. There is evidence of this view, and perhaps its societal consequences, in a variety of Buddhist traditions, including Pure Land Buddhism and Shin Buddhism.

In the general Buddhist tradition, however, the question of whether a practitioner was capable of attaining enlightenment was also taken up philosophically by such notions as Buddha-nature. The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, for instance, considers its paradoxical features as it states that even *icchantika*, or persons incapable of attaining enlightenment, possess Buddha-nature.

Pragmatically, the ability of a person with disabilities to engage the path to enlightenment centered on the question of practice, especially that of mental cultivation through meditational practices. Certainly, emphasis on attaining profound states of *samadhi* would have placed persons with physical, emotional or cognitive disabilities at a disadvantage since they would be challenged to perfect the requisite bodily rigors or advanced mental concentration. Thus, such persons would not likely have been able to accumulate merit in the traditional sense. It is perhaps revealing to note that some scriptures, like the *Surangama Sutra*, set out special practices that require the functioning of only certain human faculties, such as hearing and seeing. A more current example of contrast can be seen in the insights of Western disabled Buddhist practitioners, who find that meditation is the ideal vehicle for attaining profound understanding and appreciation of their disabilities.[9]

Another challenge faced by persons with disabilities was that of access to the Buddhist community. Some *vinaya* passages suggest that obstacles were placed in the way of full participation in the *sangha*. Furthermore, some speculate that persons with disabilities would likely have been either ignored or actively excluded from access to temple education and training facilities. In other words, persons with disabilities would not have been able to gain access to sites of practice, or practice the path to enlightenment. More inclusive attitudes among Asian and Western Buddhist sanghas, however, are beginning to reduce the impact of such obstacles.

Again there is historical evidence of Buddhist care institutions established to provide charity to disabled persons.[10] Disabilities Studies often finds, however, that such charity usually tends to be patronizing. Persons with disability, in other words, were not considered to be the equals of their non-disable peers in value or opportunity. While disabled persons might benefit from Buddhist care and compassion, they were not likely to have been deemed of equal value with their non-disabled peers. Once again, however, recent activities by Buddhists in the West and East are seeking to offer not only an improved quality of life, but also an "equality of esteem" to persons with disabilities.

Aside from the small quantity of historical data cited above, most of the material concerning the Buddhist approach to disability is to be found in the sutras and commentaries, and *vinaya*. This will serve as the main historical, religious, doctrinal and communal background regarding Buddhism and persons with disabilities, for our consideration of Shin Buddhism.

IV. Questions of human-ness and salvation in the Shin Buddhist Tradition

Pure Land Buddhism

An examination of the Pure Land tradition from the perspective of persons with disabilities will highlight certain aspects of its teaching that are not normally emphasized. A critical approach to the texts reveals some aspects that, on first glance, seem to harbor the sense of discrimination and exclusion that was often directed against persons with disabilities in ancient times. Further consideration would seem to indicate that, because it was imbued with then prevailing religious and societal views of persons with disabilities, Pure Land thought was able to present reformist perspectives on issues of exclusion and inclusion.

The status of persons with disabilities was addressed directly in some of the Pure Land scriptures. For instance, the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life* sets out the notion of past karma in Fascicle One, the section on the virtuous adornment of clan.

> The Buddha said to Ananda, "If a beggar in extreme poverty sits by the side of a king, how can their appearances be compared?"
>
> Ananda replied," If such a man sits by the side of a king, his emaciated, mean and ragged appearance cannot be compared with the king's. His appearance is a thousand million kotis or even incalculable times inferior to the king's. What is the reason for this? The conditions of a beggar in extreme poverty ... are all the result of his misdeeds in former lives. In the past he did not cultivate roots of virtue ... Thus he piled up a mountain of evil karma. ... Having no stock of merit on which to depend and no virtue on which to rely, after death he fell into one of the evil realms, where he suffered pain for a long period. When his karmic retributions ended, he was able to escape, but was reborn into a lower class; being foolish, base and inferior, he barely maintains the appearance of a

human being."[11]

In Fascicle Two of the sutra, the section on the five evil acts contains the notion that beings who commit karmic evil receive retribution in another life by becoming disabled, poor or subnormal.

> The Buddha said, "The first evil is this. Devas, humans and lesser beings, including even those that crawl, are bent on doing evil. There is no being that is not. The strong subdue the weak; all inflict serious injuries and kill each other; all devour their prey. Not knowing how to do good, they commit evil and do outrageous and unruly deeds. Later, they receive retribution; it is natural that they should be destined to evil realms. Demigods keep records of offenders' acts and make sure that they are punished. That is why some are poor and destitute, corrupt, beggarly, lonely, deaf, dumb, blind, stupid, wicked, physically handicapped, deranged, or subnormal."[12]

Although in these sections, the *Larger Sutra* appears to be taking a negative view regarding the status, cause and prospects of persons with disabilities, it might be argued that the sutra is actually presenting those issues in order to contrast the life in the realm of delusion with the path to birth in the Land of Utmost Bliss. In the same vein, it might be argued that the *Contemplation Sutra*, while not touching on disability specifically, is based on a series of ever expanding notions of exclusion from and inclusion within the path to birth.

Vasubandhu, in the Gatha of Aspiration in his *Treatise on the Pure Land*, writes that women, "deformed and deficient persons"and those having the seeds of the two vehicles will not be born in the Land of Bliss.

> In this realm of the Goodness of the Mahayana
> [All beings are] equal, and not [even] the names of unworthy beings are found there.
> Women, deformed and deficient persons and
> [Those having] the seeds of the Two Vehicles are not born there.[13]

"Deformed and deficient persons" refers to those lacking in perfect organs. They are persons without the proper faculties that provide the constituents of consciousness and realization.

In his commentary on Vasubandhu's text, T'an-Luan makes the following notation,

> Why did the Buddha originally make the Vow [of providing this merit]? ... Again, [in a land where there were deaf-mutes,] when they talked in sign language, they were ridiculed by others. For this reason, he made a Vow, resolving, "I will make my Land a realm of pure Mahayana and absolute equality. The seeds of those who potential [to become Buddhas] has been destroyed will not grow, and there will not even be words for woman and deformed and deficient persons."[14]

In the same manner as above, T'an-luan appears to maintain, on the one hand, the rather pejorative and negative societal discrimination against persons with disabilities, who were "ridiculed by others." However, based on his awareness of that secular view, he comments that in the Pure Land such delusory distinctions do not exist. Even the names of such persons do not exist there.[15] Regarding the names of things, he goes on to state,

> Question: Names designate things. Where there is a thing, there is a name. In the Land of Peace and Bliss there are not such things as the Two Vehicles, women and deformed and deficient persons. Why is it necessary to say that there are no names for these three things?
> Answer: Bodhisattvas who are not yet strong-willed and very courageous are looked down upon and called 'sravakas.' Flatterers or weaklings are derided as 'women.' Again ignorant persons are regarded as 'blind' even though they have eyes to see; those who hear expositions or principles of truth but fail to understand them are laughed at as 'deaf' even though they have ears to hear; and those who stumble and falter in speaking are contemptuously called 'dumb' even though their tongues can speak. Although such people have complete sense-organs, they are called by derisive names [as if their sense-organs were impaired]. For this reason, it is necessary to say "...not [even] names." In the Pure Land there are no such words for flattering or despising others.[16]

Here, T'an-luan makes another departure from a simple comment on the prevailing societal valorization of persons with disabilities. Accepting, in a sense, the negative evaluations of persons with disabilities, he presents "disability" (being "blind," "deaf," and "dumb") as a metaphor for "ignorant persons" in general. For so-called "able-bodied" or "able-minded" persons, this metaphorical use of disability leads to an apparently egalitarian conclusion that "we are all disabled in the search for enlightenment." However, for a person with disabilities, such a position is problematic, for it accepts prevailing societal bigotry, while promising a world of non-distinction in another existence. Also, the claim to "disability" by "normal" persons might also be seen, by persons with disabilities, as another form of neglect or belittling of their existential situation in this life.

The Pure Land teachings present a similar dialectic of exclusion and inclusion for other groups of people. For instance, among those excluded from birth were persons who committed five evil acts or slander the dharma.

As we have seen above, this idea was connected theoretically with the notion that women, faced with the five obstacles and the three submissions, would be unable to attain birth in the Pure Land unless they rejected their female form. It is also asserted that Pure Land thought adopted aspects of the societal exclusion of non-persons, who included mythical beings, but in practical terms criminals, disabled, persons in the lowest social castes, and so on.[17]

This dialectic of exclusion and inclusion was addressed in a variety of ways, with the general trend toward the inclusion of those previously excluded from the Buddhist path. It is in Shinran's thought, however, that one can find a more complex, and instructive, treatment of disability in Pure Land thought.

Shin Buddhism

All of this has formed a background for our attempt to re-examine the Shin Buddhist tradition from the standpoint of persons with disabilities. We will do so from the perspective of the three categories of inquiry that we set forth above.

1. Issues of Value

The issue of value leads to a discussion of the dualities of self & other, body & mind, and usefulness & uselessness.

The first duality brings into focus the meaning of beings or sentient beings in Shin Buddhist thought. The aspect of dharma is possessed of ultimate value in the Buddhist sense. The Vows of Amida Buddha represent pure aspiration and mind. The Pure Land is the locus of the Buddha's compassionate working. In contrast, Shinran makes frequent use of expressions such as "foolish beings,"[18] "evil beings,"[19] "persons like us, who are like tiles and pebbles,"[20] and "non-persons."[21]

The question of evil is a central focus in Shinran's thought. The well-known passage from *A Record in Lament of Divergences*, "Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will."[22] is often interpreted to mean that "the evil being is truly the one who is saved by the Vow," or "the evil person attains Buddhahood." The person bound with the weight of immense evil karma is possessed of no conditions whatsoever to gain emancipation through self-power practice. Yet, that very person is the one for whom the Buddha's Vow has been established. This is clearly evident in Shinran's citation of the following passage of Shan-tao,

> *Deep mind* is the deeply entrusting mind. There are two aspects. One is to believe deeply and decidedly that you are a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration from innumerable kalpas in the past, with never a condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is to believe deeply and decidedly that Amida Buddha's Forty-eight Vows grasp sentient beings, and that allowing yourself to be carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt or apprehension, you will attain birth.[23]

The issue of evil, or evil karma, must be examined anew from the perspective of the life experiences of persons with disabilities. As we have seen above, the predominant view in Western Disabilities Studies is that disability is a socially-constructed category. In the words of one writer, "disability" means that some people are singled out for mistreatment by "normal" people. Disabilities Studies also shows us that, in a materialistic world, the definition of "disabled" is often an economic one: fully able-bodied and able-minded persons are those who are able to work, contribute, and be productive in society. Thus, the fully "abled" are valued, while the "disabled" are considered to be of lesser value – useless, incapable, a burden or hindrance. In the West, therefore, issues of valuation or devaluation of persons with disabilities are seen as objective, external, societal or relational constructs.

Shinran's thought is able to bring new insight to this discussion and perhaps can offer another model of "disability" to it. He utilizes the metaphor of disability, taking it up from a religious sense of hindrance, obstacle or obstruction to the attainment of enlightenment. For instance,

> It is a great torch in the long night of ignorance;
> Do not sorrow that your eyes of wisdom are dark.
> It is a ship on the vast ocean of birth-and-death;
> Do not grieve that your obstructions of karmic evil are heavy.[24]
> The person burdened with extreme evil should simply say the Name:
> Although I too am within Amida's grasp,
> Passions obstruct my eyes and I cannot see the light;

> Nevertheless, great compassion is untiring and illumines me always.[25]
> Not discriminating between the inferior and the highly gifted.
> Inferior refers to those whose knowledge is shallow, limited, and slight.
> Highly gifted indicates those with great ability for learning. Amida does not choose between the two.[26]
> When shackled foolish beings – the lowly who are hunters and peddlers – thus wholly entrust themselves to the Name embodying great wisdom, the inconceivable Vow of the Buddha of unhindered light, then while burdened as they are with blind passion, they attain the supreme nirvana. "Shackled" describes us, who are bound by all our various blind passions. Blind passions refers to pains which torment the body and afflictions which distress the heart and mind.[27]

Shinran's writings are also replete with references to the notions of hindrance (*shōge*),[28] hindrance or obstruction (*shōge*),[29] obstructions (*sawari*),[30] harmfulness (*gai*),[31] (which when taken as a whole, it might be argued, represent the original meaning of the modern term *shōgai*, which is the Japanese rendering of "disability"). In context, most of these passages refer to the hindrance caused by blind passions, karmic obstructions to enlightenment, or the harmfulness brought about by delusion and self-attachment.

Moreover, in Shinran's thought, the ineffectiveness of self-powered practices points to a disability inherent in beings – the hindrance of doubt (*gigai*), which obstructs one's mind and actions from being efficacious in bringing about birth.

> ... I find that all beings, an ocean of multitudes, have since the beginningless past down to this day, this very moment, been evil and defiled, completely lacking the mind of purity. They have been false and deceitful, completely lacking the mind of truth and reality. Thus, when the Tathagata, in profound compassion for the ocean of all sentient beings in pain and affliction, performed bodhisattva practices for inconceivable millions of measureless kalpas, there was not a moment, not an instant, when his practice in the three modes of action was not pure, or lacked this true mind. With this pure, true mind, the Tathagata brought to fulfillment the perfect, unhindered, inconceivable, indescribable and inexplicable supreme virtues. The Tathagata gives this sincere mind to all living things, an ocean of beings possessed of blind passions, karmic evil, and false wisdom. This mind manifests the true mind of benefiting others. For this reason, it is completely untainted by the hindrance of doubt. This sincere mind takes as its essence the revered Name of supreme virtues.[32]

As we have seen above, caution must be exercised when interpreting Shinran's consistent use of both metaphors and expressions of disability. His utilization of the language of disability to explicate the ignorance, doubt and delusion of sentient beings, which hinders or obstructs our attainment of enlightenment, provides clear imagery of our state of being vis-à-vis enlightenment. However, it is quite another thing for so-called "normal" people to conclude that all beings are disabled, and so we can only entrust in the Buddha to save us in the life-to-come. For persons with disabilities, such a stance would do nothing to combat worldly discrimination or address their potential realize true human-ness and salvation.

It is important instead to note that Shinran uses the imagery and language of disability to argue that all of the attributes that we normally think to be advantageous, such as belief in our own abilities and self-dependence, are synonymous with our fundamental disability. And, in a paradoxical way, our profound realization of our own evil – our own obstructions, limitations and karmic hindrances – is in and of itself a profound realization of the working of infinite compassion and freedom. In other words, when our presuppositions as to normalcy, ability, usefulness and human-ness are brought under intense scrutiny (perhaps by an encounter with persons with disabilities), we awaken for the first time to our evilness. When our discriminative consciousness and failure to act on behalf of others is brought into serious question, then our obstructions and hindrances are broken through by the working of the Vow.

It is clear that Shinran's perspective on awakening cannot be divorced from social praxis. For instance, his contrast between "non-persons" and "these (good) persons" demonstrates his complete reversal of the prevailing societal valuations.

> *These people*: *these* is used in contrast with "non-." People of true and real shinjin are called "these people." Those who are empty and transitory, full of doubts and vacillations, are "non-persons." "Non-persons" are rejected as not being persons; they are people of falsity. "These people" are true persons.[33]

According to them, persons at the base of society, the under classes, were considered to be "non-persons"

and the nobility and upper classes were considered to be "good persons." In contrast, Shinran reverses the scheme and fills it with religious significance. "Non-persons" are those who harbor doubt and calculation, while "good person" are those who entrust in the Primal Vow.

What, then, is a human being? A clue might be found in Shinran's reason for citing the Nirvana Sutra in his Chapter on Shinjin. There Ajatasattru finds his human-ness in his experience of shame and self-reproach. To become a human being is to realize radical shame, which is a pre-condition for being able to hear the Buddha-dharma truly.

Finally, Shinran's perspective on the person who entrusts in the Vow involves a complex treatment of the objective and subjective aspects, as well as the cognitive and somatic features of awakening to oneself as evil. In response, perhaps, to Foucalt's arguments regarding the body as the locus and subject of discipline, Western Disability Studies often manifests a contrasting tendency to separate the person from the disability. That is, it prefers not to conclude that the person is defective. Rather, the Western view is simply that a person's body or mind has a part that does not work or function in a "normal" way. This Western presumption of a separation between person/self/essence and body/mind could be greatly informed by Shinran's thinking.

2. Issues of Boundaries

The issue of boundaries points to a consideration of exclusion & inclusion, and access to & alienation from the community or path.

The dichotomy of exclusion and inclusion operates throughout Buddhism. It was evident in the *vinaya* rules that placed conditions on disabled persons ability to participate fully in the sangha. The Pure Land Buddhist path was established on dialectic of exclusion and inclusion. For instance, ordinary beings excluded from the Path of the Sages could find inclusion within the Pure Land path. Evil beings, who were incapable of attaining birth through self-power, were able to realize birth through Other Power.

Persons with disabilities will require that Shin Buddhism also address the matter of their inclusion into the community of fellow followers and practicers, for access to the *sangha* (or temple) will allow them to hear the Dharma or receive the benefits of community support. In contrast to Western notions of access, however, the Buddhist *sangha* is not built on concepts of justice and fairness, but rather on the notion of oneness, mutual learning and mutual transformation. Thus, Western institutions and individuals would gain much from attempting to return to the original spirit of the Buddhist *sangha*.

Shinran's ideal of the religious community is based on: (1) egalitarianism (Each being is the only child of the Tathagatas) and (2) equality (The society of fellow practicers and fellow *nembutsu* followers). Yet, a critical examination of the Shin tradition would require that we look into the actual state of affairs and ask about any presumptions made regarding participation on the Buddhist path. It might be suggested that the simple act of seeking to include those who had been historically excluded from the community could become a form of "great practice," in which our own assumptions (about ourselves, others, normalcy and disability) are brought into question and our awareness of the compassionate working of the Vow is awakened.

3. Issues of Potential

The issue of potential leads to a re-examination of the meaning of consciousness & *shinjin*, salvation, transcendence and transformation on the Shin Buddhist path.

A critical examination of Shin Buddhist thought, made from the standpoint of persons with disabilities, must bring into question other basic assumptions latent within it. One such question must pertain to the implications of practice and *shinjin* in Shin Buddhism. What, in other words, does *shinjin-nembutsu* imply for a person with disabilities? How should we understand Shinran's explications that,

> [S]ince Amida's Vow is wisdom, the emergence of the mind of entrusting oneself to it is the arising of wisdom.[34]
>
> "To abandon the mind of self-power" admonishes the various and diverse kinds of people – masters of Hinayana and Mahayana, ignorant beings good and evil – to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self; to stop reflecting knowingly on one's evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad.[35]
>
> Solely saying Amida's Name is wholehearted single practice. "Wholehearted" means not shifting to other good acts, not turning one's thoughts to other Buddhas; "single practice" is solely to practice the Name that embodies the Primal Vow, free of all doubt. "Practice" means to amend and rectify the unsettledness of the heart and say the nembutsu. "Single" means sole, one. "Sole" means having

no thought of shifting to other good acts or other Buddhas.[36]

If *shinjin* is synonymous with realization, or is a form of profound attainment, such as *samadhi*, then, persons with severe physical and intellectual disabilities would be unable to attain it. Even if *shinjin* means simply to abandon calculation and entrust in the Primal Vow, that approach would seem to require a certain level of consciousness, concern or interest on the part of a person with severe intellectual disabilities or mental illness. Yet, if *shinjin* means that one does nothing at all, then it would seem to bear implications for the meaning of Shin Buddhist salvation.

In the Path of Sages, one who does not aspire for enlightenment, engage in successful practice and realize wisdom, will not attain be able to gain emancipation from samsaric existence. While these assumptions can be seen more clearly in the case of traditional self-power practices, it it possible to say that they still exist in some form in the path of *shinjin-nembutsu* of the Other Power? If *nembutsu* is practice, which must be performed so that one can ultimately realize it to be ineffective, then it would it not be an obstacle for one with a severe physical or mental disability?

The nature of salvation in Shin Buddhism must be examined from this perspective as well. If the Primal Vow contains conditions for birth, then could it be called "universal salvation?" But, if all beings are already saved, regardless of practice or faith – regardless of consciousness or participation – then, is Shin Buddhism still Buddhism? Approaching Shin Buddhism from the standpoint of persons with disabilities will offer to it a challenge, perhaps similar to the challenge to Zen by Critical Buddhism, which might clarify the profound meaning of transcendence, transformation, and salvation. That is to say, perhaps one might conclude that the Shin Buddhist path of *shinjin-nembutsu* implies that salvation is an on-going process involving a deeply personal and communal transformation, in which presumptions as to the nature of human-ness are critically re-examined, and in which fixed boundaries (physical, attitudinal, political, societal, and religious) are overcome and transformed within the individual and society.

V. Conclusion

This study attempts to posit "disability" as a primary category for a contemporary hermeneutic of the Shin Buddhist tradition. By re-examining Shin Buddhism through a contemporary Western "contextual" perspective – the perspective of the lives and concerns of persons with disabilities – we are able to hear the tradition speak to us in a different way about the meaning of human-ness and salvation. As a result, it is suggested, we are able to understand that human-ness is none other than "interpretation" – a hermeneutic of being: of disability and ability, despair and hope, shame and gratitude, weakness and strength, alienation and fulfillment, and worthlessness and infinite value. We can also view the experience of salvation as "transcendence and transformation" – a transcendence of "disability" and a transformation of self and world within the "tears and prayers" of our human-ness.[37]

Through this endeavor, which we are calling a "Western Shin Buddhist Theology of Disabilities," we find that Shin Buddhism, a Japanese religious tradition established almost eight centuries ago, is capable of enlightening Western thinking about disability in this twenty-first century. At the same time, we also discover that such contemporary thinking can bring about a re-examination of the Shin Buddhist tradition, forcing it to discover new, transformative elements within itself.

Notes

1 For a slightly more detailed explanation of this approach, see "西洋における真宗の神学的研究の課題" in 真宗学、第105-106合併号、平成14年三月, pp. 498-504.

2 A leading example of a feminist approach to the re-examination of Buddhist thought and practice is that of Rita Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: a feminist history, analysis, and reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

3 See for example Marilyn E. Bishop, ed. *Religion and Disability: Essays in Scripture, Theology and Ethics* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995) among others.

4 Nancy L. Eisland, *The Disabled God: toward a liberatory theology of disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), and others.

5 See James I. Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us: disability oppression and empowerment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 8.

6 See for example Charlton, Ibid, or Anita Silvers, David Wasserman, Mary B. Mahowald, *Disability, Difference, Discrimination: perspectives on justice in bioethics and public policy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1988).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 It must be noted that the internet is far outpacing either the temple or academy in providing a forum for discussions regarding Buddhism and persons with disabilities. One interesting site is "Buddhism Plus Disability" www.angelfire.com/electronic/awakening101, which contains contributions under the rubric, "Handicapped Buddhism" by Richard Louis Bruno.

10 In his article, "Disability in an Eastern Religious Context: historical perspectives," *Disability & Society*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1995, M. Miles, for instance, notes that records speak of the Buddhist king Asoka, who in the 3rd Century BCE organized care institutions for persons with disabilities. Such practices were apparently revived in later years by Buddhahasa in the 4th Century CE and Harsha in 645 CE.

11 *The Larger Sutra of Amitāyus*, in Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras: A Study and Translation* (Kyoto: Nagata bunshodo, 1994), pp. 263-4.

12 Inagaki, ibid., pp. 291-2.

13 Vasubandhu, *Discourse on the Pure Land*, in Hisao Inagaki, T'an-luan's *Commentary on Vasubandhu's Discourse on the Pure Land* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1998), p. 163.

14 T'an-luan, *Commentary on Vasubandhu's Discourse on the Pure Land*, in Inagaki, ibid, p. 163.

15 For further discussion of this point see footnote 3 in *Jodoron* (*Discourse on the Pure Land*), D. Matsumoto, trans, in *The Pure Land*, New Series, No. 3, Dec. 1986, pp. 98-120.

16 Inagaki, op. cit. p. 167.

17 See Takamaro Shigaraki, "Shinjin and Social Action in Shinran's Teachings," *The Pure Land*, New Series, Nos. 8-9, Dec. 1992, pp. 219-249, D. Matsumoto, trans.

18 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, in Shin Buddhism Translation Series, *The Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, 1997), (hereinafter, CWS), p. 488.

19 *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, CWS, p. 458.

20 *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, CWS p. 459.

21 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS, p. 479.

22 From *A Record in Lament of Divergences*, 3, CWS p. 663

23 Shan-tao, *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*, quoted in *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization* III, CWS p. 85.

24 *Hymns of the Dharma-Ages*, 36, CWS p. 407.

25 "Hymn of True Shinjin and the Nembutsu," *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization* II, (CWS) p. 73.

26 *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, CWS, p. 457.

27 *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, CWS, p. 459.

28 Chapter on Shinjin, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 82 & 102; Chapter on Realization, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 171; *A Record in Lament of Divergences*, 7, CWS, p. 665.

29 Chapter on Practice, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 47; Chapter on Shinjin, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 110.

30 Chapter on Practice, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 31, 42, 46 & 48; *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*, CWS, p. 510; *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS, p. 480; *Hymns of the Pure Land Masters*, CWS, p. 371.

31 Chapter on Shinjin, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 96; Chapter on Transformed Buddhas and Lands, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 257.

32 Chapter on Shinjin, *True Teaching, Practice and Realization*, CWS, p. 95.

33 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS, p. 479.

34 *Hymns of the Dharma-Ages*, CWS, p. 407.

35 *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*, CWS, p. 459.

36 *Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling*, CWS, p. 483.

37 "Tears and prayers" is a phrase taken from a text about Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and acknowledgement of religion. See John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion with Religion* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

◇研究所収書目録◇

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208/ＰＨＩ/19	Automatic analysis of the/Yumi	081/ＣＨＵ/32	ハプスブルグ帝国のビーダーマイ/中