Shin Buddhism, Authority, and the Fundamental Law of Education

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Abstract
This article takes its cue from one of the most controversial issues in the contemporary Japanese scene, the 2006 complete revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, that includes among its objectives the cultivation of patriotism, the high evaluation of Japanese tradition and culture, and the promotion of general knowledge regarding religion in public schools. Within this framework, the role of religion in education indeed represents a sensitive subject, which entails once again reinterpretation of the issues of the separation of state and religion, and the freedom of religion, which are enshrined in the Japanese Constitution. There have been reactions to this revision from various religious institutions, ranging from support to overt opposition. What is argued here is that these responses are meaningful to understanding some of the major dynamics currently at work within the Japanese religious world, and their implications for the issue of religion and authority. In this respect, the Shin Buddhist position may be seen as a way of contesting the claims of authority by political institutions, and affirming an alternative authoritative discourse on the basis of selected doctrinal sources, and a positive approach toward globalization and the differentiation of religion, politics and education.

Keywords
Shin Buddhism, Japanese religions, functional differentiation, globalization, religious education

1) This research was supported, in part, by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. I would also like to thank Martin Repp, Elisabetta Porcu, and an anonymous reviewer for their careful reading of the manuscript.
**Introduction**

In 2006 a complete revision of the Fundamental Law of Education (Kyōiku kihonhō) was implemented by the Japanese Diet. This revision to the law, the first since its enactment in the immediate postwar years, comes after a long process that formally started in 2000 with the institution of a private advisory body for the prime minister. This reform process has been accompanied by resistance from the opposition parties and sectors of civil society, such as the Japan Teachers Union, the Japan Society for the Study of Educational Law, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, and other networks of citizens. In addition, there have been various reactions also from the religious world, which are quite relevant for the study of contemporary Japanese religions. Here, I will focus on the distinctiveness of the reactions to the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education offered by Shin Buddhism (Jōdo Shinshū) in comparison with those of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and the Japan Buddhist Federation, to highlight the implications of the reactions for the issue of religion and authority. In this connection, I will discuss how the use of religious authoritative discourses within the context of the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education can be framed in terms of reactions/contributions to the process of globalization.


The Japanese Fundamental Law of Education was enacted in 1947 in order to clarify and establish the aim and foundation of public education for the new democratic state. Generally speaking, the law set the standard for an effective separation of secular education from politics and religion, to overcome the ideological overtones of Japanese wartime education. The immediate consequence of this was the absence of religious education as a subject in all public schools, while private schools were allowed to offer this subject. Starting from 1958 and 1960 respectively, however, classes in moral education (dōtoku) and ethics and society (rinri-shakai) were instituted in public schools with an emphasis on authoritarian values which were taught in prewar time, thus marking a
“tendency toward a partial return to the old educational system” (Khan 1997:112–113, 210).

Regarding the debate on religious education in Japan, this subject is usually divided into three categories: sectarian religious education (shūha kyōiku), education in religious knowledge (chishiki kyōiku), and education in religious sentiment (jōsō kyōiku). According to Dorothea Filus, the latter is by far the most controversial type, to the extent that

The current debate on religious education in public schools is concerned with the question of whether or not religious sentiments and ideals can ever be independent from religious convictions. (Filus 2006:1040)

The implication here is that if religious sentiments are controlled by religious convictions, they should not be taught in public schools. Indeed, concern for education in religious sentiment was one of the priorities in the agenda of the Central Council for Education (Chūō Kyōiku Shingikai). This advisory panel to the education minister issued a report on The Fundamental Law of Education and the Basic Promotional Plan for Education in a New Era (Atarashii jidai ni fusawashii kyōiku kihonbō to kyōiku shinkō kihonkeikaku no arikata ni tsuite) in March 2003, on the basis of which the draft amendments to the Fundamental Law of Education were developed (Chūō Kyōiku Shingikai 2003). In this connection, one of the main arguments used by the political system to justify the revision of the Fundamental Law was the need to face issues such as bullying, violence, nonattendance at school, classroom breakdown, and increasing criminality among juveniles (Chūō Kyōiku Shingikai 2003).

The draft amendments that passed the Diet on 15 December 2006 pertain to a series of highly controversial issues. Among these, one can find for example the revision of the provision concerning the freedom of education from “undue control” (futōna shihai) in Art. 10 of the original law (presently Art. 16); the appearance of “public spirit” (kōkyō

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Among the values to be esteemed (Preamble); the disappearance of esteem for “individual value” (jishuteki seishin) from Art. 1; the insertion of “general knowledge regarding religion” (shūkyō ni kansuru ippan-tekina kyōyō) as a point to be valued in education (Art. 15); and references to the “sense of morality” (dōtokushin), “respect for tradition and culture,” and “love for the country and the homeland” (dentō to bunka o sonchō shi, sorera o hagukunde kita wa ga kuni to kyōdo o ai suru) in Art. 2. A concern shared by many of the opponents to these amendments is that the government is actually attempting to reintroduce elements of the ultranationalist education system of wartime Japan. It has also been observed that “public concerns with juvenile delinquency, with the increase in crime rates and the general crisis within the education system” have been “cleverly exploited by conservatives both inside and outside the LDP” (Liberal Democratic Party) to return to prewar ideals (Filus 2006:1049).

From just a brief look at the reactions to this revision from various Japanese religious institutions, it is possible to notice different approaches, ranging from support to overt opposition. The Japanese Association of Religious Organizations (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei), which represents Japan’s five largest religious associations, submitted as early as December 2002 a petition to the Central Council for Education, and in January 2003 a statement expressing the necessity of revaluing the role of religion in public education to counter the loss of values that characterizes modern society (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei 2003). This was not to be achieved, however, through the promotion in the Fundamental Law of “sectarian religious education” (shūha kyōiku), but of “religion as a cultural phenomenon” (bunka to shite no shūkyō). As for the Christian community, the revision has been criticized by various groups, such as the National Christian Council (Nihon Kirisutokyō Kyōgikai), and the

4) The Japanese Association of Religious Organizations represents the Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai), the Association of Shintō Sects (Kyōha Shintō Rengōkai), the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō), the Japan Confederation of Christian Churches (Nihon Kirisutokyō Rengōkai), and the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan (Shin Nihon Shūkyōdantai Rengōkai). Cf. the official web site [http://www.jaoro.or.jp], accessed 24 July 2008.
Reformed Church in Japan (Nihon Kirisuto Kaikakuha Kyōkai). Within this context, the role of religion in education represents a sensitive subject that is related to the issue of the freedom of religion contained in the Japanese Constitution and to the past ideology of State Shintō (kokka Shintō) taught in wartime public schools. Expressing quite different concerns, the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō) has lamented, in addition to the failure to delete the reference to “undue control” in Art. 10, the lack of any reference to religious sentiment in Art. 9. This last issue is also present in the reaction offered by the Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai), which represents the large majority of Buddhist institutions in Japan. The Federation submitted, as early as February 2003, a petition for the revision of Art. 9 of the Fundamental Law (now Art. 15) to the Central Council for Education. In this and other similar documents one finds not only that public schools “should refrain from sectarian religious education,” but also that they should promote the “acquisition of basic knowledge of religious traditions and culture,” which was actually inserted in Art. 15 of the new Fundamental Law of Education, and the “fostering of religious sentiment” (shūkyōteki jōsō no kan’yō), which is not to be found in the amended draft.5

Interestingly enough, there has also been opposition to the revision process from within the Japan Buddhist Federation, especially from the Shin Buddhist religious community. Shin Buddhism (Jōdo Shinshū), a major denomination of Japanese Buddhism, is a distinctive Japanese expression of Mahāyāna and Pure Land Buddhism mainly elaborated by Shinran (1173–1262), a disciple of Hōnen (1133–1212) who had been formerly trained as a Tendai monk at Mt. Hiei. This tradition is characterized by absolute reliance on the working of Amida Nyorai and the teaching of other-power (tariki), which considers one’s self-power (jiriki) in performing good practices as an obstacle to the achievement of shinjin — the entrusting faith which is accompanied by saying Amida’s name (nenbutsu) — and birth in the Pure Land.

Within the two major branches of Shin Buddhism, the Ōtani-ha and the Honganji-ha, various groups of activists have severely criticized the revision process of the Fundamental Law of Education. Groups such as

5) Zenbutsu 486, March 2003:2; and 505, January 2005:5.
the 2000-nen Tōzai Honganji o Musubu Hi-sen/Heiwa Kyōdō Kōdō (2000: Joint Action of East and West Honganji for Anti-war/Peace), and the Nenbutsusha Kyūjō no Kai (Association of Nenbutsu Practitioners for Article 9), for example, maintain that in this way elements of the wartime ultranationalist education system are being reintroduced in an attempt to create an updated version of Japanese militarism.\(^{6}\)

However, a guarded attitude or even overt opposition is to be found also at the institutional level. In September 2003 the Kyōiku Kihonhō ‘Kaisei’ ni Hantai Suru Kai (Assembly Against the ‘Revision’ of the Fundamental Law of Education), a group including about half the members of the Religious Chamber of the Ōtani-ha Diet (Ōtani-ha Shūgikai), issued a document opposing the views expressed by the Japan Buddhist Federation. According to this document, educational and social issues (bullying, classroom breakdown, etc.), which are often indicated by the supporters of the revision of the Fundamental Law as the main causes of the decay of education, are addressed in a simplistic and unsatisfactory way. The real aim of the reform, it is argued, is to educate new generations of citizens who could support a country ready to fight (sensō o suru kuni). This is why, the document concludes, the favorable position expressed by the Japan Buddhist Federation for the revision of the law is not acceptable to Buddhist practitioners who respect the dignity of life (Kyōiku Kihonhō ‘Kaisei’ ni Hantai Suru Kai 2003). It may also be argued that another factor behind this criticism was the presence among the main supporters of the revision (as well as of the promotion in public school of “religious sentiment”) within the Japan Buddhist Federation of Iwagami Chikō, who was also president of the General Assembly of the Honganji-ha (Honganji-ha Shūkai).\(^{7}\)

This can perhaps also account for the more cautious attitude of the Honganji-ha administration, which, in 2006, issued two official statements about the revision of the Fundamental Law. The last of these statements, which was addressed to the prime minister in December 2006

\(^{6}\) A similar approach may be observed in various groups where Shin Buddhist activists are networked with other religionists, such as the Kenpō Nijūjō ga Abunai! Kinkyū Renrakukai (Article 20 of the Constitution in Danger! Emergency Liaison Group), and the Kokuritsu Tsuitō Shisetsu ni Hantai Suru Shūkyōsha Nettowāku (Religionists’ Network Against a National Site for Mourning). Cf. Dessi (2007:154–160).

after the enactment of the draft amendments by the Japanese Diet, is a letter of protest mainly lamenting the fast and sloppy way of dealing with such a delicate issue (Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha 2006b). In the other one, dated the month before, the criticism of the Honganji-ha for the lack of a deep discussion that included all sectors of civil society (which should have preceded any attempt to reform the Fundamental Law) is also accompanied by the concern that, despite the importance of religious education, any imprudent amendments to the draft may lead to repetition of the same mistakes of Japan's unfortunate past (Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha 2006a).8

A more detailed criticism of the draft amendments can be found in another official statement, which was issued by the Ōtani-ha in June 2004. In this document the defense of the Fundamental Law of Education is strictly linked to that of the Japanese “peace” Constitution and its underlying principles, namely, democracy, pacifism, and respect for human rights. The revision to the Fundamental Law of Education is seen, similarly to the Law Concerning the National Flag and Anthem (1999), the distorted views of Japanese history inserted in school textbooks, and other recent political measures, as further proof of the government’s excessive intervention in the educational sphere to promote nationalism. In the Ōtani-ha statement it is strongly asserted that children’s lives are not for the state; rather, education should follow the ideal of self-formation of the individual. The text then recalls the past uncritical attitude of the Ōtani-ha, which led to cooperation with the Japanese war effort. The deep reflection that has taken place on these issues within the religious community, eminently expressed in the Anti-war Resolution (Fusen ketsugi) issued in 1995, provides the grounds for opposing any policy that would compromise the constitutional values of pacifism and equality (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2004).

While there was no official reaction by the Ōtani-ha when the draft amendments passed the Japanese Diet on December 2006, in April 2007 a symposium was organized at the head temple (Higashi Honzanji) concerning the issue of the revision of the Japanese Constitution

8) It should also be mentioned here that the issue of the revision of the Fundamental Law has been widely discussed within the Kikan Undō (Central Movement) of the Honganji-ha. Cf. the web site of the Honganji-ha [http://www2.hongwanji.or.jp/kikan/houkoku/houkoku.html], accessed 26 July 2008.
and the Fundamental Law of Education within the context of the Memorial for the Victims of All Wars (Zensenbotsusha tsuichō hō-e) and in concurrence with the Haru no hōyō (Spring service). Moreover, the yearly issue of the Shinshū bukkuretto shirīzu, a booklet series of the Ōtani-ha publishing department, has been completely devoted to the same theme (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2007). This official publication, which also features contributions from intellectuals such as Takahashi Tetsuya and Ko Samyon, is presented by the editors as a collective reflection on the way Shin Buddhist practitioners can reformulate their aspiration to peace in the face of the current changes in politics and society. Significantly enough, this reflection is linked to the aforementioned statement issued by the Ōtani-ha in June 2004, where the draft amendments to the Fundamental Law of Education had been severely criticized (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2007: 102). Similarly to this past statement, in the editors’ afterword the revision of the Fundamental Law is seen as consistent with those policies attempting to weaken the “peace” Constitution (notably its Art. 9, which contains the “renunciation of war”), and create the basis for the participation of Japan in new armed conflicts. Within this context, the attribution of the decay of education and traditional culture to defects in the Fundamental Law is considered a mere expedient to insert “patriotism” as a value in public education. All this, it is suggested, goes against “the nenbutsu practitioners’ aspiration for peace” (nenbutsusha no negau heiwa) and the creation of a “society of fellows” (dōbō shakai) (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2007:102).

The Fundamental Law of Education, Authority, and Globalization

What emerges from the previous analysis of the positions concerning the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education is the presence of different and even contrasting discourses centered on the educational sphere. On the one hand it may be observed that the Japanese government is apparently trying to reintroduce in public education elements

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10) Within this context reference is also made to another official statement issued by the Ōtani-ha in June 2005, opposing the constitutional revision planned by the ruling parties. Cf. Shinshū Ōtani-ha (2007:88–89).
of past nationalistic rhetoric, such as “love for the country and the homeland,” “sense of morality,” and to exercise stricter control of the centralized educational system. In this regard, the fact that the “fostering of religious sentiment,” which has been petitioned by various religious quarters, has not found a place in the amended draft may be also interpreted as a sign that the ruling parties are leaning toward the incorporation of religious elements in the educational and political spheres as “customs” or “traditional values.” A similar approach may be seen, for example, in the Yasukuni Shrine issue, and can be traced back to the Meiji period with the definition of State Shintō as a “non-religion,” which aimed to provide the ideological framework to the new national state (cf. Hardacre 1989:39, 145).

On the other hand, various reactions emerging from the Japanese religious world ground their claims of authority in the potential of the religious tradition to solve the problems of modern society. In this regard, an interesting example is offered by the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei), where different religious sensibilities and priorities have been seemingly negotiated in order to reach a balanced position on the Fundamental Law. As mentioned above, one of the main arguments used by the political system to justify the revision of the Fundamental Law is the need to face issues such as bullying, nonattendance at school, and criminality among juveniles (Chūō Kyōiku Shingikai 2003). In the aforementioned statement issued by the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations in 2003, these and other pressing issues are related to the loss of social influence by religion. According to the text, the dominance of economic efficiency and materialism has led to the neglect of “spiritual culture,” a deficiency that should be addressed by religionists through pressure for the promotion of religious education in public school. Here it is also affirmed that religion has traditionally played an important role in society by providing adequate patterns of behavior, the foundations for spiritual life as well as spiritual care, concern and respect for others,

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11) Nihon Shūkyō Renmei (2003): “… ‘respect’ for life is neglected, ‘concern’ for others has been lost, atrocious crimes and juvenile problems are increasing, morality in politics and economics is decreasing, many social problems are before us. Behind this situation there are many causes, but we must admit that one of these is unfortunately the decline of the influence that religion should exert upon society.”
which are all the more indispensable in the present situation. In this way, despite the specification that all this should be achieved through the promotion of “religion as a cultural phenomenon” (bunka to shite no shūkyō), the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations is ostensibly pressing for the reevaluation of religious elements in public education as the source of morality and civic sense. That this role, in the Japanese case, might be mostly played by Japanese religions is suggested by the following passage:

We may think that within the process of globalization the search for internationalism and universality is becoming increasingly important. However, at the same time, the peculiar cultural traits of various countries and people are equally important. Each country presents its own distinctive religious situation… (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei 2003)

In other words, it may be argued that the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations is trying to reconcile two contrasting applications of religious education in public schools, namely as an academic discipline and as the source of moral behavior.\(^{12}\) It may be observed that this position acknowledges the superiority of religious communication over some aspects of secular education, thus implicitly justifying some degree of interference of religion in the educational system.

These claims of authority become more explicit when one considers the reactions offered by other religious agencies, such as the Association of Shintō Shrines (Jinja Honchō) and the Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai). The Association of Shintō Shrines has been from the beginning one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the revision (cf. Tsujimura 2005:28). Nonetheless, the association has openly criticized the lack of any reference to religious sentiment in Art. 15 (formerly Art. 9) of the amended draft. This last criticism, as seen above, has also been expressed by the Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai). Diverse though their emphases and underlying motiva-

\(^{12}\) Of course, there are also approaches to religious studies that would more or less explicitly promote religion as the foundation of “humanity,” as in the case, for example, of Mircea Eliade’s conception of the “sacred.” However, despite the enduring ambiguities in the definition of the field of Religious Studies, this can hardly be considered the current mainstream self-understanding of the discipline. Cf., for example, Rudolph (1989); and Whaling (1995).
tions may be, it may be observed that both the Association of Shintō Shrines and the Japan Buddhist Federation ground their discourses in the superiority of religious communication over the secular. The Japan Buddhist Federation, however, makes this claim of authority more explicit. This approach is apparent, for example, in the aforementioned 2003 statement by the Japan Buddhist Federation, in which the cause of various issues (juvenile delinquency, class and family disruption, etc.), and other educational problems are related to the lack of religious moral education in public schools, which was prohibited by the old Fundamental Law. This excessive disregard of religious education could be overcome, it is suggested, through the prescription for public schools “to refrain from sectarian religious education for a specific religion” (tokutei no shūkyō no tame no shūha kyōiku), which would open the way to general religious education in the classroom. What the Japan Buddhist Federation actually means by “religious education,” however, emerges quite clearly from the following passage:

If we take into account the understanding of other cultures in an age of internationalization, there is also an indication that the study of other religions worldwide is important. However, as far as the reform of Japanese education is concerned, first of all, fundamental knowledge and understanding of Japanese religions should be provided until the level of secondary education. On the basis of this the educational effort for the cultivation of a religious sentiment effective for character-building would be constructive, in accordance with the requirements of the time.14

Thus the Japan Buddhist Federation, though formally acknowledging the separation between secular education and sectarian religious education, grounds its claims of authority on the assumption that Japanese religions are superior both to secular education and other “foreign”

13) Technically speaking, the Japan Buddhist Federation was calling for the substitution of “religious education” (shūkyō kyōiku) with “sectarian religious education” (shūha kyōiku) in Art. 9 (section 2) of the Fundamental Law of Education. This change has not been enforced in the 2006 amended draft. However, it may be seen that the insertion of “general knowledge regarding religion” (shūkyō ni kansuru ippantekina kyōyō) as a point to be valued in education in the current Art. 15 (section 1) conveys a similar meaning.

religious traditions as the instrument to build the character of future generations of Japanese.

It is interesting to note that the aforementioned religious authoritative discourses found in the Japanese context can be framed in terms of reactions to the process of globalization. The expression “religious authoritative discourses” refers here to both the institutional view of a religious body, and to the peculiar kind of legitimation which distinguishes religious authority, namely, its reference to some supramundane component. In other words, the working definition of “religion” I employ here is “a social subsystem characterized by the fact that it legitimates its claims through the authority of some supernatural or super-human agency, however weak.” This definition avoids any reference to the unsatisfactory connection between religion and the “ultimate meaning of life” while allowing the distinction between religion and other social subsystems.

One feature of globalization finds expression in secularization theory. In the present context the term “secularization” refers to “functional differentiation,” i.e., it is used descriptively to indicate that in modern society various subsystems (economy, science, politics, family, secular education, etc.) have gradually become more autonomous from religious claims and have organized around their own mediums, and their own values (Dobbelaeere 2000). Technically oriented social subsystems, such as politics, economy, and science, are now dominant. The same argument can be extended to global society, where religion is challenged to relocate and restructure itself in relation to these technically oriented subsystems of communication. In this regard, it may be argued that secularization implies a loss of authority by religion over other social subsystems, although this does not necessarily imply the decline of religious institutions or individual religious consciousness.

On another level, present-day globalization is characterized by the intensity, pervasiveness, and rapidity of the cultural and material exchanges that are taking place around the globe. This phenomenon carries within itself a dramatically increased potential for the relativiza-

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tion of cultural assumptions and religious values, inclusivity and hybridization which was already present in earlier stages of world history.

It should also be noted that this working hypothesis, far from being an optimistic and favorable understanding of globalization, does not imply any idealistic image of global harmony and progress. It is assumed here that globalization does not only involve “the crystallization and concretization of the world as a whole,” but also the exacerbation of “civilizational, societal, ethnic, communal and individual lifestyle differences” (Robertson 1991:283–284). In this connection, the present writer is also aware that the processes of cultural dissemination are selective and can assume the form of cultural imperialism. However, it is difficult to deny that globalization carries a potential for the relativization of any code of values.

If one considers the aforementioned examples, that is, the authoritative discourses of organizations such as the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and the Japan Buddhist Federation related to the issue of the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, it may be easily seen how they are positioned in terms of reactions to the process of globalization.

In terms of the aspect of “functional differentiation” related to globalization, it is apparent how both organizations are pressing for some degree of de-differentiation of the two subsystems, namely secular education and religion. In the case of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, the interference of religion in the educational system is justified on the basis of the superiority of religious communication, also termed “spiritual culture” (seishin bunka), over secular education in providing not only the foundations for spiritual life and care but also correct patterns of behavior, and concern and respect for others. If religion could exert once again its traditional “influence upon society” (as it actually did before the development of functional differentiation), it is maintained, pressing educational and social problems that are caused by “the dominance of economic efficiency and materialism” (that is to say, by the dominance of technically oriented social subsystems) would be solved (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei 2003). In this connection, the main difference between the positions of the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and the Japan Buddhist Federation lies perhaps in the fact that the former is concerned about preserving at least formally
the differentiation of religion and education. This is mainly attempted through the aforementioned appeal for the promotion of the study of “religion as a cultural phenomenon” (bunke to shite no shūkyō) in public schools (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei 2003). In the case of the Japan Buddhist Federation this caution is lost. This may be seen in the stress placed on the necessity of inserting the “fostering of religious sentiment” (shūkyōteki jōsō no kan'yō) in the revised draft of the Fundamental Law. This interference of religion in secular education (that is, the de-differentiation of the two functional subsystems) is thus presented as the condition for the improvement of character-building of new generations of students and the solution of issues such as juvenile delinquency, class and family disruption, and other educational problems.17

Moreover, it is apparent that these reactions are also related to the second aspect of globalization, which concerns the relativization of cultural assumptions and religious values. That both the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and the Japan Buddhist Federation may have a guarded attitude toward cultural relativization and pluralism, for example, emerges quite clearly not only from the former’s emphasis on the “peculiar cultural traits of various countries” “within the process of globalization” (Nihon Shūkyō Renmei 2003) but also from the latter’s explicit insistence on the primacy of Japanese religions in providing “moral education” (dōtoku kyōiku) in “an age of internationalization.”18

Shin Buddhist Authoritative Discourses from the Perspective of Globalization

As I have mentioned above, there has also been opposition to the revision process of the Fundamental Law of Education from within the Japan Buddhist Federation. In this regard, various critical views emerging especially from within Shin Buddhism have been presented above. A closer look at the claims of authority made by this religious denomination reveals how they are related to the dynamics of globalization. In this connection, I will focus on those reactions emerging at the official

level, notably from within the two major branches of Shin Buddhism, the Honganji-ha and the Ōtani-ha.

We have seen how authoritative discourses by both the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and the Japan Buddhist Federation ground their claims of authority in the assumption that religious communication is superior to secular education as the instrument to build the character of future generations of students. In the case of the Japan Buddhist Federation it is made explicit that this role in public school should be played by Japanese religions. If we observe the position expressed by the Honganji-ha administration, it is possible to notice a shift in perspective, which despite “paying deep attention to religious education” (shūkyō kyōiku no jūyōsei ni fukaku ryūi shi) (Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha 2006a) maintains that:

...as concerns the revision of the ‘Fundamental Law of Education,’ the discussion is as yet far from exhausted, the proposal is rough-and-ready, and it is necessary to gather careful deliberations and reactions from a national debate beyond factionalism... (Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha 2006b)

This is to say that for the Honganji-ha, the authority of the political sphere alone is not enough to impose changes in the Fundamental Law. Moreover, it is also suggested here that this revision cannot be done without the concurrent efforts of all sectors of society (zenkokuminteki giron), thus implicitly acknowledging the equal status and authority of religious and other kinds of communication that are appropriate for other societal subsystems. Thus, from the perspective of globalization this position may also be interpreted as a defense, if very cautious, of the functional differentiation of subsystems in modern society. This may also be seen in the Honganji-ha’s concern that the revision of the Fundamental Law (which sanctions the separation of secular education, politics, and religion) may lead Japan to repeat the mistakes of its “unfortunate past” (fukōna rekishi) (Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha 2006a).

The implications of this kind of authoritative discourse, whose claims presuppose a positive approach toward the differentiation of the two areas of religion and education, are more explicit in the official statement issued by the Ōtani-ha (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2004). With reference to the aforementioned report on the Fundamental Law of Education and the Basic Promotional Plan for Education in a New Era issued by the
Central Council for Education (Chūō Kyōiku Shingikai) in 2003, in the Ōtani-ha statement it is clearly affirmed that

...there is no sufficient discernment whether ‘the decline of self-confidence and public morality, atrocious crimes by juveniles, bullying, nonattendance and dropout at school, classroom breakdown, etc.’ are caused by school education or society. The Fundamental Law of Education is arbitrarily deemed to be responsible for these problems, thus forcibly leading to its ‘revision’ which promotes and approves the state’s excessive intervention in the hearts of children and families. (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2004)\(^{19}\)

Therefore, such amendments as those promoting respect for Japanese tradition and culture, patriotism, and the restoration of moral education are but an instrument for the government’s interference in the educational sphere. These attempts are to be rejected, according to this document, because “the lives of the children are never for the state” (kodomotachi wa kokka no tame ni sonzai suru mono dewa kesshite arimasen), and because

Secular education is an activity that promotes and supports the self-formation of human beings as individuals, and cannot reduce itself to the planning and the imposition by the state of a definite image of the human being. (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2004)

In this way, the Ōtani-ha grounds its authoritative discourse in the open defense of the autonomy of the educational subsystem, which is one aspect of the functional differentiation underlying the globalization process.

It should also be noted that this approach is also related to the values of the Japanese “peace” Constitution, and the process of internal rethinking of the role of Shin Buddhism during the imperialistic period and its war responsibilities.\(^{20}\) These two points are of particular interest


\(^{20}\) The Ōtani-ha first acknowledged its war responsibilities in 1987, on the occasion of the Memorial for the Victims of All Wars. In June 1995, the Ōtani-ha issued an anti-war resolution (Fusen ketsugi) expressing once again its regret for supporting Japanese imperialism, with a “vow to avoid war” aiming at “the realization of a peaceful world” (heiwana kokusai shakai no kensetsu) and a “love for one’s fellow companions within the four seas” (shikai dōbō e no itsukushima). The Honganji-ha first acknowl-
for our discourse, because the acknowledgment that in the past the Ōtani-ha “forgot its duties as a community of Buddhist practitioners” (Bukkyōsha to shite no honbun o wasure) and “uncritically and actively cooperated with national policy” (muhihan ni kokusaku ni sekkyokuteki ni kyōryoku shita) (Shinshū Ōtani-ha 2004) points to another positive approach toward globalization, which is related to the relativization of cultural assumptions and religious values. This is the critical attitude toward tradition, the assumption of an “adaptive, cognitive style,” and the consequent espousal of the religious tradition as a “process of learning to learn” (Beyer 1994:144–145). That is to say, one’s own tradition is not deemed something to be defended at any cost, but can be subjected to criticism. Thus, it may be seen that the adoption of this cognitive-critical style provides further grounds for the claims of authority made by this influential branch of Shin Buddhism.

That the Ōtani-ha’s reaction to the revision of the Fundamental Law implies a positive approach to globalization may also be seen in the position of the Kyōiku Kihonhō ‘Kaisei’ ni Hantai Suru Kai, which has been mentioned above. In this connection, the following passage is particularly meaningful:

…there is a debate that tends to ascribe bullying, nonattendance at school, classroom breakdown, violence at school, and other causes of the decay of education to the Fundamental Law of Education. However, there have been no proper analyses and discussions relating to the location of the problems, there is a lack of a perspective from the point of view of the social sciences, and the argument is preposterous and too simplistic. (Kyōiku Kihonhō ‘Kaisei’ ni Hantai Suru Kai 2003)

Here lies a noticeable difference from the viewpoints expressed by the Japanese Association of Religious Organizations and the Japan Buddhist Federation. These two organizations ground their claims of authority in the assumption that religious communication has priority in secular education. Based on this premise, the former should provide the clue to solving pressing educational problems. Conversely, here it is

edged its war responsibilities in February 1991, in an official statement where reference was made to its own “collaboration in past wars.” In the text there is a call to the religious community to make “repentance” for its misdeeds and to advocate peace, according to Shinran’s teaching, “May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha’s teaching spread” (yo no naka an’on nare, buppō hiromare). See Dessi (2007:147–148).
clearly indicated that the “analyses and discussions” of such problems relating to the educational sphere should be conducted from the standpoint of the social sciences, thus acknowledging the functional differentiation of religious and educational communication (cf. Tschannen 1991:402). Significantly, in the same document opposition to the revision of the Fundamental Law is also motivated on the grounds of the “dignity of life” (inochi no songen) which is a fundamental value for “Buddhist practitioners” (Bukkyōto). Thus, both the aspiration for peace — also appearing in the other statements by Shin Buddhist institutions that have been analyzed above — and the creation of a “society of fellows” (dōbō shakai), another central concept that is mentioned in the aforementioned issue of the Shinshū bukkuretto shirīzu published by the Ōtani-ha in 2006, are used in contemporary Shin Buddhism at the institutional level as a justification to intervene in the issue of the Fundamental Law of Education. Indeed, this also may be interpreted as a positive approach to the push toward pluralism that the process of globalization itself implicitly promotes without being apparently able to fulfill it.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of various authoritative religious discourses related to the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education shows significant differences between the perspectives of Shin Buddhism and

21) This concern is often expressed in contemporary Shin Buddhism by citing the aforementioned words of Shinran, “May there be peace in the world” (yo no naka an'on nare): see CWS 1:560; and SSZ II:697. Of course, it may be objected that the reference to “peace” is common to nearly all the participants to the debate on the Fundamental Law of Education. However, it should be noted here that the rhetoric of peace is accompanied within Shin Buddhism by the concrete assumption of war responsibilities at the institutional level, a rethinking that is not to be found in most Japanese religious institutions. On this point and other articulations of Shin Buddhist pacifism, see Dessì (2007:51, 144–162).

22) The concept of dōbō implies the equality of all nenbutsu practitioners in religious terms, and is grounded on the universality of Amida’s Primal Vow, which through Shandao and Hōnen came to be understood in Shin Buddhism as including anyone “without a single exception.” For its meaning in contemporary Shin Buddhism, see Dessi (2007:38–61, 105–110).
other sections of the Japanese religious world, which imply a contrasting understanding of the functional differentiation and other core values underlying globalization. This is despite the fact that in Shin Buddhism’s statements the interference of Buddhism in education is not thematized in itself. This is not to say that contemporary Shin Buddhism always positions itself in a positive way toward the dynamics of global society. As I have illustrated elsewhere, the critique of humanism and anthropocentrism also found in official documents reveals in Shin Buddhism a tendency to religious exclusivism and cultural chauvinism not dissimilar, for example, to other instances found within the Japan Buddhist Federation (Dessì 2006).²³

However, if one remains within the limits of the present discussion, it is apparent how in those authoritative discourses that are the expression of the Shin Buddhist institutional sphere, instead of insistence on the primacy of religious communication and “spiritual culture,” one finds the acknowledgment that no revision of the Fundamental Law of Education can be implemented without the concurring efforts of all sectors of society. Instead of nostalgia for the dominant influence once played by religion upon society, one finds the acknowledgment of the autonomy of the educational subsystem with its particular mode of communication. Instead of the interference of religion in secular education as the condition for the improvement of character-building of new generations of students, one finds the conviction that this goal can be achieved only by protecting children from the intrusion of the state in education, and its manipulation of religious communication. And again, instead of the “fostering of religious sentiment,” one finds the defense of the old draft of the Fundamental Law and its secular values based on the Japanese Constitution.

From the point of view of the development of the educational subsystem’s functional differentiation, the issue of the Fundamental Law of Education shows a general tendency within the Japanese religious world to look back at earlier stages of Japanese history, when religion manifested itself as a framework of reference orientating the meaning of various spheres of social life. This framework was still at work in the

²³ It should also be noted, however, that in the Shin Buddhist context a similar positive attitude toward globalization can be traced in the relationship to other social subsystems: cf. Dessì (2007:191–208; 2009).
temple-school system (terakoya) of the Edo period, as is shown, for example, by the role played by Confucian and Buddhist moral teachings in the classroom despite a noticeable trend toward secularization. And it was also at work from the Meiji period onwards with the incorporation of State Shinto ideology in wartime textbooks, despite the creation of a centralized educational system that, from the point of view of functional differentiation, indeed increased the cohesiveness of educational communication as such. It was only with the enactment of the Fundamental Law of Education in 1947 that a clear distinction was made between the subsystems of education, religion, and politics. Against this background, the opposition of the Shin Buddhist institutions to the insertion of patriotism and more or less explicit religious elements in public education through the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education may be interpreted as a reaction to the attempt to weaken the boundaries between the differentiated areas of education, religion, and politics. In this regard, the authoritative discourses emerging from contemporary Shin Buddhism — which are also characterized by the adaptation of religious sources concerning equality and peace — show within the Japanese context an alternative pattern of interaction by the religious institutions with the dynamics of globalization, which does not necessarily understand the religious tradition as something to be asserted at any cost in spite of social change or against the claims of authority of other societal subsystems.

Abbreviations


References


Shinshū (monthly bulletin of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha). No. 1235 (February 2007).


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