

A COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF EMERSON'S "GOD-WITHIN" AND SHINRAN'S AMIDA-BUDDHA

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Abstract: Shinran (1173–1262) is the founder of the True Pure Land Buddhist School in Japan. The similarities between his teachings and the Christian faith have been the subject of numerous studies. This article, although inspired by these studies, maybe the first attempt to make a comparative consideration centering on R. W. Emerson's (1803–82) religious belief in "God-within" and Shinran's devotion to Amida Buddha (Buddha of Infinite Light and Life). This article explores the similarities and differences between Emerson's Transcendentalist religious views and Shinran's Pure Land Buddhist teachings on salvation through taking refuge in the mysterious workings of Amida Buddha's "Other-power." The article will undertake a comparative examination of the following contrasting conceptions: "God-within" and "Amida Buddha," "Faith" and "Nembutsu," "Incorporation" and "Merit-transference," "Ascending Transcendence" and "Horizontal Transcendence," and "Moral Law" and "Dharma of Dependent Origination." ¹

Introduction

Despite the considerable temporal and geographical distance between Emerson and Shinran, notable parallels exist between their lives and religious philosophies. Shinran lived from the Heian period (794–1185) to the Kamakura period (1185–1333), a time of dramatic social change with the end of the aristocratic era and the rise of the samurai class. In a chaotic situation, the idea of the end of the Dharma (Buddhist law and teachings) spread. It was the notion that the world had entered a dark period in which the teachings of historical Buddhism would disappear. People were looking for a new form of Buddhism that would enable them to easily attain rebirth in the Pure Land rather than a form of monastic Buddhism based on traditional ascetic practices. Shinran said: "I am neither a priest nor a layman" (Shinran, 2003, 6:336), meaning that he was a *Gutoku* (a stupid man with a bald head) who did not hold a priesthood and engage in Buddhist practice in a temple. Instead of traveling around local areas, he preached his Pure Land Buddhist teachings to ordinary people. In violation of the Buddhist precept, he married a woman and ate meat. Emerson, living much later in the 19th century, was also living in the rapidly changing New England society brought about by the progress of the Industrial Revolution and the market economy. Because of growing doubt about the orthodox Christian doctrine and the formalism of the church system, he resigned his position as a Unitarian minister in search of inner "integrity" as a self-reliant individual. After starting as a public lecturer, he travelled extensively in the US, presenting new moral guidelines for living to the growing middle-class citizens in the secularizing democratic society.

During the Meiji and the Taishō periods (1868–1926) in Japan, under the influence of Western literature, thought, and religion, people's sense of humanity was awakened, and questions of selfhood were eagerly explored. Emerson's writings influenced Japan's first group of avowedly "Romantic" writers, of which Kitamura Tōkoku (1868–94) was the acknowledged leader. Kitamura was attracted to the radical Transcendentalist thought

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¹ This article, limiting its discussion to a comparison of Emerson's religious view and Shinran's True Pure Land Buddhist teaching, is a development of Yoshio Takanashi, "Comparative Investigations of Daisetsu Suzuki's Pure Land Buddhism and Emerson's Transcendental Religious Thought," *Journal of East-West Thought*, 12 (2022), 4:25–39.

developed by Emerson in his early years. In “Naibu seimei ron” (An essay on the inner life, 1894), he wrote about the spiritual conflicts and struggles that arose from his exploration of the individual self and inner life. He also wrote *Emaruson* (Emerson, 1894), the first Japanese biography of an American man of letters. 1917, Emerson’s complete works translated by Hirata Tokuboku (1873–1943) and Togawa Shūkotsu (1870–1939) were published. It reached many readers and won Emerson’s admiration among ordinary Japanese people. Shinran also attracted attention for his modernity as a great pioneer who challenged questions of the human ego and existence and has tremendously influenced many Japanese intellectuals. In 1917, Kurata Hyakuzō (1891–1943) published a drama, *Shukke*, to Sono Deshi (A monk and his disciples). He depicted Shinran not as the founder of the True Pure Land Buddhist School but as a human being profoundly suffering from human sin and earthly desires. It was enthusiastically supported by young people of the time and became a bestseller, causing a “Shinran boom” in the Japanese literary world.

I. Emerson’s Transcendentalist Concept of God

Before comparing Emerson’s religious belief in “God-within” and Shinran’s devotion to Amida Buddha, let us examine Emerson’s Transcendentalist concept of God. His starting point was having a religious experience in which he perceived a direct connection with God. In his December 17, 1827 journal, he stated: “Connection between God and the Soul, —What is religion but this connection? ... Is not ..., this life within life, this literal Emanuel, *God within us?*” (Emerson, 1904–14, 2:224–25). And in his sermon “Self and Others” delivered on January 12, 1831, he stated: “Know you not that you are the Temple of the Holy Ghost, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you” (Emerson, 1989–92, 3:90). Additionally, in his journal he wrote: “God dwells in thee. ... He is the mighty Heart. ... Clouded and shrouded there doth sit the Infinite embosomed in a man” (Emerson, 1960–82, 3:290–91). Emerson resigned as a Unitarian minister of the Second Church in Boston on October 28, 1832, but shortly before that, on October 11, he delivered his final sermon “The Genuine Man.” In this sermon, he preached that “the essential man” resides within the innermost soul and that this indwelling essential self is “a higher self, “God’s image,” and “Reason.” He further developed this idea by stating that a genuine man always listens to “the inward voice” and “the invisible Leader” (Emerson, 1989–92, 4:201–08; 409–16).

As Emerson asserted: “I believe I am more of a Quaker than anything else. I believe in the ‘still small voice,’ and that voice is Christ within us” (Emerson, 1888, 48); his thought seems to have been strongly influenced by the Quaker doctrine of the Inward Christ, which the Puritans had rejected as heretical. According to the Quaker doctrine, the concept of Christ as Messiah has two distinct aspects: the “eternal Christ” and the “historical Christ” (Jesus). Quakers base the foundation of their doctrine on the Gospel According to St. John, which describes the working of Logos: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). In Johannine theology, Jesus Christ is described as the “incarnation” of the Logos, serving as the mediator of creation through the transcendent Word of God. The Logos as the Son of God is directly associated with truth, grace, life, and light, as is written: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14); “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am the bread of life” (6:47–48); and “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (9:5). Quakers believe that the “eternal Christ,” operating as a “saving power” in the soul of every human being and even in nature, is more important than the “historical Christ,” and that human rebirth is accomplished by “inward Christ,” which they understand to be present deep within the human soul, rather than by the atonement of Jesus’ death on the cross.²

² On the Quaker doctrine and its influence on Emerson, see Yukio Irie, *Emerson and Quakerism* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1967); Howard H. Brinton, *Friends for 300 years: the history and beliefs of the Society of*

Under the influence of the Quaker doctrine, Emerson developed his view of Jesus. On May 30, 1830, he delivered a sermon, "The Authority of Jesus," in which he stated:

Jesus then was distinguished from other teachers by the possession of living moral truth A great error to which we are liable on this subject, is, that we are apt to separate the truth taught by Jesus from his office, and suppose that it was his divine authority, his peculiar designation to the office of Messiah that gives authority to his words and not his words that mark him out as the Messiah. The utterance of that Truth is his office. It is his Truth that made him Messiah (Emerson, 1989–92, 2:364).

Emerson refused to see Jesus as the absolute object of worship as Christ the Savior and made "moral truth" the core of the Christian faith. In his sermon "Astronomy," delivered on May 27, 1832, he preached: "It will teach that he only is a mediator, as he brings us truth, . . . and we accept it, and live by it; that he only saves us, by inducing us to save ourselves" (*Ibid.*, 4:159). Emerson embraced a view of Jesus that rejected the notion of "special revelation" as only one Messiah specially chosen by God and endowed with supernatural authority. Instead, he accepted "general revelation" and referred to Jesus with such terms as "our common Teacher," "the soul's personal Friend," and "thy fellow worshipper."

As a Unitarian minister, Emerson rejected the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which holds that the biblical God exists in three persons and one substance: "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit." Instead, he developed his own unique doctrine of "Self-Reliance,"³ which he paraphrased the Quaker "Inward Christ" as "God-within." In his sermon "Trust Yourself," delivered on October 3, 1830, Emerson articulated the following:

Nor . . . let it be thought that there is in this self-reliance anything of presumption, anything inconsistent with a spirit of dependence and piety toward God. In listening more intently to our own soul we are not becoming in the ordinary sense more selfish, but are departing farther from what is low and falling back upon truth and upon God. For the whole value of the soul depends on the fact that it contains a divine principle, that it is a house of God, and the voice of eternal inhabitant may always be heard within it (Emerson, 1989–92, 2:266–67).

In this context, "divine principle," "a house of God," and "the voice of the eternal inhabitant" can be considered equivalent to "God-within" and "Logos." In his sermon "Religion and Society," delivered on October 27, 1833, he stated the following:

I recognize the distinction of the outer self and the inner self, —of the double consciousness, . . . there are two selves, one which does or approves that which the other does not and approves not; or within this erring, passionate, mortal self, sits a supreme, calm, immortal mind, . . . It is the door of my access to the Father. It seems to me the face which the Creator uncovers to his child" (*Ibid.*, 4:215).

Thus, "God-within" is associated with the "inner self," which is believed to reside deep within the human soul. "Self-reliance" entails the pursuit of the internal, original, and universal self by overcoming the outer, egoistic, and personal self. A detailed examination of Emerson's

Friends since George Fox started the Quaker movement (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1952); and Frederic B. Tolls, "Emerson and Quakerism," *American Literature*, 10 (1838), 44–47. See also Yoshio Takanashi, *Emerson, and Neo-Confucianism: Crossing Paths over the Pacific* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 131–32.

³ Emerson's "Self-reliance" represents a development from the doctrine of "Self-Culture," which originated in Unitarian theology. This doctrine, in contrast to the Calvinist doctrine that emphasized the inherent depravity of human nature and the necessity of divine grace, emphasized the responsibility of the individual human soul for its moral advancement.

lectures and journals reveals that his original conception of God was formed even before his “Divinity School Address” of July 15, 1838, delivered to a graduating class of Harvard Divinity School students. His journal entry of June 17, 1836, indicates that he was beginning to become aware of a “super-personal” conception of God:

A man, I, am the remote circumference, the skirt, the thin suburb or frontier of post of God but go inward and I find the ocean; I lose my individuality in its waves. God is Unity, but always works in variety. I go inward until I find Unity universal, that Is before the World was; I come outward to this body a point of variety. (Emerson, 1960–82, 5:177).

In his lecture “Holiness,” Emerson put forth that the concept of “God-within,” which leads to “holiness,” is oriented toward a super-personal Divinity while starting from an awareness of individuality (Emerson, 1959–72, 2:340–56). In his March 26, 1838 journal entry, he also stated that it was inappropriate to refer to the concept of God he was embracing by the personal name of “Father.”:

I tell men what I find in my consciousness. ... I report to them from my thought how little we know of God, and they reply, “We think you have no Father. We love to address the Father.” Yes, I say, but the Father is a convenient name and image to the affections; but drop all images if you wish to come at the elements of your thought and use as mathematical words as you can. ... We must come back to our initial stage and see and own that we have yet beheld but the first ray of Being. In strict speech it seems fittest to say, *I Become* rather than *I am*. I am a *Becoming*” (Emerson, 1960–82, 5:468).

In “The Divinity School Address,” Emerson candidly acknowledged that his concept of God was becoming increasingly “unorthodox.”:

In thus contemplating Jesus, we become very sensible of the first defect of historical Christianity. Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion. As it appears to us, and as it has appeared for ages, it is not the doctrine of the soul, but an exaggeration of the personal, the positive, the ritual. It has dealt, it dwells, with noxious exaggeration about the *person* of Jesus. The soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe (Emerson, 1971–2013, 1:82).

It provoked a vehement backlash from the Unitarian establishment, which resulted in the formation of a dissenting faction known as the “Transcendentalists.” Henry Ware, Jr. (1794–1843), Emerson’s predecessor at the Second Church and later professor at the Divinity School, attempted a sermon entitled “The Personality of the Deity.” In response to Emerson’s declaration: “The soul knows no persons,” he cautioned that negating the personhood of God would lead to atheism (Cabot, 1965, 1:338–39). In his critique, Ware elucidates how Emerson’s conceptualization of the Divine deviated from the conventional “personal” understanding of God as Father, which is the essential foundation of “historical Christianity.” The transition to a “transpersonal” conception of God also signifies that he began to perceive God as “Law,” as is stated in “The Divinity School Address”: “Having seen that the law in us is commanding, he would not suffer it to be commanded. Boldly with hand, and heart, and life, he declared it was God” (Emerson, 1971–2013, 1: 81), and “But the moment the mind opens, and reveals the laws which traverse the universe, and make things what they are ...” (*Ibid.*, 76). Consequently, Emerson’s conception of God is that of “Law” and the Logos principle of “Unity universal,” which is applicable to both the spiritual and natural realms.

As previously discussed, Emerson moved away from the traditional concept of a personal God as “Father” and embraced a distinctive Transcendentalist conception of “Over-soul.” “Over-soul” refers to the universal and fundamental principle and the cosmic Soul. It indicates no fundamental disconnection between the human soul and the transcendent “Over-soul.” Conversely, however, as he states in his journal: “God is the substratum of all souls ...

It is ... God only within that worships the God of the Universe" (Emerson, 1960–82, 3:213), "Over-soul" can be understood as the dynamic "process" of overcoming, abandoning, and transcending the selfish "self" and becoming one with the "God of the Universe" through "God-within," which dwells within each self. Moreover, Emerson, who embraced the Transcendentalist conception of God as a transpersonal "Over-soul," ultimately discerned an impersonal "Godhead" as the ultimate basis of the Divinity (Emerson, 1959–72, 2:90, "Religion"; 1971–2013, 3:44, "Experience"). The expression: "the nameless Thought, the nameless Power, the super-personal Heart" (Emerson, 1971–2013, 6:128), as found in his essay "Worship" in *The Conduct of Life* (1860), appears to be equivalent to "Godhead."⁴ As he further elaborates in "Montaigne, or the Skeptic" in *Representative Men* (1850): "Through the years and the centuries, through evil agents, through toys and atoms, a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams" (*Ibid.*, 4:104), his concept of God evolved into a super-personality of "a great and beneficent tendency" as well as an active entity of enduring, generative, and transforming life and of infinite vitality and love.

II. The similarities between Emerson's "God-within" and Shinran's Amida Buddha

II-1 Amida Buddha and God-within

The *Sutra on Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (無量壽經) states that Hōzō Bosatsu, Dharmākara Bodhisattva, who aspired to attain enlightenment, asserted that even if he attained enlightenment, he would not become a Buddha unless he fulfilled the forty-eight original prayers to save all sentient beings. One particularly illustrative example is the 18th vow: "If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten quarters who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and call my Name, even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment" (Inagaki, 2009, 7:18). After that, Hōzō is said to have completed the original vow and become a Buddha after practicing for an unbelievably long period. This Buddha is Amida Buddha, and it is said that he continues to preach even today in the Pure Land called the Western Paradise. Amida's original Sanskrit name is "Amitāyus" or "Amitābha," which means "One with immeasurable life" and "One with immeasurable light."

Shinran writes the following about the Dharma-body (法身), the true nature of Buddha, in his main work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* (教行信証: On Teaching Practice, Faith, and Enlightenment):

Buddhas and bodhisattvas have two Dharma-bodies: the Dharma body of Dharma-nature (法性法身), and the Dharma-body of expediency (方便法身). From the Dharma-body with Dharma-nature originates the Dharma-body of expediency; through the Dharma-body of expediency the Dharma-body of Dharma-nature is revealed. These two Dharma-bodies are different but inseparable; they are one but not the same. For this reason, the extensive manifestation and the all-inclusive principle enter into each other. Those two are comprised in the Dharma-body. If bodhisattvas did not realize interpenetration of the two ways of presentation, they would not be able to benefit both themselves and others. ... "True wisdom" is the wisdom of realizing true reality. Because true reality is without forms, true wisdom is unknowing. "The Dharma-body of non-action" is the body of Dharma-nature. Because Dharma-nature is nirvanic, the Dharma-body is formless. Because it is formless, there is no form which it cannot manifest (Shinran, 2003, 4:184–85).

The Dharma-body represents the absolute truth that transcends figure and form; it is the true

⁴ "Godhead" is a divine concept of God that can be traced to Plotinus' "to hen," Meister Eckhart's "Gottheit," and Jacob Böhme's and Schelling's "Unground."

nature of Buddha. The expedient Dharma-body is the bodhisattva seeking enlightenment and becoming a Buddha. It is the work of Buddha-nature by Amida Buddha, who has accumulated the merit and form as a reward for fulfilling vows. The Dharma body is revealed through Amida as an expedient Dharma body. The extensive manifestation and the all-inclusive principle are mutually interpenetrated. The two Dharma bodies are separate, unified entities; they are one entity, yet not identical.

In his journal, Emerson sets forth his concept of God: "It is ... God only within that worships God of the Universe" (Emerson, 1960–82, 3:213). It corresponds to Shinran's assertion: "From the Dharma-body of Dharma-nature originates the Dharma-body of expediency." According to the Pure Land Buddhist doctrine, Amida Buddha, as an expedient Dharma-body, establishes a relationship of communication and dialogue with sentient beings. The spiritual workings through Shinran's Amida Buddha can be compared to those through Emerson's "Over-soul," while the Dharma-body without form and personality to Emerson's impersonal nature of the Divinity as "Godhead."

II-2 Faith and *Nembutsu*

Emerson's "Self-reliance" does not consist in relying on the superficial and selfish self but in surrendering oneself to the original and universal Self, that is, to "God-within." Therefore, his God-within" is closely related to his religious faith. In his journal, he writes the following about "prayer":

Prayer does not at all consist in words but wholly is a state of mind. Consider it also in connection with the doctrine that God is in the Soul of man, and we shall make another step towards truth. For it is not to be expected that God should gratify any man in an unreasonable request only because he asks it violently, but precisely in proportion as a man comes into conformity with God, he asks right things, or things which God wills and which therefore are done (Emerson, 1960–82, 3:308).

Emerson's "prayer" can be seen as similar to Shinran's *Nembutsu*. The most distinctive feature of Shinran's teaching is the chanting of Amida Buddha's name, a testament to the faithfulness of absolute devotion to Other Power working from Amida. The following quotations are from the *Tannishō* (歎異抄: A Record in Lament of Divergences), compiled and written by Yuien, one of the disciples of Shinran:

The *nembutsu* is the single path free of hindrances. Why is this? To practicers who have realized the entrusting heart, the gods of the heavens and earth bow in homage. ... No evil act can bring about karmic results, nor can any good act equal the *nembutsu* (Yuien, 2005, 7:11).

The *nembutsu*, for its practicers, is "non-practice" and "non-good." Since it is not a practice performed out of one's own designs, it is called "non-practice." Since it is not a good act done through one's own calculation, it is called "non-good." Because it arises wholly from Other Power and is free of self-power, for the practicers, it is "non-practice" and "non-good" (*Ibid.*, 8:11).

Shinran's *Nembutsu* chanting is an intermediary between Amida Buddha and the *Nembutsu* practitioner. The relationship between the Emersonian self-reliant individual and God, and between the *Nembutsu* chanter and Amida, is analogous in that they confront each other on a one-to-one basis by communicating spiritually through words. In his journal, Emerson wrote: "To reflect is to receive truth immediately from God without any medium. That is living truth. It will come only to one who feels that he is nothing. It is by yourself without ambassador that God speaks to you" (Emerson, 1960–82, 3:279). In the *Tannishō*: "When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida, ... I realize that it was entirely for the sake of myself alone!" (Yuien, 2005, postscript, 41). Such a relationship means that each person

meets as an independent individual and communicates spiritually with the transcendental Being as God or Amida Buddha. Moreover, the following quotation from the *Kyōgyōshinshō* also shows that his Pure Land Buddhist doctrine is influenced by the idea of "Buddha-nature.": "All sentient beings have Buddha-nature. Great joy and great abandonment are Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is Tathāgata. Buddha-nature is great faith" (Shinran, 2003, 3:106). "Buddha-womb" (如来藏)⁵, considered the same as "Buddha-nature" (仏性), comes from the Sanskrit word "tathāgata-garba," meaning to contain "tathāgata" in the womb. The Buddha-nature or Buddha-womb doctrine says that every sentient being inherently endowed with an undefiled and pure mind has the potential to become a Buddha despite the attachment of numerous carnal desires to the mind like dust.

Emerson's "God-within" can be seen as a parallel to "Buddha-womb." His skepticism about the orthodox Christian concept of God led him to reject Jesus Christ as the absolute object of worship. His "God-within" resembles the Quaker "Inner Light," the power of God constantly at work within every human mind. In his sermon, Emerson preached: "It will teach that he (Jesus) only is a mediator, as he brings us truth, and we accept it, and live by it; that he only saves us, by inducing us to save ourselves" (Emerson, 1989–92, 4:159), and in his journal: "When man is wholly godly or the unfolding God within him has subdued all to himself, then he asks what God wills and nothing else and all his prayers are granted" (Emerson, 1960–82, 3:308).

It can be assumed that Emerson's "faith" is close to Shinran's "entrusting heart." It is true that Emerson, in emphasizing the superiority of "Reason," the higher faculty for discerning truth, points out the limitation of the conceptualizing faculty of "understanding." However, his faith is not entirely devoid of intellectual perception and judgment. In contrast, Shinran's "entrusting heart" can be accomplished by totally negating one's calculation of mind and actions, completely denying intellectual consideration and judgment, and surrendering to the mysterious and beneficial workings of Amida's Original Vow.

Nembutsu means reciting "Namu-Amida-Butsu" wholeheartedly, and "Namu" means abandoning all self-calculation and self-power and "taking refuge in Amida's great compassion." Then, the act of reciting Amida's name works as a recipient of the Dharma (Law 法) to ward off the delusion that there is a separation exists between the self and Amida and ultimately to come to the spiritual breakthrough that the self and Amida merge into each other. In this way, rebirth into the Pure Land is immediately achieved, as the *Tannishō* states:

Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida's Vow, I shall realize birth in the Pure Land.
The moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that the mind set upon saying
Nembutsu arises within you, you are immediately brought to share in the benefit of being
grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned (Yuien, 2005, 1:4).

In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran writes: "When I humbly contemplate the true essence of the Pure Land Way, I realize that Amida's merit-transference (廻向) has two aspects: one is the aspect of going forth (往相), and the other that of is returning (還相)" (Shinran, 2003, 1:5). In the process of going forth of "merit-transference," the formless Dharma-body as Tathāgata first transforms itself into Amida, a corporeal expedient Dharma-body. Then, in return, Amida, relying on the Original Vow with great compassion and wisdom and responding to the *Nembutsu* practitioners, directs the benefits and extends salvation to them by making them wish with their devotional hearts for rebirth in the Pure Land.

⁵ On Pure Land Buddhism and the doctrine of "Buddha-womb," see Kōshō Mizutani, *BukkyōShisō to Jōdokyō* (Buddhist Thought and Pure Land Buddhism) (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1998). He argues that the doctrine of "Buddha-womb" has provided the basis for Mahāyāna Buddhism in China and Japan and is the basis for Buddhism. For a comparison between Emerson's "God-within" and Mahāyāna Buddhist "Buddha-womb" or "Buddha-nature," see Yoshio Takanashi, "Emerson's 'God-within' and the Buddhist 'Buddha-womb,'" *Journal of East-West Thought*, 9 (2019), 1–14.

Shinran describes the spontaneous functioning of salvation through “merit-transference” as *jinen* (自然 naturalness), as is evidenced in the *Tannishō*:

With everything we do, as far as birth is concerned, we should constantly and fervently call to mind Amida’s immense benevolence without any thought of being wise. Then *Nembutsu* will indeed emerge; this is *jinen*. Our not calculating is called *jinen*. It is itself Other Power (Yuien, 2005, 16:34).

Jinen denotes the essential nature of reality and the proper way of things free from human artificiality and self-willed intention. In his later years, Shinran embraced his idea of *jinen honi* (自然法爾), which means that original human nature and all things in the world are subject to the natural accordance with the way and the law of dependent origination.

The transformative working as “going forth of merit-transference” of the Dharma-body bears resemblance to Emerson’s experience of receiving revelation from God. In his sermon, he preached:

Man begins to hear a voice in reply that fills the heavens and the earth, saying that God is within him, that *there* is the celestial host. I find that this amazing revelation of my immediate relation to God, is a solution to all doubts that oppressed me (Emerson, 1989–92, 4:215)

Amida’s work of benefiting others in the returning process of “merit-transference” has much in common with Emerson’s view of Jesus Christ. This view is close to the Christian theological concept of Kenosis, grounded on “Philippians” in the New Testament: “Jesus Christ who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. Moreover, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (2:6–8). In his sermon, Emerson states: “Every one of us should give that he has. The way is plain—the work is simple—we are to give ourselves in every moment living sacrifices. We are to give *ourselves*, that is, all that we have” (Emerson, 1989–92, 2:249). In this way, Amida’s work in the returning aspect of “merit-transference” can be compared to Emerson’s self-abandonment, which leads directly to the manifestation of “God-within” and to the ultimate “incorporation” of God into the human soul.

III. The differences between Emerson’s religious thought and Shinran’s doctrine of salvation

III-1 “Ascending Transcendence” and “Horizontal Transcendence”

Shinran believes that all human beings are innately “foolish” and “evil” and live in a polluted world of hell. They are heavily burdened with karmic evils, never being capable of doing any good and free from the delusion caused by self-attachment and blind passions. In the *Tannishō*, he states: “It is impossible for us, who are possessed of blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice” (Yuien, 2005, 3:7), and “... hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do” (*Ibid.*, 2:6). Nevertheless, he teaches that the objects of Amida’s Vow are absolutely equal, and that it is the “evil” persons who have the potential to be reborn in the Pure Land and become Buddhas, as is written: “Know that the Primal Vow of Amida makes no distinction between people young and old, good and evil; only the entrusting heart, *shinjin*, is essential. For it is the Vow to save the person whose karmic evil is deep and grave and whose blind passions abound” (*Ibid.*, 1:4), and “Hence, evil persons who entrust themselves to Other Power are precisely the ones who possess the true cause of birth” (*Ibid.*, 3:7). Moreover, he states in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*: “If the single thought of joy and gratitude is awakened in us, we shall realize *Nirvāna* without severing our blind passions” (Shinran, 2003,

2:76). Here *Nirvāna* (enlightenment), the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, does not mean a state of 'extinction' of the bondage of blind passions but that of 'liberation' from endless cycles of birth-and-death, still clinging to worldly desires.

Shinran's comparison between "ordinary people with worldly desires" and "people who, abandoning self-calculation, entrust their salvation to Amida's great compassion by reciting *Nembutsu*" corresponds to Emerson's comparison between "people based on the outer, superficial, and selfish self" and "people based on the inner, original, and universal Self." Nevertheless, a dualistic opposition and conflict can be observed in Emerson's outer and inner aspects of the self. For the individual to achieve incorporation with the original and universal Self, it is necessary to overcome the outer and egoistic self in its entirety. It is distinct from Shinran's detachment from blind passions and the dissolution of the self.

In his Pure Land Buddhist teaching, not dual opposition but mutual interaction and interpenetration between Amida and ordinary people filled with blind passions can be recognized. "Crosswise transcendence" (横超) is a crucial term for comprehending Shinran's teaching. It means suddenly leaping sideways from the world of delusion by the Other Power of Amida's Original Vow, leading to rebirth in the actual Land of Recompense and the attainment of *Nirvāna*. In the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, he writes: "Crosswise transcendence is the way of removing the mind of self-power through mindfulness of the Primal Vow" (*Ibid.*, 6:253).

In contrast to Shinran's horizontal and recurring nature of the doctrine of "crosswise transcendence," Emerson's theory of "correspondence" comprises a vertical structure of three strata: spirit, soul, and nature. In Emerson's understanding of "Over-soul," the human soul is called upon to conquer the superficial self and submit to the original and universal Soul inherent within itself. The term "over" in the Over-soul implies both "rising above" and "sinking into" the self. In this way, his Over-soul can be regarded as a dynamic process, energy, and power of identification of the human soul with the God of the Universe through complete obedience to the indwelling God within. Accordingly, Emerson's "correspondence" can be distinguished from Shinran's mutually interpenetrating transcendence. Furthermore, Shinran expresses the coming and returning aspects of "merit-transference" with the image of circles. Emerson's concept of God is also reflected in the image of circles. His circles are "self-evolving," creating new circles by expanding outward and simultaneously extinguishing old ones by contracting inward. For him, circles represent the living God as immanent and transcendent, repeatedly transcending the boundary of the self, returning to the self, and constantly changing and flowing. As he writes in his essay "Circles": "The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which rushes on all sides towards to new and larger circles without end" (Emerson, 1971–2013, 2:180). Although Shinran's circle resembles Emerson's immanent and transcendent nature, the evolving aspect of Emerson's circle cannot be identified in Shinran's.

III-2 Moral Law and Dharma of Dependent Origination

Emerson's trust in "God-within" evolves into the belief that human beings are endowed with an innate capacity for judging good and evil, that is, moral sentiment, as is written in "The Divinity School Address": "The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul" (*Ibid.*, 1:77). In his journal, he rejects the orthodox Christian doctrines and asserts that the core of Christian faith is "moral truth": "Christianity is wrongly received by all such as take it for a system of doctrines, —its stress being upon moral truth; it is a rule of life not a rule of faith" (Emerson, 1960–82, 4:77). Consequently, he came to view religion not as a system of doctrinal faith but rather as a "theory of human life" (Emerson, 1989–92, 2:88), that is, ethics consisting of moral and worldly teachings on the conduct of life. Moreover, as he states in his book *Nature*: "The moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumstance. It is the pith and marrow of every substance, every relation, and every process" (Emerson, 1971–2013, 1:26), nature is God's perennial manifestation, and the ultimate purpose of nature lies in the moral influence it exerts on human beings, whom it continually invites to awaken to Reason. As a lecturer, after he resigned from the ministry, he

applied the “moral law” beyond the realm of human inner life. He developed his Transcendentalist idea of nature, social ethics, and life.

Emerson expressed his view of good and evil in “The Divinity School Address” (1838): “Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute. ... All evil is so much death or nonentity” (*Ibid.*, 1:78). However, in his later essay “Fate” in *Conduct of Life* (1860), he wrote: “... evil is good in the making” (*Ibid.*, 6:19), acknowledging the positive role of evil in the realization of good while simultaneously opposing good. In his youth, Emerson indeed held to the doctrine of “Self-reliance,” which emphasized the inner growth of the human mind. However, subsequently, he became increasingly involved in the abolitionist movement as the conflict over slavery between the North and the South intensified. In his “Harvard Commemoration Speech” (1865), delivered after the conclusion of the Civil War, he asserted: “The war gave back integrity to this erring and immoral nation” (Emerson, 1903–4, 11:342), declaring that the moral principle had been realized throughout the US nation. Thus, Emerson’s Transcendentalist thought encompasses both social and individual human aspects of morality and ethics.

In Shinran’s teachings, on the other hand, good and evil in this world are coming from karma (the driving force behind transmigration). This concept is distinct from human morality, as evidenced in the *Tannishō*: “Good thoughts arise in us through the prompting of good karma from the past, and evil acts are conceived and committed through the working of evil karma” (Yuien, 2005, 13:22). It is true that all phenomena within the phenomenal world have no immutable substance. Instead, they are ceaselessly generated and transformed by the Dharma, that is, the law of dependent origination, interdependently arising and disappearing about other things. Additionally, Shinran states: “If one studies, more and more one realizes Amida’s fundamental intent and grows in awareness of the immensity of the compassionate Vow, so that one can explain, to those who anxiously wonder how birth is possible for wretched people like themselves, that the Primal Vow does not discriminate as to whether one’s mind is good or evil, pure or defiled” (*Ibid.*, 12:21). Indeed, within Shinran’s Pure Land Buddhist teaching, the interpersonal and communal aspects of benefiting others and creating human equality and brotherhood can be recognized, as is written: “Compassion in the Pure Land Path should be understood as first attaining Buddhahood quickly through saying *Nembutsu* and, with the mind of great love and compassion, freely benefiting sentient beings as one wishes” (*Ibid.*, 4:8). Nevertheless, he places greater emphasis solely on the spiritual awareness and salvation of the individual mind (*shin* 心)⁶ in the practice of *Nembutsu* chanting. Unlike Emerson, he does not actively express clear ideas about human morality and social ethics.

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⁶ In Buddhism, *shin* is generally considered to be synonymous with *i* (意 intention) and *shiki* (consciousness) and is distinguished from *shiki* (色 matter). *Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary*, revised edition (Tokyo: Daitō Publishing, 1999).

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