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From Buddha Nature to Original Enlightenment

"Contemplating Suchness" in Medieval Japan

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In East Asia, theories of buddha nature (Ch. *foxing* 仏性, J. *busshō*) have varied widely. Some teachers, following the Madhyamaka tradition, have understood it in terms of emptiness, in that denial of independent metaphysical essences at once establishes an ontological equality between the Buddha and ordinary beings. Other thinkers, attracted by *tathāgatagarbha* ideas, have seen buddha nature as a luminous inherent nature, replete with wondrous buddha qualities. Still others, drawing on Yogācara thought, have understood it in terms of the maturing of seeds present in the store consciousness or *ālayavijñāna*. The issue of buddha nature has drawn heated debate. Is it a potential, or an ontological ground? Is it confined to sentient beings? Ideas of buddha nature are not merely abstract philosophical issues but entail soteriological questions: What actions are necessary to manifest the buddha nature, and how long does it take?

This chapter addresses a distinctive approach to these questions found in the doctrine of "original enlightenment" (J. *hongaku hōmon* 本覚法門), which dominated the intellectual mainstream of the influential Tendai school (天台宗) of Japanese Buddhism from roughly the late eleventh through early eighteenth centuries. Today, the term *hongaku* or "original enlightenment" (also "intrinsic enlightenment," "inherent awakening," etc.) is often used loosely to mean any kind of innate buddha nature theory. This essay employs it in a stricter sense to refer to a specific discourse, or group of discourses, produced within medieval Japanese Tendai and grounded in its tradition of *Lotus Sūtra* interpretation. In essence, original enlightenment doctrine asserts that buddhahood is neither a potential to be realized nor a goal to be achieved but the true status of all things. Ordinary deluded people do not transform and become buddhas; we are buddha already, from the outset, and have only to realize it. The radiant buddhas with their extraordinary marks who appear in the sūtras are not real buddhas but merely provisional signs. The real buddha is the ordinary worldling (Skt. *pṛthag-jana*, J. *bonbu* 凡夫), just as he or she is. Liberation depends not on merit accumulation, moral cultivation, or eradication of defilements but solely on the insight, or even the faith, that one is buddha originally.

Tendai original enlightenment discourse was first brought to the attention of the Japanese Buddhist academic world by the early twentieth-century scholar Shimaji Daitō (島地大等, 1875–1927). In a time of massive importation of, and comparison with, Western academic traditions, critics claimed that "Japan has religion but no philosophy." Shimaji found a counterargument in original enlightenment doctrine, or, in his term, "original enlightenment *thought*" (*hongaku shisō* 本覚思想).[1] For Shimaji, *hongaku* discourse represented the "climax" of Buddhism as philosophy, in that it pushed to their limits the implications of Mahāyāna nonduality. He characterized it as an "absolute affirmation" of reality that celebrates all things as enlightened just as they are. Since Shimaji's time, some commentators have found in this affirmation something distinctively "Japanese," reflecting a putative cultural attitude of accommodation to the natural world.[2] Others have seen *hongaku* doctrine as antinomian and morally problematic: an uncritical valorization of the phenomenal realm that in effect denies the need for religious practice and even legitimates wrongdoing. Advocates of so-called "critical Buddhism" (*hihan Bukkyō* 批判仏教), Hakamaya Noriaki (袴谷憲昭) and Matsumoto Shirō (松本史朗), have on the contrary denounced original enlightenment thought as an authoritarian discourse that sacralizes the status quo and perpetuates social inequities.[3]

Such blanket characterizations tend to be overdrawn and require qualification and correction. For example, *hongaku* doctrine is far more consistent with broader Mahāyāna thought than has often been acknowledged. It does not deny the need for practice but rather reconceives it. I have addressed these matters in detail elsewhere.[4] This chapter examines how the conceptual shift from "buddha nature" as a universal potential to the claim that all are buddhas from the outset radically altered understandings of the Buddhist path. The first section provides background by outlining two prior doctrinal developments fundamental to the emergence of Tendai *hongaku* thought. The second illustrates how original enlightenment thought reconceives the relationship of practice and enlightenment, focusing on a specific text, the twelfth-century *Shinnyokan* (真如観, *Contemplation of Suchness*).

1 Shimaji 1931b. Shimaji's approach to *hongaku* doctrine as "philosophy" or "thought" has encouraged a tendency to view this discourse in the abstract, without due attention to its institutional or practice contexts. Nonetheless, "original enlightenment thought" is a heuristically convenient expression, and I use it here with the understanding that it does not imply "thought" as opposed to "practice."

2 Tamura 1987.

3 Hubbard and Swanson 1997.

4 J. Stone, 1999a and 1999b.

Two Key Antecedents

Medieval Tendai *hongaku* doctrine draws on multiple strands of earlier Mahāyāna thought. Since it would be impossible to detail here all the intellectual currents that contributed to its rise, let's focus on two antecedent developments that are especially important to understanding both original enlightenment ideas and the *Shinnyokan*. First are Sinitic Buddhist notions, also embraced in Japan, of the world as a holistic cosmos in which all things interpenetrate and encompass one another. Second is an issue that engaged many Japanese Buddhist thinkers: whether buddhahood might not somehow be realized quickly and by ordinary persons at early stages of the path.

The Interpenetrating Cosmos

During the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, Chinese Buddhism entered a new era, when its dominant forms took shape and its exegetes creatively reformulated their received Indic tradition to meet Chinese concerns.[5] One result was a dynamic reformulation of the implications of emptiness teachings. Dissatisfied with the relentless "neither A... nor B" apophasis of Madhyamaka texts that sought to illuminate the Dharma by saying what it is not, Chinese Buddhist thinkers sought to express notions of emptiness and nonduality in more affirmative terms. In a significant article, Robert Gimello has argued that the Chinese intellectual categories of "principle" (*li* 理) and "phenomena" (*shi* 事) as used by Buddhist exegetes parallel the Sanskrit terms "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) and "form" (*rūpa*) but significantly expand their meanings.[6] Principle, he says, may be understood as the principle that particular forms are empty of metaphysical essence, thus encapsulating the relationship of the two and stressing the modal status of emptiness in a manner that avoids its false reification either as a "thing" or as "nothingness." *Shi* or phenomena can indicate not only traditional categories of dharma analysis, such as the five skandhas that unite to form the common-sense phenomena of our ordinary perception, but also those common-sense phenomena themselves. This new language, Gimello suggests, enabled each particular to be seen not only as empty but also as full, in the sense of encompassing in itself the nonduality of principle and phenomena. This in turn enabled a positive revalorizing of the phenome-

5 Gimello 1976a: 95–119 passim, and Gregory 1991, esp. 1–20. Both build on the work of the Japanese scholar Yūki Reimon (結城令聞, 1902–1992).

6 Gimello 1976b. Gimello specifically addresses the thought of Dushun (杜順, 557–640), later celebrated as the first patriarch of the Huayan school. However, his insights about the implications of Dushun's language have a much broader application.

nal world, not as something innately delusory that must be abandoned if liberation is to be achieved, but as the very locus of liberative activity.

In consequence, Sinitic concepts of "buddha nature" frequently characterize awakening as liberative insight into the world as an interrelated cosmos in which all things, being empty of fixed substance, interpenetrate and contain one another without losing their individual identity. These concepts are both ontological, explaining that each concrete phenomenon instantiates this mutual inclusion, and also soteriological, in showing liberation to consist of insight into this nonduality. This radical interrelation was formulated in multiple ways by different thinkers and traditions. As a heuristic device, and at some risk of oversimplification, let's consider three models of this interpenetrating cosmos that emerged in China and became foundational for much of Japanese Buddhist thought.

The first model draws on *tathāgatagarbha* notions of an originally pure, enlightened mind intrinsic to all sentient beings, characterized as the "womb" or "embryo" of the buddhas and innately endowed with wondrous buddha qualities. In sentient beings it is the potential for buddhahood; in buddhas, the fully realized truth or dharma body (*dharmakāya*). In its Chinese iterations, all phenomena are said to emanate from an innately pure, undifferentiated one mind. This model is closely associated with the influential sixth-century Chinese apocryphon known as the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (*Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論), which offers the following analogy. Just as calm water, agitated by the wind, produces waves, the originally pure mind, coming into contact with adventitious defilements, generates the phenomenal world. Owing to delusion, one arouses notions about differentiated phenomena such as self and other as real entities, leading to craving, attachment, and suffering. But with the stilling of the wind, the waves subside, and the water returns to its perfect reflective clarity: Liberation lies in discerning that the phenomena of the saṃsāric world are in essence no different from the one mind and thus originally pure.[7] Broadly influential, this concept would undergo particular development within the Huayan (J. Kegon 華厳) school and among Chan (J. Zen 禅) thinkers.

This model of all phenomena emanating from a single source was also incorporated into the esoteric teachings (J. *mikkyō* 密教), and in Japan, Kūkai (空海, 774–835) used it to systematize his esoteric Shingon (真言) doctrine.[8] The combining of Huayan or Kegon elements with esoteric thought yielded a second, structurally similar model, in which the single source from which all things emanate is the

7 Taishō 1666.32.576c11–16 and 1667.32.585b5-10; Jorgensen et al. 2019: 76. For discussion, see Gregory 1991: 160–61; Jorgensen et al. 2019: 19–21.

8 Tamura 1990; Stone 1999a: 11–12.

dharma-body buddha of the esoteric teachings, Mahāvairocana (J. Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来). In this case the "dharma body" is understood not as a remote or abstract principle but as dynamically unfolding in all things. Mahāvairocana is, so to speak, the cosmic buddha, who permeates everywhere. Earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness—the six great elements that constitute all things—are the body and mind of Mahāvairocana and also form the bodies and minds of all living beings. Thus all phenomena, including the bodies and minds of all living beings, are already inseparable from this universal buddha, though the unenlightened do not realize this. This concept informed the secret techniques of esoteric practice. Mudrās—symbolic ritualized hand and bodily gestures as well as the implements used in esoteric ritual—are the body of Mahāvairocana. Mantras, sacred syllables or invocations, are his speech, and maṇḍalas, the cosmic diagrams of his realm, instantiate his mind. Through the practice of the "three mysteries" (*sanmitsu* 三密)—the forming of mudrās, the chanting of mantras, and the visualization or contemplation of the maṇḍalas or other esoteric symbols—the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner are aligned or "synced," as it were, with the body, speech, and mind of Mahāvairocana. Thus in the very act of practice, the identity of the adept and the cosmic buddha is realized.

A third and structurally different model of an interrelated cosmos, originating with Tiantai (J. Tendai 天台) Buddhism, denies that mind is prior to phenomena. Things do not emanate from an original source. The mind and all things are always mutually inclusive; wherever there is the slightest moment of consciousness, the entire phenomenal world is also present. Where the Huayan totalistic vision is "dynamic," emphasizing how the one mind gives rise to the myriad phenomena, the Tiantai version is "concrete," in that form and mind are mutually identified in every phenomenal particular.[9] One could say that the Tiantai model of the interpenetrating cosmos goes even further than its Huayan counterpart in valorizing the phenomenal world. The distinctions among good and evil, ignorance and enlightenment, self and other, and all ten dharma-realms of sentient beings and their environments, from hell dwellers to buddhas, are not the products of delusion clouding an innately pure mind but the true aspect of all things (*shohō jissō* 諸法実相). This position rules out notions of primal purity; evil is innate, although not manifest, even in the Buddha.[10] There is no greater reality beneath, behind, or above the one we see. In Tiantai language, "Of every form and fragrance, there is none that is not the Middle Way."[11]

9 Tamura 1965: 73–94, and 1973: 485; Stone 1999a: 8–10.

10 On the controversial Tiantai doctrine of "innate evil," see Donner 1987.

11 Guanding's preface to the *Mohe zhiguan*, Taishō 1911.46.1c24–25.

This model provides the conceptual basis for the perfect interfusion of the three truths (J. *en'yū santai* 円融三諦) and the threefold contemplation or discernment in a single mind (*isshin sangan* 一心三観), central to Tiantai thought and practice. All phenomena are empty of fixed substance, a discernment that frees one from attachments and corresponds to the wisdom of śravakas and novice bodhisattvas. At the same time, phenomena exist conventionally in dependence upon causes and conditions. Freed from false reifications and attachments, correct discernment of the phenomenal yields the wisdom to act compassionately in real situations in the world and corresponds to the wisdom of more advanced bodhisattvas. Thus phenomena are both empty and yet conventionally existing and yet neither exclusively one nor the other; to hold both insights simultaneously while maintaining the tension between them is the Middle, the buddha wisdom.[12]

To speak of these totalizing visions as discrete models associated with specific traditions is, as noted, a heuristic device, as their development was shaped by reciprocal borrowings, debates, and ongoing refinements of interpretation. In China, differences between the Tiantai and Huayan concepts provoked intense controversy.[13] This was less so in medieval Japan, and Tendai original enlightenment thinkers drew freely on all three versions just outlined. For them, the key point was the vision of a nondual, interpenetrating universe, implying an ontological equality of the buddha and all beings and valorizing the phenomenal world. That vision was essential to the emergence of Tendai *hongaku* thought.

"Shortening the Path"

According to the Mahāyāna sūtras and early commentaries, buddhahood takes an inconceivably long time to achieve: "three immeasurable kalpas" was one common formulation. For the compilers of those sūtras and their exegetes, this evidently did not pose a problem. Rather, the nobility and grandeur of the bodhisattva path was underscored by the vast length of time required to complete it. But many Sui- and Tang-dynasty Chinese commentators were dismayed by so remote a vision of the goal and sought more readily accessible modes of liberation.[14] Dis-

12 On the threefold truth and threefold contemplation, see Swanson 1989: 115–56; and Donner and Stevenson 1993: 9–17.

13 For an overview, see Tamura 1973: 485–504. Debate over whether "mind" should be understood according to orthodox Tiantai as the deluded mind of the ordinary person, or in a Huayan-influenced manner as originally pure, informed disputes between the "mountain" (*shanjia* 山家) and "off-mountain" (*shanwai* 山外) factions within Tiantai during the Song dynasty (960–1279). See Donner and Stevenson 1993: 84–94; Stone 1999a: 9–10.

14 Gimello 1976a: 96–100, 113–17.

courses of "sudden enlightenment," which would later become famous in Chan circles, began to emerge. The widespread attraction of Pure Land devotion owed in large measure to the notion of birth in the buddha Amitābha (J. Amida 阿弥陀)'s western Land of Bliss as a shortcut on the long bodhisattva path; once born there, it was said, one would not again fall back into the realms of saṃsāric rebirth but was assured of attaining buddhahood.[15]

In Japan, the possibility of quickly realizing buddhahood was reformulated in a different context and argued in new terms, sparking intense scholastic engagement. Discussion centered around the "realization of buddhahood with this very body" (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏), a term only rarely encountered in Chinese sources. Kūkai and Saichō (最澄, 766/767–822), celebrated respectively as the founders of the Japanese Shingon and Tendai schools and preeminent Buddhist teachers of the Heian period (794–1185), both addressed it.[16] Both positioned themselves against the rival Hossō (法相, Ch. Faxiang) school, which asserted that only a limited number of beings are capable of achieving buddhahood, and only after three immeasurable kalpas of bodhisattva practice. For Kūkai, in performing the three mysteries of the esoteric teachings, the body, speech, and mind of the adept are identified with those of the cosmic buddha, and one realizes buddhahood "with this very body."[17] Since the body and mind of the practitioner are ontologically no different from the body and mind of Mahāvairocana, the possibility of such attainment was in theory open to all; in practice, however, it was restricted to adepts, who had access to the requisite training and specialized ritual knowledge.

Where Kūkai developed the concept of *sokushin jōbutsu* in asserting the superiority of the esoteric teachings, Saichō saw it as a distinguishing feature of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the central scripture of Tendai and also revered more broadly for its promise that all can attain buddhahood. Saichō drew specifically on the episode in chapter 12 of the eight-year-old *nāga* princess ("dragon girl," in Chinese translation), who in the presence of the assembly achieves buddhahood "in the space of a moment."[18] How was this possible? Was she an advanced bodhisatt-

15 Inagaki 1962.

16 Sueki 1995: 271–83; Groner 1989. The phrase "shortening the path" is taken from Groner 1992.

17 Inagaki 2006.

18 The episode of the *nāga* girl is at *Miaofa lianhua jing* (妙法蓮華經), Taishō 262.9.35a18–c26; Hurvitz 2009: 181–85. The sixth Tiantai patriarch Zhanran (湛然, 711–782) first used the term *sokushin jōbutsu* to describe her attainment in in his *Fahua wenju ji* (法華文句記), Taishō 1719.34.314b23–24.

va already close to full awakening before she first heard the *Lotus Sūtra* from the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in the *nāga* palace beneath the sea? Or was she still at an early stage of the path, a figure who could serve as a model for less advanced, ordinary Japanese monks? Where some Chinese exegetes had placed her within the ten grounds (*daśa-bhūmi, jūji* 十地), an advanced stage of bodhisattva practice not far short of full buddhahood, Saichō positioned the dragon girl at a much earlier stage, at the level of the first abode or *bhūmi* (*shojū* 初住).[19] The first abode denotes that point on the bodhisattva path when one transitions from the status of an ordinary worldling (*bonbu* 凡夫) to that of a sage (*shō* 聖). From then on, rebirth is driven, not by deluded action, but by compassion. In other words, Saichō located her attainment at precisely this transition and equated *sokushin jōbutsu* with partial, not full, enlightenment, potentially opening this possibility to ordinary practitioners. Saichō seems to have regarded the dragon girl as representing beings with heavy karmic disadvantages who are nonetheless able to attain buddhahood quickly through the extraordinary power of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Indeed, for him, one superior feature of the *Lotus* was that it represented the "direct path" to buddhahood. Depending upon individual capacity, he said, practitioners of the *Lotus Sūtra* could realize buddhahood in only one to three lifetimes.[20]

After his death, Saichō's disciples addressed these matters at length.[21] Some of them wrote seeking clarification from their Chinese counterparts, who tended to respond in abstract terms and seem not to have shared the Japanese monks' fascination with rapid attainment as an actual possibility.[22] Did *sokushin jōbutsu* mean full or partial buddhahood? At what stage did it occur? Esoteric perspectives were soon incorporated into these discussions, as Japanese Tendai increasingly developed its own esoteric tradition and the *Lotus Sūtra* was redefined as an esoteric scripture. In the process, Tendai exegetes tended to argue the possibility of this attainment at increasingly lower levels of the path. These were scholastic discussions, rarely explicitly tied to practice; mention of practice in connection with

19 Saichō here appears to follow Zhanran, who criticized those exegetes who interpreted the dragon girl as having already achieved an advanced stage of bodhisattva practice and thus failed to acknowledge the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* in bringing about her attainment (Taishō 34.314c6–7; Sueki 1995: 279).

20 *Hokke shūku* (法華秀句), DDZ 3:261, 265–67. See also Groner 2000: 183–90; 1989: 65–68.

21 Asai 1981; Sueki 1995: 283–361; Ōkubo 1998.

22 These questions and the Chinese Tiantai scholar-monks' responses were compiled in collections called *Tōketsu* (唐決, "Tang decisions"). See Groner 1992 for discussion of relevant examples.

sokushin jōbutsu usually referred to esoteric techniques. Here again, one imagines that despite growing doctrinal inclusivity, actual prospects for "realizing buddhahood with this very body" may have been deemed limited to adepts.

Then, around the late eleventh to twelfth century, a new discourse began to emerge that united the two antecedents discussed above—the interpenetrating cosmos as both the ground for and content of awakening, and the possibility of "realizing buddhahood with this very body"—in order to assert that everything is buddha already; talk of "attaining" or "not attaining" was thus beside the point. This is the idea of original enlightenment. As this discourse developed, the concepts of practice (cause) and realization (effect) would be significantly revised. Let us turn now to some of its ramifications as seen in the *Contemplation of Suchness*.

The *Contemplation of Suchness*

The *Contemplation of Suchness* or *Shinnyokan* is attributed to the great Tendai master Genshin (源信, 942–1017), best known for his compendium *Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjō yōshū* 往生要集). However, the *Shinnyokan* is not Genshin's work but postdates him by at least a century or more. Medieval Tendai works on original enlightenment doctrine were frequently attributed to eminent scholar-monks of the past, making dating and attribution extremely difficult. In the case of the *Shinnyokan*, however, its date of compilation—probably by around the late twelfth century—can be pinned down with relative precision, thanks to internal and external references."[23] Like much of original enlightenment literature, the *Shinnyokan* may have originated in secret oral transmissions handed down from master to disciple in scholastic lineages, which were later written down on strips of paper called *kirigami* (切紙) and then eventually assembled into larger works. The *Shinnyokan* has a complex textual history, and multiple versions survive. Despite some differences in form and content, considerable overlap occurs among the various recensions.[24] One feature shared by most versions is the use of *kana majiri*

23 *Shinnyokan* cites a work called *Bodai yōshū* (菩提要集), which was composed before 1105. Also, the Pure Land teacher Hōnen (法然, 1133–1212), who advocated the sole practice of chanting the buddha Amida (Amitābha)'s name, criticizes "the various contemplations of suchness" associated with Genshin as beyond most people's capacity in his *Ippyaku shijūgokajō mondō* (一百四十五箇条問答), article 3, HSZ 648. See also the following note, as well as Stone 1990a: 422 n. 4, and Nishimura 2001: 80, who dates the *Shinnyokan* to around 1200.

24 Modern printed editions, including the one cited in this paper, are based on a 1692 woodblock edition, which in turn derives from a 1645 manuscript. Although this version may not represent the original form of the text, it is quite similar to a 1327 manuscript found at Shinpukuji (新福寺) in Nagoya. There are several *Shinnyokan* variants; judging from its colo-

bun (仮名交じり文), a written form combining Chinese characters with the Japanese syllabary and employing Japanese syntax. This would have made the *Shinnyokan* more accessible than most *hongaku*-related works, which, like Buddhist doctrinal writings in general, were commonly written in Buddhist literary Chinese. The content of some passages, discussed below, suggests that the work was possibly aimed at educated lay persons. *Shinnyokan* dates to an early phase of original enlightenment discourse and does not represent its full development. Nonetheless, it will serve well as an example here for two reasons. The first is precisely its accessibility, which minimizes the need to unpack the dense, specialized Buddhist terminology in which much original enlightenment literature is couched. The second is that *Shinnyokan* addresses more explicitly than do many *hongaku* writings the question of what the shift from "buddha nature" to "original enlightenment" meant for actual practice.

Seeing Everything as Suchness

The *Shinnyokan* opens with a brief statement of the interpenetration of all phenomena, quoting a famous passage, already touched on, from Guanding (灌定, 561–632)'s introduction to the *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mohe zhiguan* 魔訶止觀) by the Chinese Tiantai master Zhiyi (智顗, 538–597): "Of every form and fragrance, there is none that is not the Middle Way. So too it is with the realm of the self, the realm of the Buddha, and the realm of living beings."[25] "Self," here, the *Shinnyokan* explains, is the mind of the practitioner. "Buddha" means all buddhas of the ten directions, that is, throughout the universe, and "living beings" refers to all sentient existence. "Every form and fragrance" means non-sentient beings and includes grasses and trees, tiles and rocks, mountains and rivers, the great earth, and the sea and sky. All these instantiate the "Middle Way": empty of substance or permanence yet conventionally existing as elements of empirical reality; neither one-sidedly empty nor existing, yet simultaneously both. This sta-

phon, dated 1282, the earliest is a manuscript discovered inside the famous Sedgewick image of Prince Shōtoku held by Harvard University. For recent work on the dating and versions of *Shinnyokan*, see Ōshima 1995; Nishimura 2001; and Michimoto 2008. I thank Bryan Lowe for sharing these references with me. Michimoto suggests that the *Shinnyokan* originated in oral transmissions concerning the contemplation of suchness that only gradually took shape in various texts (35–38). This would account for occasional disjunctures and repetitions in the text. However, his claim that a text by this title specifically attributed to Genshin did not emerge until the mid-thirteenth to early fourteenth century seems questionable, given that the twelfth-century *Hōbutsu shū*, discussed below, explicitly cites "a work called *Shinnyokan* by Eshin Sōzu (恵心僧都) [i.e., Genshin]" (SNKBT 40: 289).

25 *Mohe zhiguan*, Taishō 46.1c24–25.

tus of "two but not two" has many names: suchness, the true aspect, the dharma realm, the dharma body, the dharma nature, tathāgata, the cardinal principle, and so forth. Here, however, the text announces, it will employ "suchness" as a key term for clarifying the contemplation of the middle set forth in the sūtras and treatises.[26]

"Suchness" (Skt. *tathatā*, J. *shinnyo* 真如), like emptiness, is a term intended to designate without describing, for words cannot fully convey enlightened insight. Suchness represents a key concept in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, mentioned above, where it indicates the fundamental aspect of the mind of sentient beings as intrinsically pure and unchanging, in contrast to the mind as subject to arising and perishing. In the Chinese and Korean Huayan tradition, suchness came increasingly to be understood as the absolute, original principle or "one mind" that gives rise to the phenomenal world.[27] Tiantai thinkers, beginning with the sixth patriarch Zhanran (湛然, 711–782), also appropriated the term "suchness" but in a manner consistent with their own metaphysics, that is, as denoting the interpenetration of the mind and all phenomena without assigning priority to either and without notions of original purity.[28] In the *Shinnyokan*, suchness is synonymous with original enlightenment.[29]

Having established its key term, the text continues:

> If you wish to attain buddhahood quickly or be born without fail in [the Pure Land] of Utmost Bliss, you must think, "My own mind is precisely the principle of suchness." If you think that suchness, which pervades the dharma realm, is your own essence (*wagatai* 我体), you are at once the dharma realm; do not think that there is anything apart from this. When one is awakened, the buddhas in the worlds of the ten directions and also all bodhisattvas dwell within oneself. To seek a separate buddha apart from one's own person is [the action of] a time when one does not know that oneself is precise-

26 THR 120. The full text of *Shinnyokan* is at 120–49. For a partial translation, see Stone 1999c.

27 Gregory 1991: 6–7 n. 8, 110, 232; Jorgensen 2017: 36–55 passim.

28 See Stone 1999a: 9–10, 371–72 n. 24, and the sources cited there.

29 The term "original enlightenment" also has its locus classicus in the *Awakening of Faith*, where it is discussed in connection with the mind as arising and perishing, not from the absolute perspective of the mind as suchness. That is, it denotes the potential for enlightenment in deluded beings. In medieval Tendai thought, however, it assumes the status of suchness or absolute principle (Shimaji 1931a; Stone 1999a: 11–12, 37–38).

ly suchness.[30]

Here we have a short initial statement, elaborated throughout the text, of a sole essential practice: to generate continually the thought that oneself is identical to suchness. According to the *Shinnyokan*, this attitude may be cultivated in connection with other practices, such as copying or reciting sūtras or chanting the Buddha's name, or as a practice in its own right. The mention of aspiration for birth in the Pure Land might initially seem discordant, as it appears to contradict the assertion that "all buddhas of the worlds in the ten directions dwell within oneself." People in premodern Japan commonly framed their postmortem aspirations in terms of birth in a pure land, most commonly that of the buddha Amitābha, said to lie far away in the western quarter of the cosmos. However, the *Shinnyokan* proceeds to destabilize that understanding by asserting an immanentalist one. When one knows that oneself is none other than suchness, then none of the buddhas—Śākyamuni, Amitābha, Bhaiṣajyaguru, or any other buddha—exists separately:

> The buddha Amida of that land together with his holy entourage of bodhisattvas all dwell within oneself. Thus one need not journey far to reach the land of Utmost Bliss. But even though one may insist that birth in the Pure Land is achieved while remaining in this world, without knowing the principle of suchness, it will be in vain, as otherwise one cannot know that one's own person and Amida are in essence nondual."[31]

In this regard, *Shinnyokan* belongs to a larger, emerging trend that drew on esoteric and original enlightenment ideas to reinterpret Amida and his Pure Land in immanentalist terms.[32] Where birth after death in Amida's "Land of Bliss" was originally considered a shortcut on the long bodhisattva path, here even that shortcut is radically truncated, from the next life to the present moment. *Shinnyokan*'s references to birth in the Pure Land also reinforce the conceit of its composition by Genshin, a pivotal figure in the development of Tendai Pure Land thought.[33]

The *Shinnyokan* goes on to explain that one is to arouse the thought that oneself is identical to suchness not only while engaged in specific Buddhist practices but

30 THR 120.

31 THR 142.

32 See for example Hanano 1979; Proffitt 2015.

33 One passage even says, "I will write elsewhere concerning the causes for birth in the Pure Land" (THR 142), undoubtedly intending to suggest Genshin's famous *Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land*.

amidst all activities of daily life: walking, sitting, standing, or lying down. Being simple to practice, this contemplation is touted as suitable for everyone: "Clergy or laity, male or female, all should contemplate in this way."[34] One should contemplate not only oneself as suchness but also others; human beings of course, but animals, too, down to the tiniest ants and crickets, should be regarded as suchness, and so should all insentient existents. "Because grasses and trees, mountains and rivers, the vast sea, and the empty sky are all suchness, there is none that is not buddha."[35]

According to the *Shinnyokan*, because suchness is the real aspect of all things, to regard both oneself and others in this way is to access a dimension in which individuals are not isolated, unrelated, or conflicting existences but nondual; without losing its own identity, each pervades the totality of all that is and encompasses all others within itself. In other words, a correct discernment of self sees self not as a separate existence but as permeating and encompassing all others. This practice clearly rests on the premise, discussed above, of an interpenetrating universe in which all things are mutually contained and the Buddha is not separate from ordinary beings. In this regard, the *Shinnyokan*, and original enlightenment thinking more broadly, are consistent with larger Mahāyāna concepts of emptiness and nonduality.

The text then proceeds to make two major claims for the benefits of contemplating suchness. First, it says, this single practice contains the merit of all practices. For example, when one offers a single flower or lights one stick of incense to a single buddha, because that single flower or stick of incense is precisely suchness, it pervades the dharma realm, and because the single buddha to whom it is offered is precisely suchness, that one buddha is all buddhas, and the countless buddhas of the ten directions without exception all at once receive that offering. The same holds true if one carries out this contemplation while, for example, invoking the Buddha's name even a single time or while reciting or copying a single verse or phrase of the *Lotus Sūtra*. "The merit gained [in so doing] by thinking that each character is the principle of suchness [will be so vast that one] cannot explain it in full."[36]

This claim, too, is then extended to include not only explicitly religious acts but also mundane activities:

34 THR 133.

35 THR 125.

36 THR 134.

> When you provide for your wife, children, and retainers, or even feed oxen, horses, and the others of the six kinds of domestic animals, because the myriad things are all suchness, if you think that these others are precisely suchness, you have in effect made offerings to all buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and to all living beings, without a single exception.[37]

Thus, the single thought, "This is suchness," produced with respect to whatever comes within one's field of consciousness, contains infinite merit that is boundlessly refracted throughout the universe.

This particular passage, along with the use of Japanese syntax and phonetic syllables, suggests that *Shinnyokan* may have been written for lay persons. It is not the only surviving medieval text to recommend the contemplation of suchness to lay practitioners. The late twelfth-century *Collection of Treasures* (*Hōbutsu shū* 宝物集), an anthology of Buddhist didactic tales (*setsuwa* 説話) attributed to the warrior official and literatus Taira no Yasuyori (平康頼, 1146?–1220), contains this passage:

> When you eat, visualize this act as making offerings to the thirty-seven honored ones, and when you feed others, form the thought that you are, upwardly, making offerings to the buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time [past, present, and future], and downwardly, giving alms to hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, and those in the animal realm. And you should likewise form this though when you provide clothing and food for your servants and retainers or give feed to horses and cattle, birds and beasts. For lay persons, men and women engaged in public and private affairs, what practice could possibly be superior?[38]

The *Hōbutsu shū* clearly states that this practice follows "a work called *Shinnyokan* by the Administrator of Monks Eshin (恵心僧都) [i.e., Genshin]," indicating that some version of the *Shinnyokan* must have been in circulation at the time.

In short, in contemplating the immediate object of one's attention as suchness, not only explicitly religious actions but any activity becomes Buddhist practice. Like *Shinnyokan*, other works associated with original enlightenment thought

37 THR 133. The "six kinds of domestic animals" are horses, oxen, sheep, dogs, pigs, and chickens.

38 *Hōbutsu shū*, SNBT 40: 289. The "thirty-seven honored ones" are the deities of the Diamond Realm maṇḍala.

tend to stress a particular attitude of mind, rather than to prescribe formal practice regimens. In that respect, the "contemplation of suchness" calls to mind the formless meditation of "cultivating samādhi wherever the mind is directed" elucidated by Zhiyi, along with more formal meditation methods involving specific postures and ritual settings.[39] In that meditation, whatever enters the field of consciousness immediately becomes an object for contemplation of the threefold truth. But where Zhiyi saw this free-form contemplation as something only the most advanced practitioners should undertake, the "contemplation of suchness" is promoted as especially suited to ordinary persons.

"Defilements are Enlightenment, Karma is Liberation"

A second major claim of the *Shinnyokan* is that this practice will override all karmic obstructions:

> From today on, knowing that your own mind is itself suchness, you will not be hindered by evil karma or defilements; fame and profit will instead become nourishment for the fruition of buddhahood and enlightened wisdom. Even if you should violate the precepts without shame or be negligent and idle [in religious disciplines], so long as you always contemplate suchness and never forget to do so, you should never think that evil karma or defilements will obstruct [your realization of buddhahood or] birth in the Pure Land.[40]

Several points in this passage merit notice. First is its flat denial that evil karma or defilements could obstruct enlightenment for one who contemplates suchness; the soteriological power of this contemplation outweighs and overpowers all such obstacles. Yet at the same time, contemplating suchness does not eradicate karma or defilements. Because the defilements have no separate existence, they cannot be eradicated; "defilements are precisely enlightened wisdom" (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩悩即菩提) and "karma is precisely liberation" (*gō soku gedatsu* 業即解脱) are recurring claims within original enlightenment discourse. How exactly fame and profit "become nourishment" for the buddha wisdom is not elaborated, but the implication would seem to be that, in the contemplation of suchness, desires are naturally redirected in soteriologically helpful ways. Contemplating suchness is

39 Stevenson 1986: 75–84.

40 THR 125.

also said to compensate for laxness in precept observance and other practices, presumably disciplinary regimes such as regular buddha-name or sūtra recitations, prostrations, and so forth. There is a certain irony, however, in that this compensation rests on the condition that one "always contemplate suchness and never forget to do so"—a discipline in its own right that would require considerable effort and ongoing commitment, thus undercutting the apparent tolerance for negligence.

Another passage explains that contemplating suchness not only transcends the pull of karmic obstructions but confers all sorts of practical benefits. Because suchness is the healing buddha Yakushi (薬師, Skt. Bhaiṣajyaguru), he will cure any illness and extend life. Because suchness is the fortune-bestowing deity Bishamon (毘沙門天, Vaiśravaṇa), he will confer great good fortune on those who desire it. Because suchness is Monju (文殊, Mañjuśrī), the great bodhisattva of wisdom, he will bestow wisdom on those who seek it. Because suchness is the fierce deity Fudō (不動明王, Ācālā), he will subdue demonic hindrances for those troubled by them. Most closely related to the negating of karmic obstructions is the claim that contemplating suchness surpasses all other methods for subduing demons. "When you think that the demonic realm and the buddha realm both have suchness as their essence, then there are no separate demons."[41] To contemplate an enemy as suchness and thus nondual with oneself is, apparently, to negate its destructive power.

In short, this simple contemplation is said to be immensely powerful. However, the *Shinnyokan* warns, there is one act that can obstruct it, namely, disbelief that all things are suchness. That disbelief could take the form of seeking a separate buddha or pure land outside oneself, or of regarding oneself as a separate existence whose interests necessarily oppose those of others. *Shinnyokan* presents this as the fundamental error that generates saṃsāric suffering. Failing to recognize that ourselves and others are equally suchness, we "arbitrarily regard as self what is not really the self," arousing anger toward those who go against us and possessive attachment toward those who affirm us, thus perpetuating deluded rebirth.[42] Worse yet, because suchness is the essence of all buddhas, one who disbelieves that everything is suchness slanders all buddhas throughout time and space.

Shinnyokan seeks to discourage this unwholesome attitude with an overview of karmic retribution in the lower rebirth realms. This section, again implicitly evoking the authority of Genshin, seems intended to recall to the informed reader the first chapter of his *Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land*. But where Genshin's text elaborates on the horrors of the six realms of rebirth in order to inspire long-

41 THR 145.

42 THR 131.

ing for Amida's western Pure Land, the *Shinnyokan* does so to encourage contemplation of self and all others as suchness. First, like Genshin's *Essentials*, it enumerates the sufferings in the eight major hells. But in contrast to Genshin's extensive treatment of the hells, *Shinnyokan* dwells in particular on the animal realm, and specifically on small insects, inviting the reader to contemplate the plight of crickets, ants, and even the countless invisible creatures that inhabit each of our 84,000 pores. When, it asks, will beings like these achieve liberation? Birth in such a small body, the *Shinnyokan* asserts, is the fruit of attachment to a narrow concept of self, but in the act of contemplating oneself and others as equally identical to suchness, one returns to the reality of original enlightenment and at once fills the dharma realm. The suggestion here is that failure to perceive or even believe that all things are suchness, and thus mutually encompassing, ultimately contracts the self into a small, severely limited form, but contemplation of suchness will open one's person to become coextensive with all that is. Realizing that self and other are not essentially different, one no longer gives rise to the egocentric passions that prompt the deliberate commission of evil.

Later Tendai *hongaku* texts would develop this idea to counter claims that concepts such as "the defilements are precisely enlightened wisdom" legitimize wrongdoing. For example, the *Collection of the Light of Han* (*Kankō ruijū* 漢光類聚), dating to around the latter half of the thirteenth century, defends the assertion that "karma is precisely liberation" and denies that it legitimates evil deeds:

> Karma and liberation are [in terms of their essence] both the ungraspable, wondrous nature of the Dharma. This is called "karma being none other than liberation." This being the case, how could one [who has realized this] fall into a one-sided emotion and commit evil deeds?... Moreover, karma is endowed with the three thousand realms [i.e., all phenomena], and liberation is also endowed with the three thousand realms. Therefore "karma being none other than liberation" means that self and others are nondual and that all dharmas are of a single nature that is without self. At the time [of so realizing], how could one entertain separate discriminations of this and that and so commit evil deeds?[43]

Parenthetically, we should note that the ethical problems raised by asserting the nonduality of defilements and enlightenment, or of karma and liberation, are by

43 Taishō 2371.74.388b24–28.

no means limited to medieval Japanese original enlightenment discourse but are inherent in Mahāyāna thought more broadly. Once one asserts the nonduality of good and evil, or enlightenment and delusion, the potential for such issues arises. Thus, while Tiantai doctrine famously maintains that even evil can serve as an object of liberative contemplation, Zhiyi himself warned against teaching it indiscriminately.[44]

"How awesome," the *Shinnyokan* says. "Whether we fall into the Avīci hell or are born in the pure land of Utmost Bliss depends solely on our attitude of mind in this lifetime."[45] Liberation depends solely on one practice, the contemplation of self and others as suchness; similarly, it can be obstructed only by one error: failure to discern, or even to believe in, this nonduality. As we have seen, the contemplation of suchness entails cultivating a particular mental attitude, rather than keeping the precepts or carrying out a particular disciplinary regimen. It can be a practice sufficient in itself or a foundation for other religious disciplines. In its emphasis on a single act as sufficient for liberation, *Shinnyokan* bears some similarity to the better-known "single-practice" movements of Japan's Kamakura period (1185–1333).[46]

Rethinking Practice and Attainment

Now let's see how *Shinnyokan* represents the path, first considering this passage:

> When you eat, if you carry out this contemplation, the merit of the perfection of giving at once fills the dharma realm, and because one practice is equivalent to all practices, the single practice of the perfection of giving contains the other *pāramitās*. And because cause and effect are nondual, all practices, which represent the causal stage, are simultaneously the myriad virtues of the stage of realization. Thus you are a bodhisattva of the highest stage, a *tathāgata* of perfect and ultimate enlightenment (*kaji engoku no nyorai* 果地円極の如来).[47]

Here we see a third major claim: In contemplating suchness, one realizes nonduality not only in spatial terms ("one's merit fills the dharma realm") but also in terms

44 Donner 1987. For more on this issue in *hongaku* literature, see Stone 1999a: 218–28.

45 THR 123.

46 The relation of Tendai original enlightenment thought to the so-called "Kamakura new Buddhism" has been treated extensively. For an overview of scholarship and a revised perspective, see Stone 1999a, esp. 55–94 and 228–36.

47 THR 133–34.

of time ("at once"). Because cause (practice) and effect (awakening) are nondual, they are said to be simultaneous, and the myriad virtues of complete enlightenment are immediately accessed in the practice of the present moment. According to the *Shinnyokan*, this extraordinary idea—that the totality of the Buddha's supreme awakening is realized in a single moment's practice—is unique to the *Lotus Sūtra*, which was revered in the Tendai school as the Buddha's highest teaching. The Tendai system of doctrinal classification (*kyōhan* 教判) broadly divided Śākyamuni Buddha's teachings into two: provisional teachings, preached according to the capacity of their hearers and therefore one-sided and incomplete; and the true or perfect teaching, which fully instantiates the nonduality and mutual encompassing of all things. Tendai identifies the *Lotus Sūtra* in particular as the complete and perfect teaching. Saichō, the Japanese Tendai founder, correlated the distinction between "provisional" and "true" with the length of the time required to attain buddhahood: provisional teachings represent the circuitous path of practice spanning countless kalpas, while the *Lotus Sūtra* is the "great direct path," which enables the realization of buddhahood in this lifetime.[48] Original enlightenment thinkers of Japan's medieval period pushed this distinction still further, claiming that provisional and true teachings not only differed in terms of the length of time deemed necessary for attainment but represented different concepts of the path altogether. As the *Shinnyokan* explains, the provisional teachings represent practice as a linear undertaking in which, to reach enlightenment, one must first eradicate the defilements, and to achieve nirvāṇa, one first must escape saṃsāra. Thus,

> bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings, ignorant of the contemplation of suchness, for countless kalpas carried out difficult and painful practices, not begrudging bodily life, and thus attained buddhahood. But it was not real buddhahood, only a provisional fruit achieved in a dream. Those who know the contemplation of suchness become buddhas in an instant.[49]

This amounts to a thorough rejection of conventional notions of the bodhisattva path, based on the model established by none other than Śākyamuni himself, who is said to have achieved buddhahood only after countless kalpas of austere prac-

48 Groner 2000: 183–90.

49 THR 128.

tices. As the *Lotus Sūtra* puts it, expressing this conventional view, "There is no place in all the trichiliocosm, not even the size of a mustard seed, where the bodhisattva [Śākyamuni] did not cast away bodily life for the sake of living beings."[50] Bodhisattvas set out to acquire the six perfections (*pāramitās*)—giving, precept observance, forbearance, assiduousness, meditation, and wisdom—each requiring many kalpas to master. Acquiring a buddha's thirty-two superior physical marks was likewise said to take three immeasurable kalpas and more.[51] As the *Shinnyokan* passage just quoted suggests, rejecting this model of bodhisattva practice spanning kalpas entails a double inversion. First the concept of a buddha as a radiant, perfected being is overturned and dismissed as "buddhahood in a dream"; the "real buddha" is the ordinary person, the common worldling, in the moment of contemplating suchness. And just as the conventional notion of buddhahood is overturned, so is that of the path to achieve it. Here we see a thorough denial of buddhahood as a future goal, the culmination of a linear process of cultivation and attainment. Instead, we might call this a maṇḍalic idea of buddhahood, always and fully accessible in the present moment.

Medieval Tendai exegetes found the basis for these reversals in the *Lotus Sūtra* itself. In chapter 16, "Fathoming the Lifespan of the Tathāgata," Śākyamuni Buddha reveals that he had not, as everyone thought, achieved awakening for the first time in this life under the bodhi tree; rather, he has been the Buddha since the inconceivably remote past. Since then, so inconceivably vast a span of time has passed that one would have to reduce countless world systems to dust, letting each particle represent one kalpa, even to begin to express it. Śākyamuni's departure from his father's palace, his harsh ascetic practices, his search for the way, and even his entry into final nirvāṇa were no more than his "skillful means," a pedagogical device. In fact, he declares, "I am always here, preaching the Dharma."[52] Medieval Tendai thinkers interpreted the Buddha's revelation of his primordial awakening in the remotest past as a metaphor for the originally enlightened status of all beings, an enlightenment to be accessed fully in the moment of practice without traversing successive stages. One might in fact understand medieval Japanese *hongaku* thought as an effort to rethink the entire received Tendai tradition from this perspective.

50 *Miaofa lianhua jing*, Taishō 9.35b23–25. Here Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation (Prajñākuṭa, 智積) is voicing his doubts that the *nāga* princess can realize buddhahood "quickly."

51 *Dazhidu lun* (大智度論), Taishō 1509.25.86c16–20.

52 *Miaofa lianhua jing*, Taishō 9.42b26–27.

At this point, the *Shinnyokan* posits a hypothetical question:

> Someone asks: I do not understand how we can all be buddhas, without distinction.... A buddha is one who possesses the thirty-two marks, whose supernatural powers and wisdom surpass those of all others, and whose compassion for the world is limitless.... "Buddha" means "Awakened One." How can creatures such as ants and crickets be spoken of as "awakened ones"?... Even if you call yourself a buddha, you do not possess the thirty-two features, nor have you gained supernatural powers. Arousing surpassing arrogance, you call it the buddha wisdom, a boundless and incalculably grave sin! How do you respond?[53]

Here the interlocutor raises a common-sense objection: Buddhas are superior beings whose appearance and abilities clearly set them apart from ordinary beings. How can all beings be buddhas? This objection provides an opening to introduce a new understanding of buddhahood and the path of its realization from the standpoint of original enlightenment. The *Shinnyokan* responds with reference to the "six stages of identity" (*rokusoku* 六即), a traditional Tiantai/Tendai *mārga* scheme for the practice of the perfect teaching. The six stages are (1) identity in principle (*ri-soku* 理即), the stage of the deluded person who has not yet heard the Buddhist teachings but is nonetheless in principle equal to a buddha; (2) verbal identity (*myōji-soku* 名字即), the initial stage of practice, at which one encounters a teacher or scripture and understands at the verbal level that all "all dharmas are the Buddhadharma"; (3) identity of meditative practice (*kangyō-soku* 観行即), where one's contemplative wisdom accords with one's intellectual understanding, and one's actions match one's words; (4) identity of resemblance (*sōji-soku* 相似即), where one's wisdom begins to resemble true enlightenment; (5) identity of partial realization (*bunshin-soku* 分身即 or *bunshōsoku* 分証即), at which stage one increasingly eradicates delusion and manifests wisdom; and (6) ultimate identity (*kukyō-soku* 究竟即), or full buddhahood. "Identity" in the name of each stage means that, whatever one's level of attainment, one is ontologically no different from the Buddha.[54] Were one to categorize the contemplation of suchness in these terms, the *Shinnyokan* continues, it would correspond to the stage of verbal identity, *myōji-soku*. Conventionally, *myōji-soku* was understood as the

53 THR 145.

54 *Mohe zhiguan*, Taishō 46.10b7–11a8; Swanson 2018: 229–41. See also Groner 1989: 63–65.

very beginning stage of practice. For the *Shinnyokan*, however, and for original enlightenment discourse in general, it is the only stage that matters. At this stage, "We have already heard the name of the threefold truth and understood that we, ourselves, are precisely suchness."[55] The distinguishing physical marks and supernatural powers of buddhas belong to the later stages, but it would be the height of foolishness, the text insists, to regard them as the defining characteristics of buddhahood. Wheel-turning kings, after all, are not enlightened but possess the thirty-two marks, and non-Buddhists may have supernatural powers. The real Buddha is suchness, and those who contemplate suchness are at once the Buddha of original enlightenment. Their every action is the mudrā of suchness; their every utterance is a mantra; and their every thought, deluded though it may be, is esoteric contemplation.[56] In short, between stages one and two lies the entire difference between bondage and liberation—between knowing that all things are suchness and not knowing it.

We have already touched on the earlier efforts of Japanese Tendai thinkers to locate the "realization of buddhahood with this very body" at progressively lower stages of the path. As early as the ninth century, scholar-monks such as Enchin (円珍, 814–891), Annen (安然, 841–?) and Rinshō (憐昭, n.d.) had suggested that buddhahood might be realized at least partially at the stage of *myōji-soku*.[57] In original enlightenment discourse, however, claims for attainment at the stage of *myōji-soku* make a quantum leap. The *Shinnyokan* asserts that the six perfections are completed and their merits obtained in the single moment in which one contemplates oneself and others as suchness.[58] Thus, in one sense, *Shinnyokan* extends the efforts of earlier Tendai thinkers to "shorten the path," abridging the time deemed necessary to realize buddhahood from three immeasurable kalpas to a single moment. Yet it can also be seen as representing an early stage in a new way of conceiving the path in nonlinear terms. Where the *Shinnyokan* leaves open

55 THR 146.

56 THR 148. This statement appears to derive from the *Shingonshū kyōjigi* (真言宗教時義) by the Tendai esoteric thinker Annen, mentioned below (Taishō 2396.75.387b4, b15–22).

57 Asai 1981: 17–18; Groner 1992: 447; Sueki 1995: 303–4; Ōkubo 1998: 146. Rinshō goes to the extent of suggesting that the superior marks are in fact present at the stage of *myōji-soku*, although ordinary deluded persons cannot see them (Sueki 1995: 327, 682–83).

58 This idea has antecedents in earlier *Lotus Sūtra* thought. The *Sūtra of Unfathomable Meanings* (*Wuliangyi jing* 無量義經), considered an introductory scripture to the *Lotus*, says that for those who embrace it, "even if they do not yet practice the six *pāramitās*, the six *pāramitās* will immediately be present in them" (Taishō 276.9.388b12–13). Simultaneous fulfillment of the six *pāramitās* also appears as a theme in the writings of Huisi (慧思, 515–77), Zhiyi's teacher (Stevenson and Kanno 2006: 65–66).

the possibility that one might at some point advance to later stages, manifesting the thirty-two marks, somewhat later original enlightenment writings explicitly collapse all later stages into the initial stage of practice, so that the path turns back on itself and its fulfillment is present in the beginning. We can see this, for example, in a passage from the *Notes on the Abbreviated Account of Self-Practice* (*Jigyō ryakki chū* 自行略記注), retrospectively attributed to Genshin's disciple Kakuchō (覚超, 960–1034) but almost certainly a later composition:

> At the stage of *myōji-soku*, one completes all six stages and realizes buddhahood with this very body. One does not traverse subsequent stages. Were there to be a sequence of even one further stage... that would not be the perfect teaching. It would not accord with the meaning of mutual identification or the teaching of mutual encompassing or the principle of perfect interfusion. It would not be the wonderful Dharma that opens the provisional [to reveal the true]... or accord with nonduality, nondiscrimination, and the inconceivable. It would essentially destroy the scriptural proofs of the perfect teaching and devolve into the one-sided, provisional, incomplete practice of the circuitous path.[59]

As seen in this passage, original enlightenment discourse is committed to asserting an absolute temporal nonduality, undercutting the very idea of the path as a graded progression toward a future goal. Any notion of buddhahood achieved as the future result of cultivation over time—the idea of "acquired enlightenment" (*shikaku* 始覚)—is dismissed either as an inferior, provisional view or as an outright error.[60] Later texts in a *hongaku* vein reject the idea of acquiring the superior marks and supernatural powers altogether. The real buddha of original enlightenment has "transcended the august forms" (*shussongyō* 出尊形) that traditionally were thought to distinguish a buddha. The forms of all beings of the ten realms and the everyday conduct of ordinary people—"our wearing clothes and using fans"—are all his true appearance.[61]

59 *Jigyō ryakki chū* 13. For further examples, see Stone 1999a: 205–7.

60 Like "original enlightenment," the term "acquired enlightenment" has its *locus classicus* in the *Awakening of Faith*, where "original enlightenment" is the potential for awakening in the mind of deluded persons, and "acquired enlightenment," its realization through practice. In medieval Tendai, however, the two terms come to designate different approaches to enlightenment and are correlated respectively with the true and provisional teachings (Shimaji 1931a; Stone 1999a: 37).

61 Shinsō (心聡, fl. 1329), *Ichijō shō* (一帖抄), TZ 9:43b–44a; Stone 1999a: 185.

These claims do not deny the need for practice. Rather, practice is no longer instrumentalized: it is not a means *to* enlightenment but inseparable from it. In the inversion of the path seen in *hongaku* literature, enlightenment becomes the ground of practice, rather than its end goal. Some later original enlightenment texts term this a reversal of cause and effect: One abandons the perspective of proceeding from cause (practice) to effect (enlightenment) (*juin shika* 従因至果) and adopts that of proceeding from effect to cause (*juga kōin* 従果向因)—a "Copernican revolution within Buddhism," as one scholar has termed it.[62] While constraints of space preclude an extended discussion here, this inversion of practice and attainment was variously appropriated by other Buddhist figures of Japan's Kamakura period who emerged from the Tendai school. Examples include the Zen teacher Dōgen (道元, 1200–1253), who stressed the "oneness of practice and attainment" (*shushō ittō* 修証一等); Shinran's (親鸞, 1173–1263) concept of "immediate achievement of birth in the Pure Land" (*sokutoku ōjō* 即得往生); and also Nichiren (日蓮, 1222–1282), who taught that all Śākyamuni Buddha's causal practices and their resulting merits are inherent in the invocation of the *daimoku* (題目), the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*—*Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō* (南無妙法蓮華経)—and are immediately accessible to the practitioner in chanting it.[63]

Doctrinal writings dealing with Tendai original enlightenment discourse tend to focus on the dynamics of the single moment in which buddhahood is accessed; they have little to say about how their radically inverted view of practice and attainment plays out over the course of a day, a week, or a lifetime. However, we do not live solely in the moment but experience time in a linear fashion; we reflect on the past and plan for the future, and one imagines that many persons would find continued practice difficult without some sense of progress over time. The *Shinnyokan* is unusual among original enlightenment writings in explicitly addressing this issue. It acknowledges that, due to individual differences in capacity, not everyone will readily be able to sustain the insight that all things are suchness. "Beings of the highest faculties, like the dragon girl, perceive that they themselves are precisely true suchness, and immediately become buddhas," it says. However, "beings of dull faculties"—which presumably includes most persons—

> may in one moment perceive that they are precisely suchness, but at the next moment, because it has been their habit since time without

62 Kawaii 1943. On the reversal of causality, see for example the interpretations of the six stages of identity from a *hongaku* perspective in *Kankō ruiju* (Taishō 2371.74.391c2–16 and 393b20–23).

63 Stone 1999a: 229–31.

> beginning, on seeing forms or hearing voices, their mind moves in accordance with external objects. Meeting that which pleases them, they arouse the defilement of greed; meeting that which displeases them, they arouse the defilement of anger... In accordance with the distinction of superior and inferior faculties, there exists an inequality of sooner or later in the maturing of contemplative practice, and there are those who can manifest enlightenment in a day, two days, a month, two months, a year, or even a lifetime.[64]

The perception that "I am suchness"—identified in *Shinnyokan* with the realization of buddhahood—can apparently be gained in one moment, lost in the next, and then regained. Such a reading is supported by other *hongaku* writings, such as the *Notes on Thirty-Four Articles* (*Sanjū shika no kotogaki* 三十四箇事書), which reads, "The day that one does not know this [nonduality], the *tathāgata* is apart from oneself. The day that one knows it, all is oneself... This is called 'returning to and becoming identical with original enlightenment' (*gendō hongaku* 還同本覚)."[65] Individuals are assumed to differ in how long it might take to establish the contemplation of suchness as one's default mental stance. Depending upon one's faculties, one might need days, months, or years to develop mature contemplation, but all are certain to do so within this lifetime. Thus, the *Shinnyokan* stresses continuous contemplation of suchness in all activities, "even while lying down with one's sash untied."[66] One passage suggests the "contemplation of emptiness" (*kūkan* 空観) as an auxiliary practice, to help loosen one's attachments; in fact, the contemplations of suchness and of emptiness may have been taught concurrently as a meditative system.[67] Even after having established one's mind in "the path of sudden enlightenment"—seeing self and others as suchness—one should "exert oneself [to continue it] night and day."[68] Thus linear progress is not altogether

64 THR 144.

65 THR 158.

66 THR 123.

67 THR 143. Michimoto (2008: 37) notes that the Harvard *Shinnyokan* manuscript includes a passage on contemplating emptiness and that Hōnen's *Ippyaku shijūgokajō mondō*, articles 3 and 4, also treats the two contemplations together, dismissing both as practices beyond the capacity of ordinary persons (HSZ 648). Although Michimoto does not note it, a further supporting piece of evidence appears in *Hōbutsu shū* 6–8 (SNKBT 40: 282–307), where both contemplations are recommended, together with a third, the contemplation of impurity (*fūjōkan* 不浄観), which may have been inspired by Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū*.

68 THR 143.

denied. Crucially, however, this development is not represented as a progression through stages or as advancement toward an external goal. The nondual realm of original enlightenment is fully accessible with the first thought, "I am suchness"; each subsequent moment of such practice deepens an enlightenment one already has.

Summation

The *Shinnyokan* illustrates several broad features of original enlightenment thinking. Fundamental to these is an inversion in the relationship of practice and enlightenment. Enlightenment is no longer the goal of practice, but its foundation; practice is not the cause of enlightenment but its paradigmatic expression. One does not traverse stages; because enlightenment is originally inherent and accessed fully in the present moment, it does not depend on the logic of accumulating merit or eradicating defilements. Cultivation serves not to shorten the distance to the goal but to deepen awareness of a buddhahood always and already present.

In consequence, the concept of buddhahood itself changes. The *Shinnyokan*'s claim that "the real buddha is suchness" brings about what we might call an anti-transcendent move. Buddhahood finds expression not in supernatural powers or extraordinary marks, but in daily activities, even eating or feeding domestic animals. It is something shared with dogs and cats, ants and crickets. Buddhahood is immediately accessible, without extirpating delusion; this perspective is touted as far superior to the idea of buddhahood as an ideal state cultivated through the bodhisattva's austere practices spanning countless kalpas. The latter "is not real buddhahood," we read, "only a provisional fruit achieved in a dream." In contrast, original enlightenment is accessed in an instant. But one trades for this very accessibility the ideal (or perhaps the illusion?) of someday becoming a perfected being: Buddhahood is manifested only while remaining a deluded ordinary worldling. Later texts in a *hongaku* mode further develop this idea, asserting that the "real buddha" of original enlightenment has "transcended august forms" and dwells solely in the mundane world.

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