Defining a Usable Past:
Indian Sources for Shin Buddhist Theology

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THOSE OF US WHO WERE fortunate enough to work with Professor Nagatomi in his years at Harvard knew him first as a scholar of the written text. His office was dominated by a well-used copy of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, and it overflowed with the dissertations of his students, communications from colleagues, and the trappings of serious Indological scholarship, to say nothing of the bands of students who sat attentively around him, with their Pāli, Sanskrit, or Chinese in their laps, puzzling over the meanings of difficult Buddhist terms. We learned, more slowly perhaps, that his love of the written word came with a passionate concern for Buddhism as a living tradition.

This concern came into focus for me in the mid-eighties when we shared the responsibility of organizing a theological encounter between the faculty of Harvard Divinity School and a group of scholars from Nishi Honganji in Kyoto. Through our work together on this conference, I learned to appreciate his affection for the Shin Buddhist tradition and to share his fascination with its fundamental values. As was true for many of Professor Nagatomi's students, this fascination led me back into the historical sources of the Mahāyāna tradition in India. *To See the Buddha*, my book on the concept of the Buddha, was an exploration of the Indian themes and patterns of thought that came to such striking fruition in Japan in the life of Shinran. The unspoken assumption behind this book was that the Japanese variants of the Mahāyāna tradition, including Shin Buddhism, could be understood best if they were seen not as isolated regional peculiarities, but as a way of working out issues and themes embedded in the structure of the Mahāyāna itself.

Looking back on that book and on the process that led to its creation, I can see how much it was indebted to Professor Nagatomi, not just in its turn toward historical sources, but in its conviction that the historical sources have something to say to the present. Professor Nagatomi was a comparativist at heart: he embodied the truth of Max Müller's dictum that "he who knows one knows none." He was persuaded that to *know* any Buddhist tradition was to know it not only in relation to the traditions of the

West, but in relation to its sources and to its internal variants in the tradition that gave it birth. When the history came together with the concerns of the present, something new happened. There was space to imagine the tradition in a new and authentic way.

The essay that follows is meant to honor Professor Nagatomi's legacy in a way that I believe he would have recognized, in the aspiration, at least, if not in the execution. It attempts to locate the contemporary reconstruction of Shin Buddhist tradition in a creative encounter with its Indian past. Whatever success this project may have is due, in no small part, to the example Professor Nagatomi set as a scholar of the Mahāyāna.

Why "Buddhist Theology"?

No matter how many times we hear the word, it is still impossible not to be startled by the mention of a Buddhist "theology."[1] There are at least two reasons for this reaction. The first is that the word seems to mark a deliberate shift from the "objective" study of Buddhism toward a more passionate, committed engagement with Buddhist values. In the academic study of religion, where scholars pride themselves on the way they hold value commitments at a distance, this move seems fraught with danger.[2] There probably is no religion professor in America who has not had to explain to a colleague from another department: "No, the Religion Department is not trying to convert anyone. If you want conversion, you can go to the chaplain's office (if there is such a thing). And never, I mean NEVER, confuse us with the chaplain's office." Many scholars of religion would say that the study of religion should analyze, describe, and in some cases compare, but should not advocate one position over another. To do otherwise, they say, would forfeit the claim of scholarly objectivity that makes the discipline a respected part of American academic life.

Another reason for surprise has to do with the word "theology." There is an old story about the Hindu philosopher Udayana, who came to a temple one day for his morning worship and found that the door was locked. In his frustration, he addressed the deity and said: "Drunk with the wine of your own godhood, you ignore me; but when the Buddhists are here, your existence depends on me."[3] Udayana was a key figure in the long-running dispute between Hindus and Buddhists in India over the existence of God. Many Hindus, Udayana included, claimed that there was a God who created the world. Udayana's Buddhist opponents said no. And therein lay the source not only of much learned commentary but of many passionate debates. To put the word "Buddhist" together with the word "theology" suggests that Buddhists have a positive word to say about the concept of God. On the face of it, this is a deliberate incongruity. There is

too much contrary evidence in Buddhist history for these words to sit together comfortably on the same page.

Why would anyone want to formulate Buddhist theology at all? There are as many explanations for this phenomenon as there are Buddhist theologians. Some point out that the concept of value-free scholarship is largely a myth, and, if scholars must make some judgments of value, no matter how carefully masked or how deeply concealed, then it is better for them to be explicit about their commitments from the start. Others point to a change in the sociology of the field of Buddhist studies. There are more Buddhist professors in America today than there used to be—not just more scholars of Buddhism, but more scholars who think of themselves as Buddhist—and it is natural for Buddhist voices to make themselves heard in ways they would not have been heard before. An important part of this change has been the addition of Buddhist professors to theological faculties that once were predominantly Christian. When someone is asked to teach as a Buddhist in a theological school, what better way to define the agenda than to articulate a Buddhist theology, and articulate it not just in an academic way, but in a way that mirrors the important and often extremely creative projects of criticism and reinterpretation that are now taking place within the Buddhist communities themselves?[4]

The rise of Buddhist theology can also be seen as part of a broader change in the way American scholars understand their role as public intellectuals. It is not that scholars of Buddhism have suddenly become eager to get on their soap boxes and play politician, but if professors of economics can express opinions about problems in the tax code or professors of sociology can hold forth about the virtues of affirmative action, why should professors of Buddhism be afraid to enter public discussion on a range of public issues? How a professor tackles these issues depends to some degree on the nature of the audience. Unlike other fields in the humanities, the study of religion has a ready-made public. If scholars of religion want to speak out on public issues, or if they want to shape the values of particular communities, they have a network of temples, mosques, churches, or Dharma centers where the issues of scholarship are just one step away from the issues of life. Many people are suspicious about the role of religion in public life, but few doubt its importance altogether.

The most basic reason to develop a Buddhist theology, however, may be the easiest to understand. In spite of all the academic expectations about the distance between scholars and the objects they study, many scholars of Buddhism think the tradition has something important to say, not just about events that happened hundreds of years ago, but about issues that trouble people today. And they are not content simply to restate old truths: they want to look critically at the foundations of the tradition, correct old flaws, and bring the Buddhist tradition to bear on a host of perennial problems. There is no question that these new voices bring energy, vivid-

ness, and controversy to a field where the paths of scholarship had become heavy going for all but the most devoted practitioners of the art.

Fine, you might say, it seems reasonable to let Buddhist scholars speak out about what they think is important in Buddhist tradition, but why should they burden their efforts with the word "theology"? One reason is practical. If Buddhist students and Buddhist professors study or teach in divinity schools and schools of theology, it is natural to speak of the Buddhist intellectual tradition as a form of theology. If theology is the word to use when someone appropriates religious values in a critical way and then applies those values to issues of contemporary life, then the critical appropriation of Buddhist values might just as well be considered theology. The term occupies an honorable place in American theological schools, and it brings Buddhist scholars into conversation with people who share the same intellectual methods and interests.

There also are more substantive reasons to use the word. One of these is based on the similarity between some sophisticated Christian approaches to ultimate reality and approaches associated with the Buddhist tradition. The concept of *theos* in Western theology is malleable and elusive enough to invite even the most critical Buddhist reflection. As a Christian theologian, devoted to the concept of ultimate reality as a plenitude of being, Paul Tillich was surprised by the Mahāyāna concept of emptiness, but he recognized that it bore enough kinship to his own theology to start a deep and probing conversation. That early encounter has provoked at least a generation of Buddhist and Christian scholars to look more closely at their assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality.[5]

Another reason is based simply on difference. Sometimes the best words for critical investigation are not the ones that make the most comfortable fit. It often is better for a word to pose a question or leave a gap to be filled in by the listener, the reader, or other writers or speakers who pick the word up and use it for their own particular ends. This is true for academic life in general, and it is particularly true for Buddhist philosophy. To capture a Buddhist philosopher's skeptical attitude toward language, you could write every word in a philosophical text as if it carried an implied question mark. You would not just say "self" or "Buddha" but "self?" or "Buddha?" The same point applies to Buddhist uses of the word *theos* or God. To say "God" in a Buddhist context puts the word itself in doubt: it leaves a question to be answered and a gap to be filled. In this respect it is like a metaphor. It crosses or "carries over," as Aristotle said, from one sphere of meaning to another.[6] But it is not a metaphor that settles down comfortably on another side. The reality to which it points is, at best, fluid; perhaps it is even nonexistent. What is ultimate about this reality is not the reality itself, but the way this apparent reality is approached, and the mode of approach inevitably involves a process of questioning and criticism. Buddhist theology functions best when it puts words under

pressure and does not let them settle comfortably into established meanings. By putting the word "Buddhist" together with the word "theology" this process of questioning is simply distilled and brought to a point of fine critical intensity.

What kind of criticism does Buddhist theology suggest? One possible approach is to scrutinize religious claims to see whether they can be justified by rational criteria. For Buddhists, this possibility has strong precedent in the Indian tradition. Unlike their Hindu opponents, Buddhist philosophers in India refused to give scripture or tradition (*āgama*) the status of an unquestioned authority. The Buddhist logicians who traced their lineage to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti accepted only two authoritative means of knowledge: perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). Even the teachings of the Buddha had to be tested against these two sources of authority before they could be accepted as true. One reason for this, of course, was the questionable status of words themselves. The rational critique of received truths did not stop at the level of the sentence; it included the words and conceptual distinctions that provided the raw material for any authoritative claim.

Different schools had different techniques for questioning the meaning of words, but all seemed to share a few basic features. One common feature was simply to ask whether a particular word refers to a real thing. There is a well known episode in *The Questions of King Milinda* where King Milinda challenges the monk Nāgasena's claim that there is no self. Nāgasena responds by asking the king about the chariot that brought him to their meeting. He asks what the word "chariot" refers to.[7] Nāgasena names the parts of the chariot and asks whether any of them constitute the chariot. The king says no. Finally they agree that no object can be "grasped" or "found" (*upalabbhate*) as the reference of the word "chariot." The word, they say, is a conventional designation, a mere name. Here the process of analysis involves a search for reference and an acknowledgment that reality has two aspects: the objects that *seem* to be designated by words, and reality as it actually is. From this basic distinction comes the doctrine of two truths: conventional truth, which is associated with words, and ultimate truth, which is beyond or inaccessible to words.

The style of Nāgasena's analysis had tremendous significance in the Indian tradition. It was not just a philosopher's game or a literary device to poke fun at a slow-witted king. It was a way of freeing the mind from the illusions that blocked the path to nirvana. Nāgārjuna formulated the connection quite precisely: "No one attains nirvana without understanding ultimate [truth]."[8] But the negative, liberating aspect of this critical process does not express the full complexity of the Indian Buddhist attitude toward the verbal distillation of tradition. Indian Buddhist philosophers were never willing to discard tradition completely. Dignāga, the founder of the tradition now known as Buddhist logic, opened his

Pramāṇasamuccaya with homage to the Buddha as the "embodiment of the authoritative means of knowledge" (*pramāṇa-bhūta*).[9] Other Buddhist thinkers also made formal acknowledgment of the Buddha's authority, not just as a gesture of reverence but through the substance of their arguments. They filled their texts with quotations from scripture and insisted that arguments—their opponents' as well as their own—be consistent with tradition (*āgama*). Criticism was crucial, but it was ambivalent, and so also was reverence for tradition.[10]

Much has changed from the philosophical milieu in the Indian monasteries at the end of the first millennium C.E. to the intellectual milieu in American Buddhist studies today. But it is not likely that anyone is going to fashion a successful Buddhist theology without coming to terms with this basic Buddhist ambivalence toward tradition: tradition commands respect, but it would not be a *Buddhist* tradition if it were exempt from critical analysis.[11] In fact, it would not be a Buddhist tradition if it did not actively encourage some form of critical analysis.

In this paper I would like to step into the middle of this Buddhist ambivalence toward tradition and suggest a new way of appropriating Indian sources in contemporary Buddhist thought. To say that my approach has never been tried before would involve a large dose of hubris and an even larger dose of naïveté. I am sure that in the long history of Buddhist thought outside the boundaries of India, there is precedent for any conceivable interpretive stance toward the Indian tradition. But my approach is meant to add a new element to contemporary discussion of Mahāyāna theology. Put simply, it involves two components. The first is to read the early sutras of the Mahāyāna, particularly the *Lotus* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*) and *Pure Land* (*Sukhāvatīvyūha*) *Sūtras*, in the context of the Indian intellectual tradition as a whole, not as sectarian documents but as examples of a fundamental religious problematic that belongs to the Mahāyāna tradition as a whole. The second is to read these sources less as authorities to be revered than as sources of critical insight in the constant Buddhist process of examining tradition and making it new. When they are read this way, I am convinced that they can become part of a *usable past* for a new generation of Buddhist theologians.

Rather than beginning with the Indian sources, I will begin with three concepts that have figured prominently in recent discussions of Shin Buddhist theology: the concepts of the Primal Vow, shinjin or the Trusting Mind, and the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. I will then move back into the sources of the Indian Mahāyāna tradition and suggest ways these concepts can be connected not only to the canonical sources of the Pure Land tradition, but to other crucial Indian texts, including the *Lotus Sūtra* and the works of the Mahāyāna philosophers.

The Primal Vow

In the *Tannishō,* one of Shinran's disciples reports that the master is fond of saying: "When I ponder on the compassionate Vow of Amida, established through five *kalpa*-s of profound thought, it was for myself, Shinran, alone. Because I am burdened so heavily with karma, I feel even more grateful to the Primal Vow which is made decisively to save me."[12] When someone comes to Shin Buddhism for the first time, knowing a bit about the language of the Indian Mahāyāna, perhaps, but unfamiliar with the distinctive flavor it acquired in Japan, it is hard not to notice the emphasis that falls again and again on the concept of the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha. Shinran insists throughout his writings that salvation comes through the agency of the Vow. It is the vessel of Amida's Vow that carries a person across the ocean of birth-and-death, and it is the Vow that elicits a person's deepest feelings of gratitude. Why does the Vow take on such primary importance? Why does Shinran not attribute the agency of salvation directly to Amida Buddha and dispense with the Vow altogether?

One way to answer these questions is to step into the story of salvation as it appears in the two *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras,* the Indian texts that served as the source of the Pure Land tradition.[13] An abbreviated version of the story might sound like this: Śākyamuni, the Buddha of this historical era, was staying near a city in India, surrounded by a large group of disciples, and he began to tell a story. Far away in the west, he said, there is a pleasurable (*sukhāvatī*) land, designed to delight all the senses; presiding over this land is a Buddha named Amitāyus (Immeasurable Life) or Amitābha (Immeasurable Light). How did this land come to be? In the distant past, he said, a bodhisattva named Dharmākara made a series of vows, promising that he would not become a buddha until he could preside over a land that had certain characteristics. When his vows were ready to be fulfilled and the land created, Dharmākara achieved full, perfect awakening and became the Buddha Amitāyus or Amitābha. The distinctive content of the vows gave the land its distinctive features, including a vow that established the mechanism of salvation. Among other things, Dharmākara promised that if someone hears the name of Amitābha Buddha and remembers him with a trusting mind (*prasanna-citta*), Amitābha will stand before him at the moment of death and relieve his fears. Another vow establishes similar conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land.[14]

This story of salvation, leading from the career of the bodhisattva Dharmākara to the land of Amitābha Buddha, helps explain why Shinran felt such gratitude for the Vow. He felt that his own life history had been infused and transformed by the power of Dharmākara's promise. But this

still does not explain why Dharmākara himself chose to rely on the mechanism of the vow to establish the pleasurable land. Why not say simply that Dharmākara aspired to function as a buddha, and when the time came to fulfill his aspiration, he created a land and acted as a buddha to save anyone who called on his name? In other words, why does the tradition attribute active agency to the Vow rather than to the Buddha himself? If we look beyond the two *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras*, to the commentarial and philosophical literature of the Indian Mahāyāna, it is possible to give clear answers to these questions. Buddhas like Amitābha have passed completely beyond conceptual distinctions and cannot initiate particular forms of action. They only appear to act, based on the needs of the believers who come to them for help and on the lingering effect of the aspirations that conveyed them to buddhahood in the first place. In the Indian tradition, these aspirations are referred to as a Buddha's previous vows (*pūrva-praṇidhāna*).[15]

The philosophical significance of the Vow is evident in a short passage from Śāntideva's *Introduction to the Practice of Awakening* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), a work that has become one of the literary classics of the Mahāyāna. This passage occupies a distinctive place in traditional accounts of the composition of the text. According to the legend of Śāntideva's life, Śāntideva was perceived as a lazy monk and seemed to have little interest in his studies.[16] Challenged to show how much he actually understood, he sat down and began to recite the *Introduction*. When he came to a crucial verse about emptiness, "When neither being nor nonbeing are present to the mind, and there is no other option, [the mind] has no object and is at peace," he rose into the sky and disappeared.[17] The monks who were listening to Śāntideva's recitation went to his cell and found that Śāntideva was gone, for reasons that seem quite clear. The verse that ended his recitation represents a particularly definitive and negative formulation of the doctrine of emptiness: there is no entity (*bhāva*), there is no absence (*abhāva*), and there is no other possibility. Not only does this leave the mind at peace, but it leaves very little more to say. We might imagine that Śāntideva's listeners went looking for him not just to find out where he had gone but to see whether this verse actually constituted the end of the text. After this statement of emptiness, what more could someone like Śāntideva say? The legend tells us that the monks found their answer in Śāntideva's cell in a continuation of the text. The next three verses say simply that the form of the Buddha appears, based on the needs of his disciples and on the strength of his previous vow:

> The form of the Buddha is seen, like a wishing jewel or wishing tree that fulfills desires, because of a previous vow and because of those who need to be disciplined. When a snake charmer consecrates a pillar and then dies, the pillar cures snakebite, even when [the

snake charmer] is long dead. A Buddha is like the pillar: he is consecrated by following the practice of awakening, and he does everything that needs to be done, even when the bodhisattva has ceased.

Here the vow makes a bridge between the awareness of emptiness and the Buddha's salvific activity: it serves as the active agent that makes it possible for the Buddha's form (*bimba,* literally "reflection") to be visible to a potential disciple.[18] As in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras,* the vow involves a sequence of actions: the bodhisattva set the vows in motion before achieving buddhahood, and the vow comes into effect when the bodhisattva becomes a buddha. But there is more to the vow than a sequence of events, as the comparison of the snake charmer makes clear. The problem with the snake charmer is that he dies. If he wants to have some effect after his death, he has to leave a powerful object behind to act in his absence. The bodhisattva does not die, exactly, but he does reach a state that the text refers to as "cessation." The commentator Prajñākaramati explains that this "cessation" is another word for nirvana, and it is a word that puts emphasis on the idea that the bodhisattva has to stop for the Buddha to come into being.

This way of modeling the activity of the vow solves a number of important doctrinal problems. Mahāyāna sources say, for example, that a buddha acts without making any effort and yet is able to satisfy all the needs of sentient beings. How can a buddha act without making any effort? Candrakīrti, a seventh-century Madhyamaka philosopher, explains that the Buddha's actions come from the power of the vow. He makes this point by comparing the Bodhisattva Vow to the motion of a potter's wheel. Once a potter spins a wheel and sets it in motion, Candrakīrti says, the wheel keeps on turning, and the potter seems to produce pots without expending any effort.[19] Mahāyāna sources also say that a buddha has no concepts and yet responds in different ways to different situations. Again it is the vow that makes this possible. Śīlabhadra, a Yogācāra commentator on the *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra,* makes the point this way:

The Tathāgata has no concept of effort, either with regard to himself or with regard to something that belongs to himself, but because of a previous vow, he generates insights and manifestations and accomplishes the needs of sentient beings…. The Tathāgata does not distinguish what he will do from what he will not do, but he still does what needs to be done, just as someone who is in a state of concentration rises from concentration because of a previous vow. As is said in "The Chapter on the Ocean of Wisdom Bodhisattva," [the Buddha] is like a monk who stays in a state of concentration until a bell is rung. Even though he does not hear the bell ring, he still rises from concentration at the appointed time.[20]

There also is a problem about the differences between different buddhas. If buddhahood is defined as the understanding of emptiness, and emptiness means that there are no distinctions between things, why are there different buddhas? The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* answers this question by comparing a buddha to a piece of tie-dyed cloth. The knot in the cloth is the Bodhisattva Vow, and the dye is emptiness. The dye is all the same color, but when the cloth is dipped into the dye at the moment of buddhahood, each individual vow gives each individual buddha distinctive characteristics.

I have argued elsewhere that these problems are aspects of a more fundamental problem in Mahāyāna thought.[21] For lack of a better word, I call it simply the problem of absence. There is the absence of the bodhisattva who has to cease for there to be a buddha, and there is the absence of the Buddha, who is the perfect embodiment of the nonconceptual awareness of emptiness—an emptiness so complete that it involves not just the absence of any entity but the absence of any absence. These two types of absence have a distinctively Mahāyāna flavor, but they are not far removed from a problem that manifested itself in the early years of the Buddhist community. During the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, followers could look to him directly for guidance. When he died, they had to compensate for his absence with some other source of authority or with some other way to sense his lingering influence. This influence could be embodied, perhaps, in his teaching, in the monastic community, or in the physical relics that had been made powerful by his presence. One of the concepts that emerged from this problematic period was the concept of the Buddha's "sustaining power" (*adhiṣṭhāna*), a power that could be distilled particularly in his relics.[22]

As time went on and the Mahāyāna tradition began to evolve, the Buddha's *adhiṣṭhāna* became disconnected from the physical artifact of a relic, as it became disconnected from the concept of a single buddha, and it was associated with a group of words that designated aspects of what we might call the Buddha's (or buddhas') "grace." One of these words was *anubhāva*, the Buddha's might.[23] Another was *parigraha*, the Buddha's helping or holding. Another was the Buddha's vow. Sometimes groups of these words could be combined, suggesting that they functioned, for all intents and purposes, as synonyms in the salvific logic of the early Mahāyāna. A good example from the Pure Land literature is a passage in the *Longer Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* where the Buddha says that those who live in Sukhāvatī can serve a vast number of buddhas and then return to Sukhāvatī in the time it takes to finish a morning meal, "because of the help of the sustaining power of the previous vows" (*pūrva-praṇidhāna-adhiṣṭhāna-parigrahena*) of the Buddha Amitāyus.[24] Read with these words in mind, even the texts of the Perfection of Wisdom literature take on a surprisingly

devotional flavor, particularly in passages where the text insists that the actions of bodhisattvas are made possible, sometimes unwittingly, by the sustaining power of the Buddha.[25]

The significance of the vow in the larger world of the Indian Mahāyāna has important implications for Shin Buddhist theology. The first is so obvious that it almost does not need to be said, if it were not so widely overlooked. It is clear from these examples that the devotional logic of the vow is a fundamental part of Mahāyāna speculation about the nature of the Buddha. It is not a small, isolated doctrine, and it is not confined to a small group of texts. It is part of the intellectual and religious legacy of the Mahāyāna as a whole. This presents challenges as well as opportunities for Shin Buddhist theology. Pure Land Buddhism is often presented as if it involved a radical break from other forms of the Mahāyāna.[26] Certainly there are ways in which this is true. But exclusive emphasis on the *distinctiveness* of Pure Land teaching overlooks the important lines of connection that sew the Pure Land tradition together with the rest of the Mahāyāna. It also overlooks the way other Mahāyāna literature can serve as a resource for Pure Land theology. If the concept of the vow is not a sectarian notion but a significant feature of Mahāyāna thought as a whole, as it is in the works of thinkers like Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, and Śīlabhadra, then there is no reason why Shin Buddhist theologians should not use the whole Indian tradition as a resource for their critical reconstruction of the tradition, and there is no reason why they should not be full participants in any contemporary effort to rethink the meaning of the Mahāyāna.

In the process, however, Shin Buddhist theologians will have to confront aspects of the Indian tradition that seem to resist their traditional understanding of Pure Land Buddhism. It is customary, for example, to translate the word "previous" (*pūrva*) in the formula "previous vow" (*pūrva-praṇidhāna*) as "primal." The editors of *The Collected Works of Shinran* explain that "the Sanskrit original, *pūrva-praṇidhāna,* implies that the Primal Vow, as the manifestation in time, from ten kalpas ago, of that which is timeless, existed prior to (*pūrva*) the earliest being, and that is the basis and foundation of each being, leading to its self-awareness from the bottomless depths of life."[27] This may be an accurate account of Shinran's understanding of the primacy of the Vow, but there is no indication in the Indian sources that the Vow is timeless or existed prior to the earliest being. The examples from the Indian philosophers indicate simply that there is a sequence of causes. First there is the snake charmer's consecration, then there is the consecrated pillar. First the potter spins the wheel, then he makes the pot. First the monk enters concentration, then the monk gets up. First there is a Bodhisattva Vow, then there is a Buddha. Śāntideva's commentator Prajñākaramati makes this point explicit by using a traditional Buddhist causal formula: "When the state of the cause ceases, one

attains the state of the result."[28] The cause in this formula is not a primal or original cause, it is simply one element in a beginningless chain of causes and effects: it is the bodhisattva that precedes the appearance of a buddha.

By locating the Vow prior to the earliest being and beyond the flow of time, the Shin Buddhist tradition has introduced an element of paradox that would not have been necessary in the classical Indian context. If the Buddha Amitābha exists, as Luis O. Gómez has said, in "an eternal present," then there is no need for the chronological sequence of the Vow.[29] If the chronological sequence is real and describes something important about the process leading from bodhisattva to buddha, then there was a time when Amitābha Buddha was not. There was only the bodhisattva whose vows eventually, in time, produced the Buddha, just as ordinary causes produce ordinary effects. In the Indian tradition the paradox disappears when the vow is understood as a way of explaining how something that no longer exists can continue to have an effect.

This does not mean, however, that the concept of the Buddha is completely free from paradox, either in India or elsewhere. In India the idea of the vow was meant to explain how the Buddha can appear to act while he is completely free from action, just as the Buddha appears to speak, even though he remains silent.[30] The paradox of action and inaction is part of a more fundamental Buddhist paradox about identity. If there is no self, how can someone act? If buddhahood is defined as the perfect awareness of emptiness, how can the Buddha seem to choose one action over another? And if everything is empty, how can the sequence of action leading from bodhisattva to buddha make any sense? To bring these paradoxes to a resolution requires some concept of two truths, as the conversation between Nāgasena and Milinda has already suggested.[31] I will have more to say about the resolution of these paradoxes when I take up the relationship between emptiness and the doctrine of two truths in the last section of this paper.

Shinjin or the Trusting Mind

While Shinran insisted that the Primal Vow provided everything necessary for salvation, he also felt that the Vow had to elicit a response in the heart and mind of the believer: it had to be accepted with a sense of confidence and trust before it could save someone from the world of birth and death. In this respect Shinran stood on strong scriptural foundation. The text of Dharmākara's Eighteenth Vow (in its Sanskrit version) clearly presupposed a response on the part of the believer:

Blessed One, may I not awaken to unsurpassable, perfect, full awakening, if, after I attain awakening, those living beings in other

world spheres who conceive the aspiration to attain unsurpassable, perfect, full awakening, hear my name, and remember me with serene trust, will not be met by me at the moment of death—if I should not stand before them then, surrounded and honored by a retinue of monks, so that they can meet death without anxiety.[32]

The key term in this passage is "serene trust" (*prasanna-citta*). A more literal translation of this term would be "serene" or "trusting mind."[33] In recent works on Shinran, this term is often represented simply by its Japanese equivalent, *shinjin*, without translation. Looking elsewhere in the text of the two *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras*, it becomes clear that "trusting mind" is related to a number of other important Indian words that express some sense of confidence, trust, or faith. The most notable of these is the Indian word *śraddhā* or "faith." Taken altogether, these words raise a series of important interpretive questions. Do the words have distinctive meanings? Is there anything distinctive about their use in the early Mahāyāna? And how do these terms help us understand the continuing dilemmas of Shin Buddhist theology? The best way to answer these questions is to begin in the canonical tradition that preceded the appearance of the Mahāyāna.

In the early years of the Buddhist tradition, the concept of faith (*śraddhā*) played a clear but circumscribed role in the discipline that led to nirvana. It is understood best, perhaps, as an access virtue, a state of mind that a person needs to cultivate in order to get started on the Buddhist path. Eventually, however, faith has to give way to something more permanent and more deeply transformative. This more permanent virtue is wisdom, a person's own understanding and appreciation of the truths that constituted the Buddha's awakening. According to this model, faith is not entirely dispensable—a person needs to trust the Buddha's teaching and believe that it can be effective before practicing it with conviction—but faith in the Buddha's teaching is not enough. Faith eventually has to give way to wisdom. Once you have followed the Buddha's path and understood the Buddha's teaching for yourself, there is no longer any need to have faith in it. The old proverb may say that seeing is believing, but in classical India seeing is more than believing. Once you see something for yourself, there is no longer any need to take it as a matter of faith.

In the Abhidharma tradition, this understanding of faith is expressed in the list of five faculties (*indriya*): faith (*śraddhā*), vigor (*vīrya*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). According to Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, the five faculties function as the foundation (*āśraya*) of nirvana: faith is their source, and the practice of the five faculties leads eventually to nirvana.[34] In this respect the early Buddhist tradition is similar to the tradition that manifests itself in the seventeenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*:

> Without faith (*aśraddhayā*), any offering, gift, austerity, or action
> is called nonexistent (*asat*), O Pārtha; it does not exist here, and it
> does not exist in the world to come.[35]

For any action to be effective, it has to be done with faith, as the etymology
of the word itself suggests. You have to "put" (*dhā*) your "heart" (*śrad*) into
something before you can expect success.[36] Otherwise, the action might as
well never have taken place.

In the early Mahāyāna sutras, the word *śraddhā* continued to have the
same meaning, but its role changed dramatically. There were passages that
echoed the old usage, like the Buddha's comment, in the third chapter of
the *Lotus Sūtra*, about disciples who "go with faith in me, but do not have
knowledge of their own."[37] But there are also many passages where the
central drama of salvation turns on the issue of faith. The fifteenth chapter
of the *Lotus Sūtra*, for example, begins with the repetition of a simple
refrain: "Trust me, sons of good family, have faith (*abhiśraddadhvam*) in
the true teaching delivered by the Tathāgata."[38] The chapter itself then
elaborates a parable about faith: A physician goes away on a trip and finds,
when he comes home, that his children are sick. He offers them medicine,
but only some of the children are willing to accept it. To persuade the
others, the physician tells them that he is about to die, and he leaves for
another part of the country. Stunned by grief, the children take the medi-
cine out of respect for their absent father. When they have been healed, the
father reappears. The issues of truth and manipulation, as well as the issues
of the presence and absence of the father (as a representation of the
Buddha), are similar to issues raised elsewhere in the text,[39] but the key to
this passage is simple: to be healed the children have to have faith in their
father. Later in the text, this point about faith is distilled into a salvific
formula where faith itself guarantees that a person will become irreversible
from supreme awakening:

> O Ajita, any son or daughter of good family who hears this
> Dharma-teaching about the lifespan of the Tathāgata and gener-
> ates even a single moment of resolution (*adhimukti*) or has faith
> (*abhiśraddadhāna*) will have an immeasurable accumulation of
> merit, and, equipped with this accumulation of merit, this son or
> daughter of good family will become irreversible from supreme,
> perfect awakening.[40]

The *Lotus Sūtra* is not unique in the significance it attributes to
śraddhā. Similar passages in both the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras*[41] show that
śraddhā played a much more powerful role in the economy of salvation in
the early Mahāyāna than it did in previous traditions. How did it come to

carry such weight? Given the historical and textual uncertainty that sur-rounds so much of the early Mahāyāna, it is hard to do more than suggest a possible scenario. The change in the weight of *śraddhā* seems to be related, however, to basic changes in the Mahāyāna approach to the path that leads to awakening. As the ideal of the bodhisattva developed in Mahāyāna literature, the goal of nirvana no longer had the same central significance. The point of the bodhisattva path was not to achieve awaken-ing in this life but to return in the cycle of death and rebirth to bring others to awakening. Nirvana and buddhahood were still long-term goals, but in a practical sense buddhahood was postponed far into the future. The more immediate goal was to cultivate the six perfections so that a bodhisattva could function as a more powerful agent of salvation for others. With this change in the shape of salvation came a change in the relationships that tied practitioners together on the path. In the earlier tradition, practice was largely understood as a solitary discipline: nirvana could be achieved only for oneself. The bodhisattva path made it possible, however, for someone to benefit more clearly and more explicitly from a network of salvation. Bodhisattvas not only worked for the salvation of others; they could rely on the help of other bodhisattvas and buddhas who had gone before them.

Both these changes, the postponement of buddhahood and the possi-bility of a network of salvation, gave new significance to the concept of *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* still functioned as the trust that got someone started on the path, but it was more important to get started than it had been before. With the goal so far in the future, merely to be on the path became a substitute for the goal itself; and entry into the path gave access to a vast network of salvation, extending back into the distant past and carrying the believers forward in ways that would have been impossible for them to generate on their own. The only thing necessary was faith—to accept that this network of compassion was available and trust that it would be effective. The meaning of *śraddhā* did not change—it still signified a form of trust—but its function was transformed so radically that it became possible to speak, for the first time, of a Buddhist "salvation by faith."

Strangely enough, the concept of *śraddhā* does not seem to have retained its importance in the later history of the Indian Mahāyāna. In the formal discussions of the bodhisattva path that eventually dominated the literature of the Mahāyāna—works like Bhāvaviveka's *Flame of Reason* (*Tarkajvālā*), Candrakīrti's *Introduction to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), and Śāntideva's *Introduction to the Path of Awak-ening*—faith yielded its primacy to the "mind of awakening" (*bodhicitta*).[42] The hallmark of a bodhisattva was understood as the successive "genera-tions" (*utpāda*) of the mind that aspired to awakening for the benefit of others. *Bodhicitta* was a more complex concept than *śraddhā*, and its complexity contributed to its appeal. It had a moral dimension in the sense that it began as an aspiration (*praṇidhi*), like the vow (*praṇidhāna*) of a

bodhisattva, and then manifested itself in initiative (*pravṛtti*) toward action.[43] The *bodhicitta* also had an epistemological dimension. As an aspect of the mind (*citta*), it involved awareness, so that the cultivation of the *bodhicitta* was never far away from the development of insight and the study of philosophy. But its most important dimension lay in the realm of ontology. For the authors of the classic Mahāyāna, as for many others, the mind was not just what a person *knows* but what a person *is*: the *bodhicitta* was not just an aspiration or a thought but an expression of a person's being. Finally, the *bodhicitta* pervaded every aspect of the path to awakening. It was a beginning and an end: at the start it may have been nothing more than the first stirring of desire to follow the path to awakening, but even this first aspiration participated in the Buddha-mind to which it aspired. It was often compared to a jewel, not just because it was precious but because it represented, in its own infinitely faceted way, just about every aspect of the life and thought of a bodhisattva.

While the concept of the *bodhicitta* had not reached anything like its full elaboration at the time of the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtras*, the texts contain a hint of the complexity that lay ahead. The Sanskrit text of the Eighteenth Vow is not concerned about *śraddhā*. That appears elsewhere in the text. The vow calls instead for the mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*) and for a trusting mind (*prasanna-citta*): "…may I not awaken to perfect awakening, if living beings…who generate the mind of awakening (*bodhau cittam utpādya*), hear my name, and remember me with a trusting mind (*prasanna-citta*) …." It is not surprising that Shinran's commentary on the experience of *shinjin* (the Japanese equivalent of *prasanna-citta*) should share many of the complexities of the *bodhicitta*. Like the *bodhicitta*, Shinran's view of *shinjin* has a cognitive component: it involves an *awakening* to one's fathomless evil.[44] It is just a beginning, but it anticipates the highest good: "'To be transformed' means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into the highest good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water." Finally, *shinjin* represents the Buddha-mind at work in the mind of the believer: "The person who attains shinjin and joy / Is taught to be equal to the Tathagatas. / Great shinjin is itself Buddha-nature; / Buddha-nature is none other than the Tathagata."

The intellectual and religious kinship between *shinjin* and the *bodhicitta* is close enough to provide rich intellectual resources for Shin Buddhist theologians, and it makes it possible to pursue their implications, once again, in the sophisticated and critical style of the classical Indian Mahāyāna. The concept of the *bodhicitta* had deep resonances in Mahāyāna ritual; it was woven into the narrative tradition of the Mahāyāna; and it was capable of elevated philosophical expression.[45] All the riches of this tradition would be available to Shin Buddhist theologians, were it not for a percep-

tion, it seems, that *bodhicitta* and *shinjin* stand on opposite sides of an unbridgeable religious divide. Hōnen, Shinran's predecessor, drew heated criticism when he excluded the mind of awakening from the Pure Land path,[46] but Hōnen felt that people in this degenerate age simply could not achieve the mind of awakening. The only possibility for salvation, as he saw it, was to rely on the power of Amida. It is important to realize, however, that *bodhicitta* involves more than a one-dimensional reliance on one's own efforts. Traced through the full range of Mahāyāna literature, it brings together the same complex combination of grief and elation, humility and pride, repentance and self-abandonment that resonates through many of Shinran's most affecting passages about *shinjin*. Reading the early chapters of Śāntideva's *Introduction the Practice of Awakening* next to Shinran's *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'* or the chapter on *shinjin* in *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way* makes one aware that the complex currents of Mahāyāna devotion do not flow only through a single tradition.[47]

The Buddha of Immeasurable Life

The account of Amida Buddha in Shin Buddhist tradition plays back and forth between two points of paradox: the paradox of form and formlessness and the paradox of time and timelessness. On the subject of form and formlessness, Shinran says:

> Buddha-nature is Dharma-nature. Dharma-nature is dharma-body. For this reason there are two kinds of dharma-body with regard to the Buddha. The first is called dharma-body as suchness and the second, dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as suchness has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. From this oneness was manifested form, called dharma-body as compassionate means.[48]

The paradox of time and timelessness is reflected not just in exegetical statements about the Primal Vow, which the editors and translators of Shinran's *Collected Works* have described as "timeless" and "prior to the earliest being,"[49] but also in statements about Amida himself. Amida is said to be "the primordial Buddha who embodies the essence of all Buddhas." And, while Amida's origins are spoken of as if they belong to a sequence of historical time, "the inconceivable lengths of time that are described place them beyond our ordinary notions of time."[50] Clearly the Shin Buddhist tradition works with two contradictory points of view and insists that each expresses something important about the nature of Amida Buddha. What can we make of these paradoxes in the context of the Indian

Mahāyāna? Are they unique to the Shin tradition, or do they grow out of problems that are common in the Mahāyāna tradition as a whole?

A good way to consider these questions is to look closely at one of the most startling claims in the Mahāyāna, the claim that the Buddha can be eternal (*nitya*) or have an immeasurable span of life (*aparimitāyuḥ*).[51] There are many Mahāyāna doctrines that have an odd ring to more traditional ears, but none sounds more peculiar than the claim that a Buddha can last forever. This claim violates the doctrine of impermanence (*anitya*), one of the most basic of Buddhist doctrines. The Indian philosopher Bhāvaviveka acknowledged that the concept of the eternal Buddha was problematic when he included it in a list of objections raised by traditional Buddhists against the Mahāyāna.[52] Much can be learned from the way this master of debate framed his response. For Bhāvaviveka a Buddha could be considered eternal in two different ways. At the moment of a Buddha's awakening, the Buddha acquired the ability to manifest bodies, known in the Indian tradition as "manifestation-" or "illusion-" bodies (*nirmāṇa-kāya*). These could continue to serve the welfare of sentient beings "eternally," as long as there was anyone who needed the Buddha's help. At the moment of awakening, a buddha also realized the Dharma-body, or achieved perfect awareness of the emptiness of all things, in a way that transcended time altogether. The Dharma-body was eternal, because all things were and always will be completely empty. Bhāvaviveka expressed these two types of eternality by saying: "[A buddha] is called eternal because [as the Dharma-body] he is completely free from concepts …, and because [as the manifestation-body] he always accomplishes what is good for others."

Clearly Bhāvaviveka was working with concepts that were similar to the concepts used by Shinran and the later Shin Buddhist tradition. For Bhāvaviveka the Dharma-body was formless, while the manifestation-body had a particular shape and form, and the Dharma-body transcended time, while the manifestation-body acted within the flow of time to serve the needs of sentient beings. Bhāvaviveka would have been puzzled, I suspect, by the precise form of Shinran's distinction between the Dharma-body as suchness (or emptiness) and the Dharma-body as compassionate means, but he made a comparable distinction between two kinds of ultimate reality, one that was nonconceptual and effortless and another that was conceptual and subject to various kinds of human effort.[53] The similarities between these two widely separated thinkers was not accidental. As different as they may have been in the details of their doctrine, Shinran and Bhāvaviveka shared a similar set of problems. There were differences in terminology, but the basic paradoxes were the same: a buddha had form and it had no form, and a buddha acted as part of a sequence of historical events while it also transcended the sequence of time altogether.

What is the source of these paradoxes, and how can they be resolved, if they can be resolved at all? In my discussion of the Primal Vow, I mentioned the Buddhist paradox of identity. This is a paradox that any students of Buddhism confront when they begin to ask questions about traditional Buddhist views of reality. If everything changes and there is no permanent self, who is it who acts? If there is no self, who remembers yesterday's events or the events of a previous life? And if there is no self, who practices the path and hopes some day to achieve nirvana? The same problems apply to the concept of the Buddha, but with even greater force, since a buddha is a being who has perfectly realized and perfectly embodied the awareness of no-self. If buddhahood is defined as the awareness of no-self or (in Mahāyāna terms) emptiness, how can a buddha choose one action over another? If everything is empty, how can the practices that lead from a bodhisattva to a buddha make any sense? There are many ways to understand the idea of no-self, of course, but the problems remain remarkably constant in different schools of Buddhist thought. Buddhists want to be free from attributing any permanent identity to things, yet they also want to count on a predictable sequence of events, along with the possibility that whatever they do today will bear some fruit tomorrow, no matter how much they may have changed.

Karl Potter gave a useful, if rather abstract, explanation of this dilemma when he said that every Indian philosophical school has to avoid two problems: fatalism and skepticism.[54] Fatalism means that things will always be the way they are and nothing can be done to change them. Skepticism means that, while things may change, there is nothing I can do to change them or benefit from the change. You might say that a fatalist thinks that the chain of causation is too tight and everything is predetermined. A skeptic thinks the chain is too loose and actions have no predictable effect. To avoid these two problems, an Indian philosopher has to show how things can be free to change but also how the change can be sufficiently predictable that a person can do something today and hope to get some result from it tomorrow. In other words, there has to be an element of freedom in a system and also an element of predictability. If either freedom or predictability is missing, it is impossible to make choices that have any meaning, from buying the morning newspaper to seeking nirvana.

Given this set of choices, the classical Buddhist tradition opted decisively for freedom. Buddhist thinkers said that reality ultimately involved no self. By no self they meant not only that there was no continuous reality from one moment to the next, but, in the more radical interpretation of the Mahāyāna, no reality even in the individual moments themselves. Heraclitus may have said that you cannot step into the same river twice, but the philosophers of the Mahāyāna took the point a step further and said that you cannot step into the same river once. This choice, of course, left the

problem of predictability: they had to explain how they could be confident that their actions had any meaning when they had no self. Their answer was to approach things from two perspectives: *ultimately*, things have no self, but *conventionally*, according to the rules and expectations that govern ordinary human life, there is a self that can engage in action and experience the results.[55] A proper and balanced approach to life holds both these truths together.

Much more can be said, of course, about the controversies that surrounded this doctrine of two truths. Here it is enough to say simply that these two truth are not only contradictory, they are inseparable. The first of these points is easy to grasp; the second is more difficult. It is easy to see that whatever is true from the conventional perspective cannot be true from the ultimate perspective. If I say that I have a certain identity, that is true conventionally, but it is not true ultimately. If I say that I am not a self, that is true ultimately but not conventionally. The two perspectives are opposite and contradictory. In what sense are they inseparable? The Madhyamaka philosophers who elaborated this doctrine in India insisted that the truth of each perspective depends on the truth of the other. If something can come into or go out of existence conventionally, it cannot exist ultimately, and if something exists ultimately, with a permanent identity, it cannot come into and go out of existence conventionally. Sometimes people mistakenly say that Madhyamaka philosophers affirm the conventional reality of things *in spite of* the fact that they are ultimately unreal. Actually they say that it is precisely *because* things are unreal ultimately that they are real conventionally. Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition, made this point by saying, "Everything is possible for someone for whom emptiness is possible; nothing is possible for someone for whom emptiness is not possible."[56]

With the distinction between the two truths in mind, the paradoxes involved in Shinran's account of Amida Buddha become far less problematic. Form and formlessness, and time and timelessness are simply ways of speaking about the Buddha from different perspectives. Conventionally the Buddha results from certain vows, has form, and initiates action. Ultimately the Buddha is identical with emptiness, beyond words, beyond form, and beyond action. The contradiction between these two perspectives constitutes a paradox, but it is far less mystifying than it seems. The word "paradox" often is used as an easy way to avoid difficult thought, especially in writings about religion. But careful definitions of paradox insist that it involves an appearance of contradiction or absurdity that can be resolved when it is investigated or explained.[57] Shinran's paradoxes involve deep contradiction, but they are founded on the basic paradox of identity in the Mahāyāna, and they are capable of determined resolution, as long as one is prepared to grapple with the difficulties of the two truths.

This does not mean that difficulties simply disappear. Gordon D. Kaufman has posed some pointed questions for Shin Buddhist theologians, not just about the relationship between Amida Buddha's form and formlessness, but about the way Amida Buddha acts through the power of the Vow.[58] The idea of a previous vow, set in motion in the distant (but real) past, made good sense according to the traditional Indian worldview, where it was assumed that every person and every buddha were the results of decisions made in enormous numbers of previous lives. This Indian worldview conforms rather uneasily, however, with a modern, scientific worldview. To find a satisfactory, contemporary explanation, the traditional Indian philosophers may be both a hindrance and a help. They relied on presuppositions about the prehistory of the buddhas' activities that are even more difficult to translate into the world of modernity than into the world of thirteenth-century Japan. But the critical method they used to resolve the basic contradictions of Buddhist thought has a modern ring. The precision of this critical method is thoroughly Buddhist and should be one of the most important tools for contemporary Mahāyāna theologians.

Conclusion

In his book, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History*, William J. Bouwsma quotes a line from Henry James: "To be an American is an excellent preparation for culture…. It seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them, we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically, etc.) claim our property wherever we find it."[59] To say that picking and choosing is a distinctively American trait now seems hopelessly antiquated. Modernity, post- or otherwise, has made all of us shoppers in the marketplace of culture, discovering and appropriating traditions wherever we find them.

In this essay I have argued that Buddhist theologians, particularly in the Shin Buddhist tradition, can find useful and powerful resources in the intellectual world of the Indian Mahāyāna. I have made this argument because I am convinced that the Indian intellectuals gave a precise and challenging account of some of the most basic ideas in the Pure Land tradition, from the Primal Vow to the trusting mind and the Eternal Buddha. But I also am convinced that they embody a salutary attitude toward tradition itself. Tradition was important to the Indian intellectuals. They quoted from scripture, argued about its interpretation, and used it as an authority in their analysis of reality. But they recognized that tradition was unstable. It could not serve as an authority in its own right without the support of critical argument. In this respect they embodied the ambiguity that characterizes theology today, especially the academic theology prac-

ticed in American universities. What better way for Buddhists to test themselves against a renewed and revivified tradition than with traditional sources that were also critical and uneasy about tradition? To say that sixth-century Buddhist intellectuals were crypto-moderns would not do justice to them or to us, but they shared just enough of the ambiguities of the modern world to be intriguing foils in the contemporary struggle with tradition.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000).

2. Ray L. Hart gave an vivid account of the ambivalence many professors of religious studies feel toward the practice of theology in his study of the field published as a special issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion.* I have discussed many of the same issues in "The Ghost at the Table: On the Study of Buddhism and the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1995): pp. 1085–1110. For a trenchant critique of theological agendas in the study of religion, see Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies: The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

3. Aiśvaryamadamatto 'si mām avajñāya vartase / upasthiteṣu bauddheṣu madadhīnā tava sthitiḥ / / quoted by George Chemparathy in *An Indian Rational Theology: Introduction to Udayana's Nyāyakusumāñjali* (Vienna: Indological Institute, University of Vienna, 1972), p. 28.

4. One project that has received wide attention is the movement known as Critical Buddhism. This movement has been ably documented by Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997). Another important project is the Shin Buddhism Translation Series, culminating in *The Collected Works of Shinran*, trans. Dennis Hirota, Hisao Inagaki, Michio Tokunaga, and Ryushin Uryuzu (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), and including Yoshifumu Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989).

5. The energy generated by this dialogue is best represented, perhaps, by the long-running conversation between Masao Abe and John Cobb. See particularly Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought,* ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985); John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

6. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric,* trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), book 3.

7. T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda*, Sacred Books of the East 35–36 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890–1894; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1963).

8. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.10.

9. Masaaki Hattori, *Dignāga On Perception*, Harvard Oriental Series 47 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

10. Paul J. Griffiths made this point about Hakamaya Noriaki's practice of Critical Buddhism in "The Limits of Criticism," in Hubbard and Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, pp.145–160.

11. Robert Cummings Neville made a similar point about his own theology when he said that tradition functions as a source but not as a norm. See *A Theology Primer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), ch. 2.

12. Taitetsu Unno, trans., *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic* (Honolulu: Buddhist Study Center Press, 1996), p. 33.

13. The Sanskrit text of the sutras is found in *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, vol. 1, ed. P. L. Vaidya (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961). Both sutras have been translated by Luis O. Gómez in *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

14. I am basing this summary of the key vows on the text of the Sanskrit version. One of the most crucial problems in the study of the Pure Land sutras has to do with the text of these two vows (numbers 18 and 19 in the Sanskrit version). The Chinese translation differs not only in the order of these two vows but in the conditions set for Amitābha's compassionate intervention. See Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, pp. 71 and 167–168, with notes on pp. 231–232 and 247–248.

15. Here and in subsequent paragraphs, I follow the account of the vow found in part 2 of my *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (HarperCollins: San Francisco, 1992; reprint ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

16. J. W. de Jong, "La légende de Śāntideva," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 16 (1975): pp. 161–182.

17. Verse 9.34 in *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts Series, no. 12 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960).

18. On the devotional and philosophical significance of this act of vision, see *To See the Buddha*, part 3.

19. Ibid., p. 77.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., part 2.

22. For examples of the use of this concept, see *To See the Buddha*, pp. 90–94.

23. As in the Longer *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*: "Furthermore, Ānanda, it is the power [*anubhāva*] of the Tathāgata that causes you to question the Tathāgata about this point." Vaidya, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, p. 222; corresponding to Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 64.

24. Vaidya, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, p. 246; corresponding to Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, p. 99.

25. As in Edward Conze's translation of *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* (Bolinas: Four Season Foundation, 1973), p. 159: "Sariputra: It is through the might (*anubhāva*), sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*), and grace (*parigraha*) that the Bodhisattvas study this deep Perfection of Wisdom, and progressively train in Thusness? The Lord: So it is, Sariputra. They are known to the Tathagata, they are sustained and seen by the Tathagata, and the Tathagata beholds them with his Buddha-eye."

An important example of the word *adhiṣṭhāna* in the *Lotus Sūtra* occurs in the chapter on "The Manifestation of the Stūpa" (chapter 11). Here the meaning of *adhiṣṭhāna* comes close to the meaning of *praṇidhāna* (vow): "Then, Prabhūtaratna, the Tathāgata, Arhat, and Perfectly Enlightened Buddha had this *adhiṣṭhāna*: 'Let this stūpa, containing my physical form, arise in any Buddha-fields, in any world systems in the ten directions, wherever there is a revelation of this Dharma-teaching, the Lotus of the True Dharma….'" See P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960), pp. 149–150. Burton Watson translates *adhiṣṭhāna* in this passage as "vow." See *The Lotus Sūtra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 171. A similar point is made in the chapter on "Peaceful Practices" (chapter 13 in the Sanskrit and chapter 14 in Burton Watson's translation of Kumārajīva's Chinese): "O Mañjuśrī, this Dharma-teaching has been sustained (*adhiṣṭhita*) by all the Buddhas. O Mañjuśrī, it has been eternally sustained by the Tathāgatas, Arhats, and Perfectly Enlightened Buddhas of the past, present, and future" (Vaidya ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 176). Here Watson translates the Chinese of *adhiṣṭhita* as "protected by supernatural power." This is not incorrect, but it loses the parallel with the previous passage and with the concept of the vow.

Adhiṣṭhāna comes closest to a concept of grace in the *Lotus Sūtra* when the object of *adhiṣṭhāna* is not the teaching but the people who hear the teaching, as in the beginning of the chapter on "The Life-Span

of the Tathāgata" (chapter 15 in the Sanskrit, chapter 16 in Watson): "Sons of good family, you should listen to the following application of the power of my *adhiṣṭhāna*" (Vaidya ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 189). What follows is an account of the Tathāgata's life as Śākyamuni Buddha.

The common element in all these passages is the idea of a power that, once it has been set motion, continues to work its effect without the need for any further action by the original agent. I call *adhiṣṭhāna* "sustaining power" to suggest that it gives support and also continues in existence, force, or intensity, but no single word or phrase can do justice to all its uses in the literature of the Mahāyāna.

26. Yoshifumu Ueda and Dennis Hirota, for example, say, "The Pure Land path is distinctive in presenting a way by which all people may realize awakening, whatever their moral or intellectual capacities," in *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought,* p. 104. Gordon D. Kaufman has commented on a tendency to rely on sharp contrasts or radical forms of dualism in Shin Buddhist thought in his "Shin Buddhism and Religious Truth: Some Questions," in *God, Mystery, Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 138.

27. *The Collected Works of Shinran,* vol. 2, p. 201.

28. *Hetvavasthānivṛttau phalāvasthāprāptau*: *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* ed. P. L. Vaidya, p. 200.

29. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss,* p. 37.

30. On the Mahāyāna understanding of the Buddha's silence and its relationship to the concept of the vow, see *To See the Buddha,* part 2.

31. Most contemporary definitions of a paradox insist that it involves an apparent contradiction that can be shown, often in a surprising way, to be true. See, for example, Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms,* 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). This meaning corresponds to the second definition of paradox in *The Oxford English Dictionary*: "A statement or proposition which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common sense, though, on investigation or when explained, it may prove to be well founded." *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). The challenge for the philosopher or theologian is to show how these apparent contradictions or absurdities nevertheless make sense.

32. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss,* p. 71. The Sanskrit text corresponds imperfectly to vow number 19 in the Chinese version (Gómez, *The Land of Bliss,* p. 168).

33. As Gómez does in his glossary entry on "faith."

34. Prahlad Pradan, ed., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu* (Patna:

K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975): commentary on verse 2.6.

35. *Bhagavad Gītā* 17.28: aśraddhayā hutaṃ dattaṃ tapastaptaṃ kṛtaṃ ca yat / asad ity ucyate pārtha na ca tat pretya no iha //.

36. *Śraddhā* in this sense is attested as early as the *Rig Veda* and has a long history in Hindu religious literature, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has demonstrated in *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), ch. 4.

37. Vaidya, ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 65: ete 'pi śraddhāya mamaiva yānti / pratyātmikaṃ jñānu na caiva vidyate //.

38. Chapter 16 in Watson's translation.

39. As in the parable of the burning house in chapter 3.

40. Vaidya ed., *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, p. 199. The degree to which the merit is immeasurable has been abbreviated.

41. Vaidya, ed., *Mahāyānasūtrasaṃgraha*, pp. 249 and 257; corresponding to Gómez, *The Land of Bliss*, pp. 104 and 21.

42. A good way to observe the relationship between *śraddhā* and *bodhicitta* in the formal accounts of the bodhisattva path is to study the transition from *śraddhā* to *bodhicitta* in the first few pages of Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya* ("Compendium of Teaching"). The second verse reads: "Anyone who wants to bring suffering to an end and wants to achieve final pleasure should solidify the root of faith (*śraddhā*) and solidify the mind for awakening (*bodhau matir*)." Śāntideva elaborates this verse by quoting several passages from the Mahāyāna sutras in praise of faith, then moves on to a lengthy exploration of the mind of awakening. Faith does not reappear as a significant topic until he discusses the recollection (*anusmṛti*) of the three jewels in chapter 18, where faith functions as the initial item in two lists of good qualities: one consisting of faith, respect, humility, and courage, another consisting of the five faculties (*indriya*). The Sanskrit text can be found in P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Śikṣāsamuccaya of Śāntideva* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961). An outdated but still useful translation can be found in *Śikshā-Samuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine Compiled by Śāntideva*, trans. Cecil Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse (reprint ed., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971).

43. As Śāntideva explained in the first chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

44. The references to Shinran's thought in the remainder of this paragraph are taken from *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 2, pp. 107–108.

45. Luis O. Gómez has commented on "the richly textured and complex world of imagery and religious hope" shared by the two Pure Land sutras and the larger world of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but he has been reluctant to use what he calls "scholastic Buddhism" to make that larger world avail-

able to interpret Pure Land tradition (*The Land of Bliss*, p. 115). This position imposes unnecessary limitations on what could be a richer and more open-ended process of interpretation.

46. *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 2, p. 17.

47. Compare, for example, the alchemical metaphor ("I can make bits of rubble turn into gold") in *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 459 with *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 1.10 ("The idea of the mind of awakening takes this impure image and changes it into the priceless image of the jewel of the Buddha; grasp it firmly and work with it as if it were an elixir of mercury"). Compare also the confession of faults in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* chapter 2 with Shinran's confessions of his own unworthiness.

48. *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1, p. 461.

49. *Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 2, p. 201.

50. Ueda and Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction*, pp. 121 and 117.

51. There are many examples of this doctrine outside the Pure Land tradition, such as the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, trans. R. E. Emmerick as *the Sūtra of Golden Light*, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, vol. 27 (London: Pāli Text Society, 1970; reprint ed., 1979). The *locus classicus* of this doctrine must certainly be the chapter on the lifespan of the Tathāgata in the *Lotus Sūtra* (chapter 15 in Vaidya's edition of the Sanskrit text).

52. For this and other references to the idea of the eternal Buddha, see *To See the Buddha*, pp. 109–113.

53. The distinction between the conceptual and non-conceptual ultimates is discussed in Malcolm David Eckel, *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 112–113.

54. Karl Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963; reprint ed., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972).

55. This outline of the two truths is a simplified version of the doctrine that was elaborated with much greater complexity in the Madhyamaka school. More detailed accounts of the two truths can be found in my *To See the Buddha*, ch. 2, and *Jñānagarbha's Commentary*. See also "The Satisfaction of No Analysis: On Tsong kha pa's Approach to Svātantrika Madhyamaka" in *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction*, ed. Georges B. J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), pp. 173–203. The distinction would be stated differently if one followed the terminology of the Yogācāra, but the distinction between two perspectives, the perspective of emptiness and the perspective of conventional duality, remains.

56. *Madhyamakakārikā* 24.14. For a discussion of this verse and the issues it raises, see *To See the Buddha*, ch. 2.

57. See note 30 above.

58. *God, Mystery, Diversity*, p. 138.

59. William J. Bouwsma, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 4–5.

Why did Buddhism disappear from Bharat? Jainism was in full swing in India prior to Hinduism. All royal people were influenced by Jain monks and there speech on ruthless Hindu Kshatriya or warrior dharma/religion of protection & offense. They highlighted the path of peace and salvation that could only be attained by Jainism. The Brahmins performed a great Puja and earnestly prayed Lord Shiva to stop the progress of Jainism. According to aggressive Hindu beliefs Adi Shankaracharya was born. Regarding Shankaracharya it is said in at least one case he was not able to answer questions placed b Buddhism basically died out in India proper a long time ago. Well, first of all, the very few native Indians that I know who called themselves Buddhists were converts from Hinduism because they belonged to the lowest caste. What I have been able to discern from them is that they still basically practise Hinduism but without the caste taboo or getting blessings from the Brahmin priests. You asked - "What's the difference between Indian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism?" Buddhism basically died out in India proper a long time ago. Well, first of all, the very few native Indians that I know who called themselves Buddhists were converts from Hinduism because they belonged to the lowest caste.