

# Shin Buddhist Song Lyrics Sung in the United States: Their History and Expressed Buddhist Images<sup>1)</sup>

(1) 1898~1939

Keiko Wells

Buddhism is quiet. Gautama Buddha died lying flat. Horizontal. And he lived until very old. ...Lying down, and relaxing. (Jane Imamura)

Chanting really is the vocal expression of oneness. Buddhist oneness means individuals "as is." ...When you understand that oneness, then you start creating gathas in your own language. (Masao Kodani)

## Introduction

Religious songs are partly folksongs. My concept of folksong is comprehensive: it is the song that a group of people with the same or similar identity in their culture, language, occupation or generation, love to sing. They also have similar emotional attachments to the song. Because of the emotional attachments, the song can evoke the singer's personal memories of his/her life and strengthens the feeling of closeness to that particular cultural group. The song, therefore, does not have to be traditional or anonymous, but it has a strong tie with the tradition of the culture. The song is so widely known that people generally do not care about the copyright of the poet and composer, and quite frequently do not know their names. The singer may say it is "a song of my youth," or "a song of my homeland," instead of "a song by Kosaku Yamada." In this sense, some religious songs are folksongs. People sing them and receive the

---

<sup>1)</sup> I am grateful to Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program and the fellowship that made my research in 2001, on which this article is based, possible. I am also grateful to Ritsumeikan Academic Research Grant given during 2000-01 academic years. I owe special thanks to Dr. Michael Owen Jones, who hosted me at UCLA during the Fulbright Fellowship period and gave me constant encouragement and advice. I thank Dr. Isao Fujimoto, who directed my attention to the songs sung at Shin Buddhist Temples in the United States. My deepest appreciation to those who willingly accepted my request of interviews, and afterward kept giving me advices and encouragement: (according to the chronological order of meetings I made) Rev. Hiroshi Abiko, Mr. Michael T. Endo, Ms. Yasuko T. Wooster II, Ms. Jane Imamura, Rev. Kyogyo Miura, Rev. Masao Kodani, Ms. Helen Kurozumi, Ms. Shirley Watanabe, Ms. Laura Ishikawa, Mr. Benjamin Wieman, Mr. Tad Aoki, Ms. Michi Aoki, Guadalupe Buddhist Church members, Ms. Yachiyo Roberts, Ms. Linda Castro, Rev. Donald Castro, Ms. Yumi Hojo, and Ms. Kimi Hisatsune. Rev. Miura and Rev. Kodani supported me with advice and hints about researching on Buddhism. Ms. Jane Imamura and Ms. Kimi Hisatsune kindly gave me valuable research materials. My gratitude also is to Ms. Chizuko Iwanaga and Rev. Thomas R. Okano for answering my questions over the phone and e-mail.

“feeling” of the religion. Whether they like this “feeling” or not is often more important in determining their religious identity than the intellectual understanding of religious dogma.

Shin Buddhism, known as Buddhism of Pure Land in Western countries and called Jodo Shinshu Hompa Hongwanji-ha or Nishi Hongwanji, in Japanese, has the largest membership among the many Buddhist sects in both Japan and the United States. Shin Buddhism started as a sect that brought Buddhism to common people. Shinran (1173–1263) taught the illiterate people, who absolutely lacked knowledge and time to study sutras and sit for hours to meditate, that they could attain Buddhahood by chanting the phrase, “Namu Amida Butsu” or “Namo Amida Butsu” (南無阿弥陀仏). “Namu Amida Butsu” can be translated as “I will take refuge in Amida Buddha.” The repetitive chanting of this short phrase of only six syllables can be understood as a particular kind of singing, because it generates a strong feeling of moving toward Buddhahood, or more precisely, the feeling of becoming one with the Buddhahood.

Shin Buddhism has other folk chanting traditions as well, and Shinran’s four line verses called “wasan”(和讃), of which 353 are well known, have also been sung or chanted with musical intonations. Thus Shin Buddhism has had a long history of vocal activities in its religious practices. Because of this tradition, it is not surprising that Hompa Hongwanji was the first to be interested in singing religious songs with Western music when Japan started communicating with foreign countries in the Meiji period (1868–1912). In 1872, Hompa Hongwanji sent ministers to Europe in order to investigate European educational system and institutions.<sup>2)</sup> Based upon the report of this mission, Hompa Hongwanji founded a system of religious schools, from elementary to university level, throughout Japan in 1877, and Sunday Schools also were started. They needed new songs in these schools, and they published the first Buddhist songbook with Western style music in 1903. This was twelve years after Japanese public schools started using a music textbook with Western style music.

Introducing Western style music to Japan was not an easy task. The Meiji government started the Western style public education system in 1871, but there were no music teachers who knew Western style music. The music classes did not start until 1881 when the first music textbook, mentioned above, was published. Many of the songs included in the textbook had Japanese words sung with the tunes of European folksongs and Christian hymns. Writing song lyrics in Japanese for these European tunes must have been a strenuous task, because traditional Japanese verses, either in Chinese style or short verses (waka and haiku), have different rhythms. However, the new songs were beautifully done, and they attracted Japanese children of the new era. The adoration of Western music evoked a longing for the unknown world and its culture including Christianity. In fact, a considerable number of intellectuals became Christians during the Meiji period, and the Japanese translations of Christian hymns had a strong influence on the new Japanese poetry in the early twentieth century. Along with these movements, Hompa Hongwanji sought its ways of accepting the Western influence. One of the resolutions was to make Buddhist hymns with European style music, and to use them in serv-

<sup>2)</sup> 「大谷光端師とその時代(1)」『季刊せいてん』*Seiten Quarterly*, 41: 40.

ices and in Buddhist schools.

The Shin Buddhist English songs, however, are not the direct offspring of this Westernization effort in Japan. They were made to meet the need of people in Hawaii and the United States. The Japanese labor immigration to Hawaii started in 1885. Many of the immigrants were Shin Buddhists, but there were no Buddhist ministers to guide them. In 1889 Soryu Kagai arrived in Honolulu to survey the situation on the island, and Gakuo Okabe established the first Buddhist temple in 1894. While the major population of Japanese in Hawaii was comprised of laborers, many of the Japanese in San Francisco in 1870s were students and intellectuals. They were drawn to America for new knowledge. Some of them became enthusiastic Christians, and in 1877 the first Japanese Christian group, the Gospel Society, was formed in San Francisco. Compared to this early start of Christian group activity, the foundation of a Shin Buddhist organization, the Young Men's Buddhist Association, in San Francisco in 1898 was rather late. However, as the number of Japanese increased in the mainland, membership in the North American Buddhist Mission (founded in 1899), which was once the Young Men's Buddhist Association, increased. The organization changed its name to the Buddhist Mission of North America in 1914, and again changed it to the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) in 1944. The call for English songs was first raised in Hawaii to increase the understanding of Buddhism among Christians, and then on the mainland to satisfy the need of English speaking generations of Japanese Americans. Buddhist songs with Western music were first called "hymns," and afterward "gathas" in order to avoid a Christian connotation.

As we see later in this article, the selection of gathas sung in the Shin Buddhist temples in the United States has been changing since the beginning of their history. There have been two hundred and some gathas published over the years. Present time members of BCA sing English and Japanese gathas both new and old. Changes in gathas reflect what the Buddhist leaders of each period aimed to accomplish. They also mirror the taste and sentiment of the membership. In this article I will illustrate the changes in Japanese and English Shin Buddhist gatha lyrics sung in the United States and discuss the meaning of the changes. I will also analyze the main images and motifs used in these songs while bringing out the interrelation with those of other Japanese songs and Christian hymns. The analysis of the song texts will show that there has been consistency in the attitudes of Buddhist song creators in America.

My discussion will follow five stages in the changes of Buddhist gathas in the United States. 1st period: services given in Japanese with chanting, and some Japanese songs brought to the United States from Japan; 2nd period: strong emphasis on English songs, which were made in Hawaii by Caucasians after a model of Christian hymns; 3rd period: Japanese gathas and English gathas were sung; 4th period: children's gathas in English were made by Nisei (the second generation Japanese Americans); 5th period: ① new English songs were made by a Caucasian, ② diverse cultural activity sprung from Japanese Buddhist tradition enhanced by Sansei (the third generation Japanese Americans). For each period of transition I will present approximate time range according to the publication years of service books that indicate the changes. However, it must be noted that the actual move from one stage to the other was

gradual, and the shifting process varied according to the ministers and service masters at each temple.

**Beginning of Buddhist Services in the United States, 1898–1937;  
Bringing in Japanese Esthetics to Songs**

In the boxes of the BCA Archives at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, there are many old Japanese sutra books that were used by ministers to practice Buddhism and give ceremonies. Most of them are compact editions, and often have a brush paint handwritten signature of the owner and his address in Japan where he probably bought this book and had religious training. Relatively new books are hard covered with beautiful cloth over them, and old ones are bound in the traditional Japanese way. They are worn out. They sometimes have pencil marks and scribbling to show the traces of the owner's diligent study. The Japanese Buddhist ministers packed these compact edition sutra books and crossed the Pacific Ocean to reach San Francisco Bay.

Until 1912 there were no Buddhist service books in Japan. The weekly service is not a Japanese tradition, and most Buddhist temples in Japan still do not give Sunday services. Japan did not use the solar calendar until the Meiji Restoration in 1868; Sunday was not any special day before the solar calendar started functioning in people's everyday lives. Hompa Hongwanji, however, searched for a new style of Buddhist practice that would suit the new age. The first service book, 『聖典』 (*Seiten*, Sacred Texts, 1912), was both for the ministers and the members. This was very innovative because formerly published sutra texts were only for ministers. 『聖典』 (*Seiten*) contains 148 pages of Buddhist texts for chanting, and 26 songs with Western style music. The songs are printed at the end of the book.

These 26 songs are epoch-making as we compare them with the very first Buddhist songs with Western style music in Japan. The first song book, 『通俗仏教唱歌集 第壹編』<sup>3)</sup> (*Tsuuzoku Bukkyo Shouka Shu*, Buddhist Song Book for People, vol. 1) was published by a Buddhist priest from Hiroshima in 1903. There is only one short tune to apply to each stanza of all the songs in the book. There are thirty songs and each song has many stanzas; for example, the first song, 「信心歓喜の唱歌」 (Shinjin Kanki no Shouka, "A Song for Joy in True Faith"), has 48 stanzas. The poems are adaptations of Buddhist texts and religious and moral teachings. The poet uses the same kind of eloquent language as professional storytellers used in the nineteenth century. The tune monotonously repeats every four lines, while the poems are rich in metaphorical images and didactic statements. The poet tends to translate subtle Buddhist concepts in a tangible image using metaphors and similes, and write the moralistic phrases in the tone of catchy proverbs. The poet clearly meant to popularize Shin Buddhist teachings with these songs.

The messages of the song texts in 『通俗仏教唱歌集 第壹編』 (*Tsuuzoku Bukkyo Shouka Shu*) are also expressions of the mixture of Buddhism, popular religion, and moral principles. Here is an example.

---

<sup>3)</sup> The copy I saw was once used in Fort Lupton Buddhist Temple in Colorado.

「四恩の唱歌」

皇御國の人々は。  
男女の差別なく。  
朝な夕なに心して。  
四恩てふこと忘るるな。

“Shion no Shouka”

Sumera mikuni no hitobito wa  
Otoko onna no shabetu [sic] naku  
Asana yuuna ni kokoro shite  
Shion to iukoto wasururuna

そは君の恩父母の恩。  
佛の恩と衆生恩。  
これに報ゆる人こそは。  
眞の人と申すなり。

Sowa kimi no on fubo no on  
Hotoke no on to shujyo on  
Koreni mukuyuru hito koso wa  
Makoto no hito to mousu nari

...

教も多かるそが中に。  
神と佛と聖人の。

Oshie mo ookaru sogu naka ni  
Kami to hotoke to seijin no

✧ 通俗佛教唱歌集譜 ✧

は

(優美に)

調

6666 | 66 55 | 6654 | 5-6- |  
あゝあり | がたやー | なむあみ | たー

四

拍

子

2̇2̇2̇2̇ | 2̇2̇1̇1̇ | 2̇2̇1̇6 | 1̇-2̇- |  
しんじん | かんぎの | いまのみ | はー

2̇1̇2̇6 | 6̇1̇55 | 6654 | 5-6- |  
ろくじを | もちたか | もたれた | かー

4455 | 2222 | 3322 | 2-●○ |  
さてもー | とふとや | なむあみ | たー

(1) The only music note for all songs in *Tsuzoku Bukkyo Shokashu*, 1903.

三の教の麗しき。  
光は國の光なり。<sup>4)</sup>

Mitsu no oshie no uruwashiki  
Hikari wa kuni no hikari nari

“A Song of Four Debts of Gratitude”

People in the country governed by Tenno,<sup>5)</sup> men and women equally,  
Remember the four debts of gratitude every morning and every evening.

Be thankful for Tenno, be thankful for your parents,  
Be thankful for Buddha, be thankful for everything with life in this world.  
Only the one who would try to requite them all can really be called a person.

• • •

There are many teachings, but the three teachings of  
Kami, Buddha, and the Sacred person are graceful and beautiful.  
The light is the light of the country.

In the early Meiji period the government guided the anti-Buddhist movement that led to the destruction of Buddhist temples and images. The religion of the nation was declared to be Shinto (a folk religion of kami/kamis), because it is the only religion originated in Japan. However, the Meiji Shinto was not the same as the religion living among people, but rather a camouflage of the Tenno system. The above quotation reflects this late nineteenth century thought. The poet does not sound hesitant in celebrating Kami, Buddha, Tenno, Shinran (“the Sacred person”) and parents in one poem as moral icons. Judging from the confident and proud tone of the above poem, the author had probably adjusted himself to the current thought.

There is a song in 『聖典』 (*Seiten*), the first Buddhist service book that I previously mentioned, which sings the same theme as the 「四恩の唱歌」 (Shion no Shouka). The title of the song in 『聖典』 (*Seiten*) is 「四の恩」 (Yon no On, “Four Expressions of Gratitude”). It has four stanzas, and the first two have a tune and the latter two a different tune. Each stanza is complete and does not run on as in the songs of 『通俗仏教唱歌集 第壹編』 (*Tsuzoku Bukkyo Shouka Shu*). The songs in 『聖典』 (*Seiten*) try to convey the straight Shin Buddhist teachings. There is no reference to Kami nor Tenno. When the poet<sup>6)</sup> says “the country,” he means the land of people or this world of life, not the state of a deified ruler. Next is the first number of 「四の恩」 (Yon no On).

<sup>4)</sup> 『通俗仏教唱歌集・第壹編』 (*Tsuzoku Bukkyo Shouka Shu*, vol. 1) 8-9. Translations from Japanese texts are mine except when noted.

<sup>5)</sup> Tenno is usually translated as Emperor, but Tenno is quite different from European emperors.

<sup>6)</sup> There are no references to the poets and composers of the songs included in 『聖典』 (*Seiten*). However, in the 1948 version of service book, the credit is given to Tokusui Kotani (lyrics), Yasuo Sawa (music), and Seisui Fujii (music arrangement).

## 「國の恩」

天地ゆたかにいや栄江  
輝くひかりのどかにて  
静かにおさまる國のうち  
ゆるがぬ基たのもしや  
國の恵みにうるほひて  
青人草もやすらけし  
そのいさほしを畏こみて  
むくひまつるぞ民の道<sup>7)</sup>

Ametsuchi yutakani iya sakae  
Kagayaku hikari nodokanite  
Shizukani osamaru kuni no uchi  
Yuruganu motoi tanomoshiya  
Kuni no megumi ni uruoite  
Aohitogusa mo yasurakeshi  
Sono isaoshi wo kashikomite  
Mukumatsuruzo tami no michi

“The debt of gratitude to the country”  
We see prosperity in the sky and the earth.  
There is serene glistening light.  
This country is governed in tranquility.  
The country stands firm and is reliable.  
Our thirst is softened with the blessings.  
The people live like green grass in peace.  
We are awed by its achievement.  
We, the people, will return the debt of gratitude.

The above verse, though it eliminated the reference to Kami and Tenno, is a praise of the country rather than the praise of Buddha. The second and third number of 「四の恩」 (Yon no On) are titled as “The debt of gratitude to the parents” and “The debt of gratitude to all beings,” and they express the Confucian moral norm of the Meiji period. Thus these three verses dropped out in the later gatha books, but the fourth verse, 「三寶の恩」 (Sambo no On) survived. The short song is loaded with Buddhist metaphors; the sea of ignorance, the mountain of Buddhist teachings (Dharma), and the moon that symbolizes enlightenment. These are traditional images that can be found in Buddhist texts.

## 「三寶の恩」

迷の海に沈む身も  
教えの船に法の師の  
導くまに漕ぎゆけば  
悟りの岸にいたりなん

## “Sambo no On”

mayoi no umi ni shizumu mi mo  
oshie no fune ni nori no shi no  
michibiku mamani kogi yukeba  
satori no kishi ni itarinan

法の深山にわけいりて  
悟りの月を見るときは  
心にかかる雲もなし

nori no miyama ni wakeirite  
satori no tsuki wo miru toki wa  
kokoro ni kakaru kumo mo nashi

<sup>7)</sup> 『聖典』(Seiten) 200.

これ三寶の恩なり<sup>8)</sup>

kore sampo no megumi nari

“Three Treasures” (Trans. by Kimi Hisatsune)<sup>9)</sup>

Though we flounder on the Sea of Ignorance,  
by following the Buddha’s guidance  
As we sail on the Ship of the Dharma,  
we will surely reach the Shore of Enlightenment.

As we enter further into the Dharma Mountain  
and behold the pure moon of Bodhi,  
our clouded hearts become clear and free.

This is truly a gift of the Three Treasures.

The fourth printing of 『聖典』 (*Seiten*, 1923) has an inner cover on which “for the use of the Buddhist Churches of America” is printed in Japanese. Seven gathas, which did not have clear Buddhist messages, had been replaced with new ones since the 1912 first edition. Nichiyō Gakko Dojin (Sunday School Fellows), a group organized to make Shin Buddhist gathas for Sunday Schools in Japan, wrote the new songs. The individual names of this group are not known. The final gatha selection for 『聖典』 (*Seiten*) was so good that some of the gathas are still well loved by present time Buddhists in the United States. The songs in the fourth edition of 『聖典』 (*Seiten*) express Buddhist ideas clearly, with traditional images that are often used in *wakas* and Buddhist texts. The language is much more colloquial than that of the songs in 『通俗仏教唱歌集』 (*Tsuuzoku Bukkyō Shōka Shū*), yet keeps the elegance of archaic literary style. I cite one gatha below that is included in the latest BCA service book published in 1994. This is “Nori no Miyama,” which presents traditional *waka* motifs such as cherry blossoms, nightingales and dream.

「法の深山」

法のみ山のさくら花  
昔のままに匂ふなり  
道の枝折の跡とめて  
さとりの高嶺の春をみよ

“Nori no Miyama”

nori no miyama no sakurabana  
mukashi no mamani niou nari  
michi no shiori no ato tomete  
satori no takane no haru wo miyo

<sup>8)</sup> In the original version the last line reads as 「これ三寶の恩としれ」 (*Kore sampo no on to shire*/ Be sure to note we have a debt of gratitude to the Three Treasures). In the latest version, the imperative has been changed to the narrative style, and the word, 「恩」(*on*/ a debt of gratitude), which often has Confucian connotation, is replaced with 「恩」(*megumi*/a gift). Please note that by giving different readings to the same kanji (Chinese character), one can express more than one meaning by the same word. This device is referred to later in this article.

<sup>9)</sup> The translations of song lyrics by Kimi Hisatsune are taken from *Shin Buddhist Service Book* (1994).



法のみ山のほととぎす  
昔のままに名のるなり  
浮世は夢ぞ短か夜と  
驚きさます聲をきけ<sup>10)</sup>

nori no miyama no hototogisu  
mukashi no mama ni nanoru nari  
ukiyo wa yumezo mijikayo to  
odoroki samasu koe wo kike

“Dharma Mountain” (Trans. by Kimi Hisatsune)

Cherry blossoms on the Dharma Mountain

spread their fragrance as of old.

Cease marking traces on the Noble Path,

## Nori no Miyama 107

Seiran Ouchi

Gagaku Etenraku

Arr. Kiyomi Fujii

1. No—ri no mi ya ma no sa ku ra ba na Muka shi no  
2. No—ri no mi ya ma no ho to to gi su Muka shi no

ma—ma ni ni o u na ri Mi i chi no shi o ri no  
ma—ma ni na no ru na ri U ki yo wa yu—me zo

a to to me te Sa to ri no ta ka ne no ha ru o mi yo  
mi ji ka yo to O do ro ki sa—ma su ko e o ki ke

(2) “Nori no Miyama”; first printed in *Seiten* (1923) without a music text. The above text is in *Buddhist Service Book* (1963).

<sup>10)</sup> 『聖典』(*Seiten*, 1923) 172.

and perceive the springtime splendor  
of Bodhi we assumed was beyond our reach.

Nightingales on the Dharma Mountain  
sing the praises of the Name as of old.  
Listen to their voices warning us  
that this life is but a dream  
and the night is very short.

The beauty of cherry blossoms that cover the mountain stands for Nirvana (the condition of no agitation, perfect peace). Though it is an everlasting beauty, it appears to us only momentarily just as the cherry blossoms are beautiful only for a few days. Nightingales invite us to recognize the darkness of the transitory life and to seek the way to be enlightened. It is said that the song of nightingales sounds “Hoh-wo-kike” (法を聴け, Listen to Dharma). The pathos expressed here rests not in the fact every being is mortal, but in the awareness that one can hold the peace and happiness of enlightenment only momentarily. This pathos has long been underlying the Japanese literature. The following folksong sung by a professional female entertainer in the twelfth century is a masterpiece in expressing this emotion.

仏は常にいませども	hotoke wa tsune ni imasedomo
現ならぬぞあはれなる	utsutsu naranuzo awarenaru
人の音せぬ暁に	hito no oto senu akatsuki ni
ほのかに夢に見え給ふ	honokani yume ni mie tamau
『梁塵秘抄』	

[I know] Buddha always exists, but  
It is different when Buddha appears.  
On the quiet dawn, with no sound of a being heard,  
I see Buddha faintly in the mist of my dream.

(*Ryōjinhisho*)

Six years before the fourth edition of 『聖典』 (*Seiten*, 1923) was printed, Buddhist Japanese song book, 『らいさん』 (*Raisan*, Praise 1917) was published in Honolulu. Nine years later, in 1926, a revised version was published in Japan. The revised Japanese version contains 30 songs. Tokusui Kotani, the editor and one of the four lyric poets for the Honolulu version 『らいさん』 (*Raisan*), had little idea of authorship and did not cite the names of the poets and composers for the Japan version, which were printed in the Honolulu version. He also made many changes in the words of the songs. In the “Preface by the editor” he writes that finding a printer who could print the sheet music was challenging. This comment reflects the fact that the Western staff notation had been hardly used in Japan in the early twentieth century.

The songs in 『らいさん』 (*Raisan*) reveal two things. One is that Buddhist Sunday schools were well under way by this time. The following song, titled “Sunday School,” encourages children to come to school.

「日曜学校」

とうさま かあさま	tosama kasama
おかほをあらつて てをふいて	okao wo aratte te wo fuite
きものをきかへて おはやうと	kimono wo kikaete ohayo to
みほとけさまを おがみませう	mihotokesama wo ogami masho
とうさま かあさま	tosama kasama
おてらのかねが なりました	otera no kane ga nari mashita
みんなといっしょに きげんよく	minnato isshoni genki yoku
にちえうがくかうに まるりませう <sup>11)</sup>	nichiyogakko ni mairi masho

“Sunday School”

Father, Mother, let’s wash our faces and wipe our hands  
Change our clothes, say, “good morning” to Hotoke-sama.<sup>12)</sup>  
Let’s join our hands and bow.

Father, Mother, I hear the big temple bell ring.  
Let’s get together with others in good spirit,  
And go to the Sunday School.

The other thing that 『らいさん』 (*Raisan*) reveals is the influence of the New Children’s Song (Doyo) Movement in Japan. The Doyo movement occurred about thirty years after the start of new western style music education at public schools. Out of the first generation of the public school pupils, new Japanese musicians and poets came. They criticized the school songs as not fitting for children, so they searched for the songs written in the language that children would use. They avoided didactic tone and Confucian ethics, trying to write from a child-centered viewpoint and created the feeling of freedom. Both the romantic philosophy of child-centered education and the feeling of freedom from feudalistic ideas arrived from Europe, and the poets often used foreign motifs such as “shoes” “cradle” “canary,” and “church.” These European motifs, indeed, enhanced the children’s admiration for the unrestricted atmosphere and the material wealth of the Western world, but they had relatively shorter lives. On the

<sup>11)</sup> 『らいさん』 (*Raisan*) 9.

<sup>12)</sup> “Hotoke” (“sama” is an honorific expression to be added to the name), means the Buddha, Amida, and sometimes the deceased ancestors. I dare not choose one of them for the translation of this word here. It is more than a religious term in Japan; the common expression, “the person is really a Hotoke-sama,” means “the person is compassionate, generous, or/and very helpful.”

other hand, some of the songs that blended traditional motifs and images in the lyrics have survived until the present day. They are much loved and are an indicator of cultural identity among Japanese people. 「夕焼小焼」(Yukake koyake, “The Sunset”) is a very good example.

夕焼け小焼けで 日が暮れて	yuyake koyake de hi ga kurete
山のお寺の鐘が鳴る	yama no otera no kane ga naru
おててつないで みなかえろ	otete tsunaide mina kaero
からすといっしょに かえりましょ	karasu to issho ni kaerimasho

The sunset, orange-red sky, a day is almost over.  
I hear the sound, the big bell of the temple in the mountain.  
Let's hold hands, and go home together.  
Let's go home together with the crows.

The combination of the sunset and the Buddhist temple in the mountain is quite symbolic. The West is the direction where one finds Nirvana, thus the beauty of the sunset is a metaphor for the enlightened condition. (Here “the West” does not mean the Occident.) The mountain stands for a great heap of true knowledge. Crows are associated with death, and in the above song they invite the children to go back to their safe homes. This sounds contradictory, but the Japanese folk sentiment is allied with the awareness of death. It is not their own death that the children are aware of; the crows are an image of deceased ancestors and Buddha who would protect them and guide them to the enlightenment.

“Higan”<sup>13)</sup> by Kotani, first printed in 『らいさん』(*Raisan*) and loved ever since, directly refers to the Buddhist meaning of the sunset.

「彼岸」	“Higan”
きれいなお日様 西に入る	kireina ohisama nishi ni iru
かがやく雲の あちらには	kagayaku kumo no achira niwa
あみだによらいのお浄土が	amida nyorai no o-kyodo ga
あるといふこときました	arutoiu koto kikimashita
彼岸の中日 お日様は	higan no chunichi ohisama wa
ちょうど真西のお浄土に	chodo manishi no o-kyodo ni
おはいらなされるお話を	o'hairinasareru o'hanashi wo
けふはお寺できました	kyo wa otera de kikimashita
みんなでなかよくみ名称へ	minna de nakayoku mina tonae

<sup>13)</sup> “Higan” literary means “the other shore.” In Japanese folk belief, it is the other side of the water which divide the world of the living from that of the dead. It also means the land of enlightenment. The mid-day of Higan week is the spring or fall equinox.

きれいな浄土に参りませう  
 けふの入り日のうつくしさ  
 ほんに浄土の 雲のやう<sup>14)</sup>

kireina jyodo ni mairimasho  
 kyo no irihi no utsukushisa  
 honni jyodo no kumo no yo

“Higan” (Trans. by Kimi Hisatsune)

The beautiful sun sets in the West.

I heard that Amida’s Pure Land lies  
 beyond the shining clouds.

At the temple today, I heard that  
 during the mid-week of Higan,

7 ひ が ん

一きれいな浄土の  
 けふの入り日のうつくしさ  
 ほんに浄土の雲のやう

かかま-く-ク-モノ ア-ラ-ニ ハ  
 ちが-び-ま に し の み じや-ど

ア-ミ-イ-ニ ライノ 一ド ガ  
 おほい-り-な さいろ は-な し

ア-ル-ト-イ-コト ア-マ-シ-タ  
 ほん-に-は-お-て-あ-り-ま-す

(3) “Higan,” in *Raisan* (1926).

<sup>14)</sup> 『らいさん』 (*Raisan*) 8.

the sun enters directly west in Pure Land.

Reciting the Nembutu,  
 let us go to the beautiful Pure Land.  
 The setting sun is truly like  
 the shining clouds over Pure Land.

Cherry blossoms and the sunset are two important images in Japanese culture. Buddhist songs willingly utilized them to make the songs appealing to people. The images are rooted in Buddhism, but do not exactly translate Buddhist ideas. They convey the “feeling” of Japanese religious sentiment.

### **English Gathas and Services Modeled after Christian Style, 1924–1939; Songs Independent from Japanese Ethics**

The first English songs came from Hawaii. Ernest Hunt, an Englishman whose Buddhist name is Shinkaku, compiled the *Vade Mecum* in 1924, the first Buddhist service book in English. He intended to spread Buddhism among Occidentals, avoiding sectarian conflicts. On the first page of the *Vade Mecum* he directly states his mission:

It is the fervent desire of the Authors of this little volume that the heresy of separateness now prevailing among Buddhists may soon be abolished. They have endeavored therefore to avoid unduly emphasizing sect, keeping to the fundamental and ethical teaching, hoping that all, whatever their sect affiliation, may be able to use it.

The *Vade Mecum* is clearly modeled after Christian service books. It is divided into two parts. In the first part it presents ceremony procedural models for seven different ceremonies such as Wesak Day (Buddha’s birthday), marriage, funeral ceremonies and so on. The ceremony models do not include sutra chanting by the minister, but all models contain hymn singing. This makes a strong contrast with traditional Buddhist ceremonies. The second part of the *Vade Mecum* is an anthology of hymns. There are 138 songs, of which 47 are written by Dorothy Hunt, the wife of Ernest Hunt, and 51 are by A. R. Zorn.

The song lyrics in the *Vade Mecum* show the struggle of the pioneers who attempted to communicate Buddhist ideas in English. They tried to build a bridge over Buddhism and Christianity. Though they hardly used Christian key words such as soul, eternity, or creation, they borrowed Christian terms and imagery, especially when they referred to Buddha. In “To the Lord Buddha,” written by Shinkaku (Ernest Hunt), Buddha is a deity with strong personality just as the Christian deity.

How glorious is Thy Dharma,  
 O, Buddha, Blessed Lord.

How wonderful Thy Sangha,  
Which spreads Thy word abroad.

We, too, will surely follow  
The road that Thou didst find,  
The perfect Road of Knowledge,  
And never look behind.

And walking in Thy footsteps,  
We'll find the truest wealth  
Lies in the full surrender  
Of that we call the self.

Thine Infinite Compassion,  
Thy Pure and Holy Life,  
At length shall lead the nations  
From bloodshed, hate and strife.

And so we take our refuge  
In Thee, our Lord Divine,  
Thy Holy Law the Beacon  
That in our hearts shall shine.

How glorious is Thy Dharma,  
O Buddha, Blessed Lord.  
How wonderful Thy Sangha,  
Which spreads Thy word abroad. (No. 105)<sup>15)</sup>

In this song, Buddha is addressed as “Lord,” and his followers (Sangha) are praised as if they were heroes. The words that imply battles such as “surrender” and “bloodshed” come from Biblical imagery rather than Buddhist texts. Here, we can see the spiritual uplift of Shinkaku himself, who was determined to “follow the road that Thou [Buddha] didst find,” and “spread[s] Thy [Buddha’s] word abroad.” Becoming a Buddhist minister in the early twentieth century must have been a difficult path to take for an Englishman, who once studied for admission to Anglican Orders.<sup>16)</sup> His Christian sensibility probably needed to modify the concept of Buddha, which is very different from the concept of Christ or God and is not very uplifting in

<sup>15)</sup> The song number in parentheses is taken from the *Vade Mecum*.

<sup>16)</sup> The biographical information about Ernest Hunt is from Louise H. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii; Its Impact on a Yankee Community* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1971) 152.

the sense that no irrational miracles nor heroism are involved, by giving Buddha a solid and sturdy personality and superhuman quality. Yoshifumi Ueda explains the difference:

In the West, religion is considered to be based on the relationship between man and God. Man is finite, helpless and weak whereas God is a supernatural being, omniscient and omnipotent. Because man's life is fulfilled through the grace of God, this dependence is crucial. It rules out any possibility of man attaining the status of God. In contrast, Buddhism teaches that it is a human person who becomes a Buddha. One of the consequences of this position is that there are countless Buddhas in the cosmos. ... Man and Buddha, thus, are not two separate beings but the selfsame being at two extremes of spirituality: unenlightened and enlightened, or non-awakened and awakened. The crucial factor between man and Buddha, then, is not dependence, but the *process of becoming*.<sup>17)</sup>

Thus the word, "Buddha," means an enlightened person, but it also indicates Gautama Buddha, who was the first to be enlightened. Ambiguously enough, it sometimes stands for Amida Buddha in Shin Buddhism. Masao Kodani translates Amida Buddha as "Truth-Reality."

This Truth-Reality called Other Power is ineffable and beyond description. It is beyond shape and form and beyond categories of time and space - and yet, it is expressed in human terms by an anthropomorphic image called Amida Buddha, or the more abstract formulation of "Namoamidabutsu" in Chinese characters. ... The Truth-Reality called Amida Buddha, then, is the central object of veneration in Jodoshinshu temples.<sup>18)</sup>

The ambiguous and "ineffable" quality of "Buddha" is clearly seen in the following Japanese song for the celebration of Buddha's birthday. This song was first included in a BCA service book, *Young Buddhist Companion* (1954) and is also in the latest service book published in 1994.

「花祭の歌」

お庭は櫻の花の幕  
草の褥もやはらかに  
今日はずれしい花祭  
佛の前で私等は  
唱歌うたうて遊びませう

皆さんおいでよ暖かく

"Hanamaturi no Uta"

oniwa wa sakura no hana no maku  
kusa no shitone mo yawarakani  
kyo wa ureshii hanamatsuri  
hotokeno maede watashira wa  
shouka utatte asobimasho

minasan oideyo atatakaku

<sup>17)</sup> Ueda Yoshifumi, edited by Masao Kodani, *Mahayana Buddhism: An Approach to Its Essence* (Los Angeles: Pure Land Publication, 1989) 2-3.

<sup>18)</sup> *Senshin Buddhist Temple* (Senshin Buddhist Temple, 2001) 5-6.



野草を渡る春風が なかよく遊ぶ私等を かはゆがられる御佛の 心のやうに吹いて来る	nogusa wo wataru harukaze ga nakayoku asobu watashira wo kawaigarareru mihotoke no kokoro no yoni fuite kuru
小枝に鳥がよい聲で 春のなさを歌つてる いつしよに揃うて私等を いつも勞り下される 佛の慈悲を讃へませう	koeda ni tori ga yoi koe de haru no nasake wo utatteru isshoni sorotte watashira wo itsumo itawari kudasareru hotoke no jihi wo tataemasho
花で此の世がかざられる 嬉しい春をつかさどる お方がもしもあるならば 此の世にひとりなつかしい お慈悲の高い阿彌陀さま (No. 115) <sup>19)</sup>	hanade konoyo ga kazarareru ureshii haru wo tsukasadoru okata ga moshimo arunaraba konoyoni hitori natsukashii ojihi no takai amida sama

“Flower Festival, Buddha’s Birth” (Trans. by Kimi Hisatsune)

The garden is a curtain of cherry blossoms and  
soft are the grasses that blanket it.  
Today is happy Hanamatsuri!  
Let us sing a song in front of the Buddha  
And dance together with joy!

Come, everyone!  
The warm spring breezes caress the wild grasses,  
Just as the Buddha’s compassion  
comfort us who play together in harmony.

On a little branch, a bird sings in a lovely voice  
the compassion of spring.  
Let us together sing of Buddha’s compassion,  
which constantly cares for us.

If there is someone who can bring about a happy spring  
that decorates the world with flowers,  
That would, indeed, be the kind and  
compassionate Amida Buddha.

<sup>19)</sup> The song numbers quoted hereafter in parentheses are BCA gatha numbers.

Buddha, here, is expressed by the image of cherry blossoms that make a soft pink “curtain” over the garden. His “kokoro,” which literary means “heart and mind in one” (Buddha’s heart and mind is nothing but “compassion” as translated by Hisatsune), is “the warm spring breezes.” People are celebrating Buddha’s birthday, but what is really praised in the poem is the abstract concept, “Buddha’s compassion,” rather than Gautama Buddha himself. At the end of the song, Buddha is identified with Amida Buddha. In this poem Buddha is expressed as an atmosphere with no tangible shape, not as a dominant personality who can be addressed as “Lord.”

Compared to Japanese Buddhist songs that tend to flow into an expression of religious mood, Christian songs are likely to conclude with tangible imagery. The well loved Christian hymn, “Amazing Grace,” opens with the praise of the religious idea, “grace”; however, the fourth stanza is congratulating “the Lord” rather than his grace, and he is compared with a substantial thing, a “shield.” I cite below the first and fourth stanzas.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound  
 That saved a wretch like me!  
 I once was lost, but now am found,  
 Was blind, but now I see.

• • •

The Lord has promised good to me,  
 His word my hope secures;  
 He will my shield and portion be  
 As long as life endures.<sup>20)</sup>

The English songs in the *Vade Mecum* follow the tradition of Christian hymns, and poets often have preferred to bring out Buddha as a dominant deity. A ceremonial song for Buddha’s birthday written by A. R. Zorn is a good example.

On this glad day that knew Thy birth,  
 Buddha, Our Lord, Our Guide and Friend,  
 Let joy prevail o’er all the earth,  
 Thy peace on all mankind descend.

Homage and love to Thee we bring  
 With blossoms fair thy shrine adorn  
 Grateful our hymns of praise we sing

---

<sup>20)</sup> Ian Bradley ed., *The Book of Hymns* (New York: Testament Books, 1989) 36.

To hail Thy glorious natal morn.

Lord of compassion boundless, free,  
 Fountain of Truth's immortal lore,  
 Steadfast our trust shall rest in Thee,  
 Thou art our Refuge evermore. (No. 9)

In the first stanza Zorn addresses Buddha, saying "Our Lord, Our Guide and Friend," and the blossoms in the second stanza are simply the decoration of the shrine. The third stanza opens with another address to Buddha, "Lord of Compassion, boundless, free." The more the words of address accumulate, the more solid and "steadfast" the image of Buddha's personality becomes. Though Zorn does not write anything contrary to Buddhism, the style of writing and words with Christian connotations create a different feeling from the Japanese Buddhist songs.

The imagery used in the *Vade Mecum* that is most remote from Japanese Buddhist folk literature is the war imagery. The war songs are hero songs in nature and the "we" who sing the English song are usually identified with winners. But in Shin Buddhist teachings there are no heroes because all beings are equal and one, so there are no enemies to fight against even metaphorically. Among lyrics by Dorothy Hunt, though they reveal her good understanding of Buddhist ideas and some of them the very best among the 138 songs, the ones with war imagery sound "very Christian like."<sup>21</sup> She calls young Buddhists "Buddha's soldiers true," "the knights of old"(No. 20), and "Buddha's army" (No. 21). She writes they "proclaim" their "loyalty" and "lead men to Truth's day" (No. 20). When she tries to say that the perfect self-effacement is ideal and that this is possible because Amida Buddha's compassion exists, she writes, "Self is the foe each child must slay" (No. 32) and "Love shall be our weapon" (No. 32). The images of war seem to have drawn Hunt toward more "Christian like" metaphors, thus the description of Buddha resembles that of Christ. The second and the third stanzas of song No. 32 read:

True liberty our Master gained  
 From death and fear and sin,  
 And those who do as Buddha did  
 This liberty shall win.

The false self speaks within our hearts  
 But we must all refuse  
 To listen to the lies he tells,  
 And Buddha's teaching choose. (No. 32)

<sup>21</sup> When I interviewed people in Shin Buddhist temples asking why they do not want to sing most of the songs from the *Vade Mecum*, they answered that the songs are "very Christian like songs."

The song, "Loyal Soldiers," by Zorn even more follows the style of Christian songs with war imagery.

We are Buddha's loyal soldiers,  
 Marching 'neath His banner true;  
 Proud to follow where He leads us,  
 Glad His holy will to do.

#### CHORUS

Marching forward, ever forward,  
 Loyal soldiers we will be;  
 'Neath the Buddha's glorious banner  
 We will follow faithfully.

• • •

With the sword of Truth our weapon  
 Let us battle manfully;  
 Pressing forward, never yielding,  
 Till the hosts of error flee. (No. 49)

There is also a marching song by Dorothy Hunt.

Have you heard the sound of footsteps  
 As of soldiers marching on?  
 Have you seen their banners waving?  
 Have you heard their battle song?  
 Have you watched their blazing torches,  
 Lighting up their columns long? (No. 19)

These marching songs of "Buddha's loyal soldiers" remind us of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
 He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
 He hath loosed the fateful lightening of his terrible swift sword;  
 His truth is marching on.<sup>22)</sup>

---

<sup>22)</sup> Julia Ward Howe, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" (1862) in, Christ-Janer Hughes Smith, *American Hymns Old and New* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) 286-87.

In 1989 BCA sent questionnaires about gathas to all the temples in preparation for the making of a new service book. Some of the returned comments are very critical of English gathas: “many problems: Christian sentiment rather than Buddhist, especially in archaic language,” “too many Christian connotations,” and “some have too strong Christian connotation.”<sup>23)</sup> The important factor in the religious song is, therefore, imagery and words that can bring out the common sentiment of the group.

I have discussed that Japanese songs tend to avoid the association of Buddha with material imagery, and that English songs in the *Vade Mecum* do the contrary. This is also true when the image of light is used in songs. The Shin Buddhist texts are full of references to light, because Amida Buddha is described as the one who “emits light beams from his<sup>24)</sup> body, illuminating all the worlds - not just one world but the entire universe - so many worlds that it defies our human calculation of measurement.”<sup>25)</sup> Japanese people traditionally used the light of the moon to express Amida’s light in understanding that it is the light to be found in the darkness of ignorance. When the sunlight is used as a metaphor for Buddhist light, it is either the light of the sunset or dawn; that is, the light comes from the same level of height as beings on the earth, and not from above. The English songs in the *Vade Mecum* have a different style of expression of light. The sun represents the enormous light of Amida and the light shines from above. Zorn often associated the sun with Buddha in Christian style of expressions such as in “Thou art the Sun of Righteousness” (No. 4), and “Lord Buddha, Sun of Truth and Love” (No. 137).

On the other hand, Dorothy Hunt avoided the direct association of the sun and Buddha, and wrote sensitive beautiful pieces.

On this great day, our Holy Prince of Peace  
From sorrow’s chain has found release;  
Self is no more, banished the clouds of night  
Upon mankind hath shined the light.

• • •

The Sun of Truth dispels the mists of night  
And round us sheds its Holy Light;  
No more shall powers of ignorance hold sway,  
At last hath dawned the Wesak day. (No. 10)

<sup>23)</sup> “BCA Music Questionnaire Comments.” Unpublished literature.

<sup>24)</sup> Suzuki uses a male pronoun for Amida Buddha here, but he writes in the same book that Amida cannot be referred as “he,” “she” or “it.”

<sup>25)</sup> Daisetz. T. Suzuki, *Buddha of Infinite Light* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997) 23-24.

In the above poem, Hunt succeeded in taking in the ambiguous and subtle atmosphere of Japanese Buddhist sentiment by associating the image of the sun with the fuzzy “mists of night.” In the following poem, she also combined the sun (not capitalized) with the contrary imagery of rain, and expressed the Buddhist attitude that accepts and dissolves contrary elements into one.

Thou Great Reality, O Truth Divine,  
 Amidst the fleeting shades of things unreal;  
 Thou Changeless One, True self of all that live,  
 Thy close indwelling presence oft we feel.

And like the mighty sun whose golden rays  
 Attract the sparkling rain drops from the sea,  
 So dost Thou draw the selfish hearts of men  
 To seek a higher life apart with Thee. (No. 138)

The Buddhist English songs in the *Vade Mecum* certainly have Christian tones, but a poet like Dorothy Hunt succeeded in some poems to free herself from the bound of Christian tradition, which the English language inevitably carries.

The song that I quote last in this section, written by Zorn, is one of the favorites of the present time BCA members.

When we see the golden sun  
 Shining from above  
 We are mindful  
 Of the Buddha's love.  
 O'er us all His pure compassion  
 Sheds its steadfast glow,  
 By His Doctrine  
 Wisdom's Way to show.

When we see the silver moon  
 Gleaming in the sky,  
 We remember  
 Still our Lord is nigh;  
 By his blessed Law to guide us  
 Through this earthly night,  
 Out of sorrow  
 Into joy and light. (No. 37)

The words are not too philosophical, and Buddha is represented both by the sun and the moon, thus no single image for Buddha is established here. Buddha can be the sun and the moon. This ambiguity allows us to think that Buddha can be anything. I wondered first, however, why the passage, "Shining above" does not bother the people. In my understanding Buddha is not in the heaven above as Christian God is. But when I visited the Hongwanji Buddhist temples in the United States, I realized this understanding of mine was inflexible. The temples in America are built partly in the same style as Christian churches. The first thing that struck me was that the Najin, the area where shrines are, is placed on a high stage. This happened sometimes because Buddhists recycled a Christian Church building, or American architects had no idea of Buddhist temple so they used Christian churches as a model, or Buddhists used a sec-

## 527 When We See the Golden Sun

A. R. Zorn

A. R. Zorn

1. When we see the gold-en sun Shin-ing from a - bove,  
2. When we see the sil-ver moon Gleam-ing in the sky,

We are mind-ful of the Bud-dha's love.  
We re-mem-ber Still our Lord is nigh;

O'er us all His pure com-pas-sion Sheds its stead-fast  
By his bless-ed Law to guide us Thru this earth-ly

glow, By His Doc-trine Wis-dom's Way to show.  
night, Out of sor-row In-to joy and light.

(4) "When We See the Golden Sun"; first printed in *Vade Mecum* (1924) as song 37 without a music text. The above text is in *Buddhist Service Book* (1963).

ond hand school building and the high stage in the auditorium became Najjin space. Whatever the case was, to place shrines up on the high stage is not in Japanese Buddhist temple tradition. In American temples people look up to the golden shrine when they go closer to offer burning incense. Buddha is often literally “shining from above.” Seeing this, I thought there was no reason that the light of true knowledge and compassion cannot shine above. The *Vade Mecum* implanted a new sensibility and identity to the Buddhists in America. Japanese Buddhism in America was gradually moving toward the creation of a Japanese American Buddhist culture.

In the next issue I will discuss the bilingual service book published in 1936, and examine the changes and movements observed thereafter. The list of Shin Buddhist Service Books and Gatha Books will be attached.



## アメリカ生れの讃仏歌： 新仏教文化の誕生と行方（1）

### 〈Summary〉

ウェルズ 恵 子

アメリカに浄土真宗本願寺派の団体が組織されたのは1898年、ハワイに寺ができたのはそれより早い1894年であった。以来現在に至るまで、「アメリカにおける浄土真宗はどうあるべきか」という模索が続いている。この模索と文化的推移を最もよく表しているのが、讃仏歌の変化である。北米教団は、日本語と英語をあわせて200以上の歌を持つ。拙論は、宗教歌はフォークソング（民謡）の一種であるという立場から、それらの歌の創作と取捨選択の過程を辿り、各時代の日系アメリカ人の理想と感性の特質を指摘する。第一部は太平洋戦争勃発直前までを扱い、1) 西洋音楽を用いての日本讃仏歌の誕生、2) ハワイにおいてイギリス人僧侶を中心に創作された138曲の英語讃仏歌、およびキリスト教礼拝をモデルとする英語礼拝の始まりを分析する。日本人の宗教的感性とキリスト教との違いを示し、急速に軍国主義化していく日本とは異なるスタンスで伝統をアメリカで継続しようとしつつ、日本仏教をキリスト教文化圏の人々に理解させようと努力する教団の姿勢を明らかにする。