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Review:

Modern Japanese Buddhism is a complex pattern of various denominations among which Shin Buddhism (Shinshū) is one of the most important. This tradition is a form of Pure Land Buddhism which highlights a strongly subjectivised reliance on the compassionate vow of the mythical Amitābha Buddha (Japanese: Amida Butsu). Though it was founded in principle on the basis of the profound and subtle religious thought of Shinran Shōnin (1173-1262), who refined the tradition he had himself received from earlier expositors such as Hōnen Shōnin, Shin Buddhism was given a massive institutional boost as a result of the life-work of Rennyō Shōnin (1415-1499). (The title Shōnin is often loosely translated as "Saint".) The volume briefly reviewed here is a long overdue, and very successful attempt, to explore and present the teaching and activity of Rennyō, being a multi-authored work based on a top-flight conference in the field at Ōtani University, Kyōto, in 1998.

The majority of the contributors to this book are Japanese, but at the same time much careful work has gone into translation by scholars who are themselves excellent connoisseurs of Japanese Buddhism, including Jan van Bragt (who sadly has died early this year), Thomas Kirchner, Maya Hara, William Londo, Eisho Nasu, Sarah Horton, and Mark Blum who himself translated no less than three of the articles. This review eschews a repetition of the whole contents, but the list of authors alone includes well-known and in some cases very prominent names in the field: Kuroda Toshio, Stanley Weinstein, Matsumura Naoko, Kinryū Shizuka, Kusano Kenshi, Minamoto Ryōen, Terakawa Shunshō, Kaku Takeshi, Alfred Bloom, Ikeda Yūtai, Katō Chiken, William R. Lafleur and Ruben L.F. Habito. Naturally, though all should be mentioned, it is not possible to review each of their contributions separately. (Some additional information may be found in the review of the same book by Elisabetta Porcu in Italian, also in this issue of *Marburg Journal of Religion*.)

The sixteen contributions in the book are set out in three sections: Historical Studies, Shinshū Studies and Comparative Studies. One could argue about the relationship between these, especially the first two, because modern Shinshū studies are usually marked by a deep sense of history and

historical responsibility on the part of the scholars who expound this branch of Buddhism. Apparently as a side product, the editors have taken the opportunity to ensure the inclusion of all the necessary basic information for the study of Rennyo's life and work by English readers in a way that has not been available at this level before. Yasutomi's own contribution "The Life of Rennyo: A Struggle for the Transmission of Dharma" is therefore located justifiably near the beginning, after Mark Blum's "Introduction: The Study of Rennyo". Apart from his substantial editorial and translation work, Mark Blum also contributed a very fine piece on Rennyo Shōnin as a "manipulator of icons", in other words doing justice, with very up-to-date methodological sensitivity, to Rennyo's contribution to the construction of Shin Buddhism as it has come to be known in later centuries. For general orientation, the section entitled "Shinshū Studies" begins with a finely balanced study by Terakawa Shunshō, exploring the relationship between Shinran Shōnin and Rennyo Shōnin and the delicate question of continuity in the Shin Buddhist tradition. This picks up in more detail Stanley Weinstein's piece in the first section entitled "Continuity and Change in the Thought of Rennyo", which in fact deals in particular with the relation between the thought of Shinran and Rennyo, and which some readers may find more immediately accessible. With articles such as these, as well as the splendid apparatus (glossary, chronology and bibliography), students will be able to find their way very well into this chapter of Japanese Buddhist history. Nor should the significance of the subject matter be overlooked, for in Weinstein's words: "What is beyond dispute...is the truly monumental role Rennyo played in transforming the scattered fellowships of *monto* [i.e. the believers; reviewer's italics] into what has become the largest Buddhist denomination in Japan today."

Other articles provide special materials and viewpoints, for example editor Yasutomi Shin'ya's second, fascinating piece about "The Tale of the Flesh-Adhering Mask", which introduces the age-old Japanese problem of the relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and also gives insight into Rennyo's vast teaching and preaching programme. Other special topics are conflict and persecution among Japan's Buddhists and the general perception of gender issues in Rennyo's version of Shin Buddhism. A little unclear is the underlying conception behind the heading "Comparative Religion". This includes only three contributions which are interesting in themselves (Katō, Lafleur and Habito) but which are not clearly correlated with each other or with the other sections. Overall however, there is no doubt that this volume fills a major vacuum in the available literature on the history of Japanese religions, and the editors deserve to be thoroughly congratulated on a fine achievement.

Michael Pye