SHIN BUDDHISM AND GLOBALIZATION:
ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POLITICAL SUBSYSTEM
AND PLURALISM AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND
INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

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One of the major distinctive features of present-day globalization lies in the intensity, pervasiveness, and rapidity of the cultural and material exchanges that are taking place around the globe. Accordingly, the tendency toward the relativization of cultural assumptions, as well as the inclusivism and hybridization, that was already present in the early phases of globalization has dramatically increased. As far as religion is concerned, globalization implies the relocation of religion in the face of dramatic changes within society, with the dominance of technically oriented subsystems such as economy, politics, science, and the progressive relativization of religious values. All this carries important consequences for the discourse on social ethics in the religious context as well.

In this chapter, I will explore some of the ways through which Shin Buddhism, a major denomination of traditional Japanese Buddhism, is responding to the challenges of globalization. I will focus in particular on the Shin Buddhist attitudes toward the political subsystem and the relativization of religious values and pluralism, in order to illustrate the adaptations, and contributions, to the dynamics of global society at both the organizational and individual levels.¹ The background for this analysis will be provided below by a brief summary of Shin Buddhist social ethics and the current major trends.

1. FACETS OF SOCIAL ETHICS IN SHIN BUDDHISM

One of the distinctive features of Shin Buddhism (Jōdo Shinshū浄土真宗) lies in its diffidence toward normative ethics. This is mainly

¹ I have already attempted an analysis of the organizational level from different perspectives in Dessi (2007: 191–208), (2009a), and (2009b).
due to the emphasis that Shinran 般若 (1173–1262), who is acknowledged as the founder of Shin Buddhism, placed on the necessity of abandoning all "calculations" (hakarai はかり) in order to have access to "other-power" (tariki 他力), the working of Amida Nyorai. Accordingly, one’s "self-power" (jiriki 自力) at performing good acts is seen as an obstacle to achieving birth in the Pure Land. This drastic approach led Shinran to abandon the Buddhist precepts as a means to religious liberation. However, his reluctance to accept or formulate a code of ethics did not imply the denial of moral action, the implications for which are carefully thought out within the framework of a strict adherence to the teaching of other-power. Thus, on the one hand, it is possible to see that on the basis of the universality of Amida’s Vow to save all sentient beings, Shinran acknowledged the equality of all nenbutsu practitioners as "fellow companions" (dobō 同伴), or similarly, as "fellow practitioners" (dōgyō 同行). In doing so, Shinran was applying the idea of his master Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), the initiator of the movement for the exclusive practice of the nenbutsu (senju nenbutsu 専修念仏), that the nenbutsu alone is the ‘easy practice’ aimed at directing all sentient beings without exception toward birth in the Pure Land. On the other hand, Shinran often linked the morality of the practitioner to the main framework of religious experience, and to the Mahāyāna idea of compassion. Thus, not only did he deplore the antinomian tendency of condoning evil (zōaku muge 造悪無碍), but he also recommended to his followers to respond in gratitude to the Buddha’s benevolence (ho-on 報恩) by rejecting the evil of this world. Moreover, in addition to these and other passages about ethics, especially found in the Letters, it is also possible to find in Shinran’s thought elements indicating a critical attitude toward the interconnected system of rites and practices. All this, integrated by more recent contributions by Shin Buddhist doctrinal studies (shinshūgaku 真宗学), provides in turn the framework for much of the current formulations that are concerned with the relationship between Shin Buddhist teachings and human society.3

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3 On this topic, see Martin Repp’s contribution to this volume. Cf. Dessi (2007: 38ff.).

3 For a more detailed account of Shinran’s ethical thought and later formulations, see Dessi (2007: 38–77).
As I have argued elsewhere, it is possible to distinguish within these discussions several themes that are closely linked to social ethics (Dessi 2007: 83–140). Two of these, namely the discussions on the idea of birth in the Pure Land (お祝 生) as something immanent in the present world and those referring to the fundamental religious experience of shinjin (信心), which represents for various Shin Buddhist scholars the closest proximity to the ideal of compassion expressed by Amida’s vows, tend to provide the general framework of reference. In particular, there are three themes, that is, the emphasis on equality, the critical potential of the teachings, and the critique of ‘humanism,’ which provide the basis for characteristic formulations of social ethics within Shin Buddhism.

The discussions on the equalitarian dimension of the teachings especially focus on Shinran’s references to the community of “fellow companions” (ども) and his identification with the marginalized in society. This point is also related to the distinctive Shin Buddhist emphasis on non-violence and peace (in Shinran’s frequently mentioned words: yo no naka an’on nare 世の中安穏なれ [May there be peace in the world]). The evaluation of the critical dimension of Shin Buddhist teachings is traditionally expressed in the dislike for kami worship (じんぎくい 神祇不拜), a distinctive theme in Shinran’s religious thought, but has also found other applications, especially in the postwar period. Within this context, it is often argued that Shinran’s teaching represented a threat to the nexus of religion and power of those times, and that, therefore, his teaching can provide a standard to challenge, also in the present, the claims of authority made by secular institutions. The critique of ‘humanism,’ often interpreted as a form of ‘self-power’ which implies an anthropocentric view of reality, though not central in Shin Buddhism, is an issue that also emerges at the institutional level.

It should be noted here that equalitarianism based on the concept of “fellow companions” (ども) and a guarded attitude toward kami worship are also basic assumptions that lie behind the main social activities promoted by Shin Buddhist institutions, especially the recent commitment to peace and the interest in issues of discrimination. The Shin Buddhist pacifist stance is connected to the ongoing process of rethinking of the religious community’s past war responsibilities, which also implies a critical position toward the recent attempts made by the government to promote nationalism. This last issue is especially linked
to the visits made by former Prime Minister Koizumi to the Yasukuni Shrine (Yasukuni Jinja 靖国神社), which were and are opposed, also for doctrinal reasons, by religious institutions and several groups of plaintiffs and anti-war activists.

As for discrimination, it is possible to find in Shin Buddhism an interesting number of social activities focused on this issue, which are performed on behalf of minorities who face discrimination. This is the case, for example, of the so-called hisabetsu burakumin 被差別部落民, a cultural minority who came to be associated in pre-modern Japan with occupations that Buddhism and Shintō considered unclean.4 Another instance is the Hansen’s disease (‘leprosy’) issue (hansenbyō mondai ハンセン病問題). In this case, Shin Buddhism is actively engaged in supporting former patients, and to contrast the discrimination they are still suffering, to which the denomination itself strongly contributed in the past.5

It should be noted here that the aforementioned issues that are peculiar to contemporary Shin Buddhist social ethics have also been extensively incorporated at the institutional level. Still another interesting point lies in the fact that a consistent part of the aforementioned discussions and social action within Shin Buddhism is a relatively new phenomenon, the roots of which can be traced to the postwar period, with the development of the dōbō movement inside the two major branches, the Honganji-ha 本願寺派 and the Ōtani-ha 大谷派.6 Therefore, they are relevant for the analysis of the Shin Buddhist attitude toward globalization at the organizational level, and indeed, they may also be interpreted at the same time as both exegeses and adaptations of traditional doctrines, and responses to modernity and the dynamics of global society.

2. Religion and Society in the Global Context

In a sense, globalization is nothing new in the history of humankind. Some of the traits, for example, may be seen in the Silk Road of antiq-

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4 On this topic, see especially Galen Amstutz’ contribution to this volume.
5 For an analysis of these social activities within Shin Buddhism, see Dessi (2007: 141–190).
uity, through which goods and ideas circulated on a large scale along the routes linking East Asia with the Mediterranean Sea. Especially since the 1980s, various studies have contributed to a deeper understanding of the dynamics that lay behind the process of globalization, and its implications for and connections with religion.\(^7\) Far from being a simple opening of the markets, as in certain mystifications by the media, the term globalization may well be taken to indicate that we are living in a world that is becoming more and more interconnected.

The process of globalization carries within itself the potential for the relativization of cultural assumptions, inclusivity and hybridization, which to some extent was already present in the past.\(^5\) It may be argued, however, that one of the main features of present-day globalization lies in the intensity, pervasiveness, and rapidity of the cultural and material exchanges that are taking place at the global level. Indeed, as has already been noted by others, all this also deeply affects the way the idea of global society is perceived and introjected at the individual level. This working hypothesis does not imply any idealistic image of global harmony or unification. In Roland Robertson’s words:

> Globalization itself produces variety—more accurately, it encourages heterogeneity-within-homogeneity, or difference-within-identity. Put another way, globalization involves, in the most general terms, the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism. Civilizational, societal, ethnic, communal and individual lifestyle differences are exacerbated—indeed, produced—in the globalization process; while, on the other hand, globalization involves the crystallization and concretization of the world as a whole—sociologically and geographically (Robertson 1991: 283–284).

Of course, one should also take into account that the processes of cultural dissemination are selective and that they can easily assume the form of cultural imperialism. Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny that globalization carries a dramatically increased potential for the relativization of any code of values, thus strongly affecting the way religions relate themselves to the social environment and to each other.\(^9\)

Another salient feature of globalization finds expression in the secularization theory. I am not referring here to the predictive hypothesis

\(^7\) For a general overview of mainstream positions, see Beyer (1994: 14–41).
\(^8\) See, for example, Campbell (2007).
that postulates the irreversible decline of religion in modern society. Following Karel Dobbelrae’s formulation, the term secularization refers here to the process by which religion is “being reduced in a modern functionally differentiated society to a subsystem alongside other subsystems, losing in this process its overarching claims over the other subsystems” (Dobbelrae 2000: 24). In other words, the term secularization is used here descriptively to indicate that in modern society subsystems such as the economy, science and politics, have become gradually more autonomous from religious claims. These technically oriented subsystems have organized around their own medium—such as money, truth, and power—and their own values—such as success, validity, and separation of powers—and are now the dominant ones.

The same argument can be extended to global society, where religion is evidently at a disadvantage in relation to these technically oriented and dominating subsystems of communication, and is challenged to relocate and restructure itself (Beyer 2000: 82; and Dobbelrae 2000: 22–23). This does not mean that modernity and globalization necessarily imply the decline of religious institutions or individual religious consciousness. This is because the secularization of the social system is not a valid indicator in evaluating the religiousness of individuals. The motivational structure at the micro level is seemingly more complex, and other factors are also at work. A well-known expression of these is the so-called phenomenon of ‘religious bricolage,’ the individual patchwork or recomposition of religious meanings (cf. Dobbelrae 2000: 28, 31).

The fact that globalization implies the relocation of religion in the face of dramatic changes within society and the progressive relativization of values carries important consequences for the discourse on social ethics in the religious context as well. In this connection, I will particularly focus below on two distinct areas that are significant to Shin Buddhism in the global context. These are, respectively, the attitude toward politics, one of the major functional spheres, or subsystems, within society, and the attitude toward the potential of globalization for promoting the relativization of religious values and pluralism.

Needless to say, current attitudes of Shin Buddhism toward aspects embedded in globalization, such as pluralism, and the functional differentiation of religion and politics do have a historical background, which has been explored in various studies from various perspectives. It is sufficient here to remember, for example, the ambiguities of the
“Imperial and Buddhist Law” (ōbō-buppō 王法・仏法) dichotomy in Rennyo (1415–1499), which oscillates between the acknowledgment of the complete autonomy of the religious sphere and the conception that the laws of the state are fundamental (Kuroda 1996). This paved the way for the later formulation of the “Two Truths” (shinzoku-nitai 真俗二諦) theory, which was also to be used, together with those doctrines elaborated during the wartime (senji kyōaku 戦時教学), as a powerful tool to justify Shin Buddhist support of the state and militarism from the Meiji period until the end of World War II.\(^\text{10}\)

During the Meiji period, Shin Buddhism and all other forms of Japanese Buddhism were compelled to respond to critical historical circumstances, including the persecution of Buddhism, the fact that the modern state had been gradually assuming many of the roles previously played by the religious institutions, and the manipulation of the Shintō tradition to create an ideology for the modern nation state in the guise of State Shintō. Buddhism replied to the persecutions and to dramatic social changes by presenting its tradition as a force useful to society, and compatible with the science imported from western countries. In this search for legitimation, all traditions of Japanese Buddhism went so far as to actively cooperate with the imperialist policies of the new nation state. At the same time, Japanese Buddhism and Shin Buddhism reacted to this new scenario by stressing the tradition and spiritual heritage of Buddhism in opposition to the materialism of western civilization and Christianity, which was perceived as the official religion of western powers.\(^\text{11}\) It may be argued that it was only after the end of World War II and the promulgation of the 1947 Constitution that a decisive shift took place in Shin Buddhism, with the acceptance of the principle of freedom of religion (shinkyō no jiyū 信教の自由) and the separation of state and religion (seikyō bunri 政教分離). This attitude has also found expression, at least from the 1960s, in the campaigns against the state interference with the Yasukuni Shrine, the wartime center of ultranationalist rhetoric, and,

\(^{10}\) See, for example, Rogers and Rogers (1991: 307–339), Ama (2001), and Toku-naga and Bloom (2000). The ‘Two Truths’ indicate the aforementioned concepts of ōbō and buppō, and imply the prescription for all practitioners to conform to existing social norms and subordinate to the interests of the state. During the wartime period, the shinzoku-nitai theory even evolved to the point that entrusting in Amida’s compassion and loyalty to the emperor were considered equal. Cf. Shigaraki (1992).

starting in the 1980s, in the reflection on the war responsibilities of the Shin Buddhist religious community promoted by both the Ōtani-ha and the Honganji-ha. Nonetheless, some of the dynamics that were at work in these earlier stages of globalization continue to reverberate in the present, as will emerge in the discussion below.

The aforementioned developments broadly reflect the trajectory of the process of globalization in the Japanese context, which reached a crucial point in the Meiji period, with the dramatic process of modernization of the country, the structuring of the nation state, the massive development of science and technical knowledge, the development of a centralized educational system, etc., and speeded up especially during the postwar period, after the promulgation of the new Japanese Constitution in 1947.

Let us now return to the interaction of contemporary Shin Buddhism and globalization. In the following sections, the focus will be on the organizational level, which finds expression especially in official documents and statements, and in the general guidelines of the denomination’s and branches’ policy, and on the individual level, through the results of a survey on the religious consciousness and social behavior of Shin Buddhist practitioners.

3. SHIN BUDDHISM AND THE POLITICAL SUBSYSTEM

The Organizational Level

One of the most interesting aspects of the Shin Buddhist response to globalization is represented by the denomination’s attitude toward the issue of the separation of politics and religion. A typical reaction to globalization found in various world religious contexts is the attempt to support political activity at the service of religious faith, in order to dedifferentiate the functional areas of religion and politics. This strategy is underlined by the claim that “the public influence of religion should be supported by law” (Beyer 1994: 92; cf. Warburg 1999: 53). One issue among the most pressing for contemporary Shin Buddhism at various levels, namely the opposition to state support of the Yasukuni Shrine, represents a vigorous defense of the opposite line, according to which religion tries to establish its contribution to society as specifically religious.

Behind the Shin Buddhist opposition to the Yasukuni Shrine, various motives can be detected. On the doctrinal level, passages in Shinran’s
works are clearly against the worship of *kami* and the enshrinement of spirits. 12 Two other important themes are the firm commitment to the constitutional principle of the separation of religion and state and the concern that the state officials' homage to the "glorious [war] spirits" (*eirei* 英霊) enshrined in the Yasukuni Shrine may encourage the younger generations to take an uncritical approach to the delicate issue of Japanese past war responsibilities.

Indeed, it should be emphasized here that the Shin Buddhist opposition to state interference with the Yasukuni Shrine is a postwar phenomenon, a consequence of the denomination's full support of the separation of religion and politics, which overcame the abovementioned ambiguities visible in the modern history of Shin Buddhism, when the denomination was divided between the affirmation of its peculiarity and autonomy and its submission to the political authority. Shin Buddhism's strong opposition to the interference of the state in the Yasukuni Shrine started at least in the late 1960s, when the Liberal Democratic Party presented the so-called Yasukuni Bill. This opposition, which found expression at the institutional level and at the level of social activism, has especially focused on the visits of state officials, and on state support of the shrine.

As is well-known, expressions of this attitude of Shin Buddhism at the institutional level may be found in the series of official notes of protest that have been regularly issued by the Honganji-ha, the Ōtani-ha, and the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 真宗教団連合 (Shin Buddhist Federation), 13 on the occasion of, or to warn against, visits paid by state officials to the shrine. This also applies to the annual visits to the shrine started by former Prime Minister Koizumi after his election in April 2001. For example, in one of these written protests issued by the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō in October 2005, one can read:

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12 Here are two examples from Shinran's main work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in CWS I: 255, and SSZ II: 175: "If one has taken refuge in the Buddha, one must not further take refuge in various gods" and "Do not serve other teachings, do not worship devas, do not enshrine spirits, do not heed days considered lucky." In this connection, it is noteworthy that Hōnen had already implicitly rejected the worship of *kami* as long as they were concerned with salvation, that is, birth in the Pure Land, though he allowed visits to shrines by practitioners in order to obtain worldly benefits. A detailed discussion of these issues can be found in Rhodes (1994).

13 The Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō includes the two major branches, the Kyoto-based Honganji-ha and Otani-ha, and other eight minor branches. To the Shin Buddhist tradition also belong other small groups, some of which, as in the case of the Shinrankai 視覚会, have seceded from mainstream branches.
The Yasukuni Shrine is a religious establishment, or a religious body that glorifies the war dead as the nation’s protective glorious spirits. The fact that the prime minister pays official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine must be considered an act against the Japanese Constitution, which upholds the principle of the freedom of religion and separation of state and religion (Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 2005).

Great emphasis is placed here on one of the above-mentioned themes, the issue of “freedom of religion, and separation of state and religion.” The visit thus is seen as state interference in the activities of the Yasukuni Shrine, which is a religious body honoring the ‘glorious [war] spirits,’ or eirei. This standpoint is all the more meaningful because, as in many other related official documents, the concern regarding not worshiping spirits or kami does not appear in the text of the written protest. Indeed, this can be taken as an indication that in many cases values and principles that are strictly related to the dynamics of globalization (that is, those upheld by the Japanese Constitution) have come to occupy a central role in this issue, and the doctrinal aspect is peripheral.

The same concern emerges in the opposition by Shin Buddhist activists to the visits paid by state officials to the shrine. This opposition has found expression especially with recourse to lawsuits, in which Shin Buddhists often collaborate with common citizens. One well-known case is the Ehime tamagushirō lawsuit, in which in 1997 Japan’s Supreme Court ruled on the unconstitutionality of the prefecture’s expenditure of public funds for ceremonies held at the Yasukuni Shrine and the local gokoku jinja (Anzai 1998). In more recent lawsuits, such as the Yamaguchi-Kyūshū lawsuit and the Ajia lawsuit, the court ruled that Koizumi’s visit to the shrine violated Article 20 of the Constitution. In this connection, it is interesting to note that although Shin Buddhist institutions do not directly promote these lawsuits, the institutions openly support the plaintiffs, and even cite the court’s ruling in their official documents, as in the following passage from an official statement of the Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō:

The official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by the prime minister and cabinet members, in whatever form [the visits] are conducted, are acts that are feared by neighboring countries to be connected to the past

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14 Chūgai nippon 中外日報 (April 10, 2004); Mainichi shinbun (yukan) 毎日新聞 (夕刊) (September 30, 2005).
horrible wartime experiences. Besides, according to the verdict of the 
Ehime tamagusshiryō lawsuit, these are acts that violate the constitutional 
principle of the separation of the state and religion, and they cannot be 
allowed in any circumstances.\footnote{See Shinshu Kyodan Rengo (1997). A similar approach may be seen in Chugai nippō (April 10, 2004) (see Appendix VI).}

From the abovementioned examples, it is clear that institutional 
Shin Buddhism, as concerns the separation of religion and politics, is 
endorsing the differentiation of functional areas that lies at the basis 
of modern and globalizing society. This means that, although Shin 
Buddhism may appear to be trying to increase the influence of reli-
gion within the public sphere even through the Yasukuni Shrine issue, 
the action should be seen instead as a reply to deliberate attempts to 
weaken the boundary between politics and religion.\footnote{On this aspect, cf. Warburg (1999).} This is quite evident by the examination of various lawsuits filed by Shin Buddhist activists, which are usually based on Articles 19, 20, and 89 of the Japa-
nese Constitution, where this principle of separation is stated. Thus, 
the Yasukuni Shrine problem in the Shin Buddhist context refers to 
two main layers of meaning. This problem is a sectarian issue related 
to the doctrinal sphere—which, in its strict interpretation, does not 
admit the enshrinement and worship of kami and spirits. And, at the 
same time, the issue is the result of the dynamics linked to the process 
of globalization and the differentiation of the religious and political 
subsystms.

\textit{The Individual Level}

Selected results of a survey on the religious consciousness and social 
behavior of Shin Buddhist practitioners that I conducted during the 
summer of 2008 will be used here to shed some light on the attitudes 
toward the political sphere at the individual level. One of the items of 
the questionnaire that was administered to a sample of Shin Buddhist 
practitioners from twenty-six Japanese prefectures was in regard to 
the appropriateness of the prime minister’s visit to the Yasukuni 
Shrine (Table 1).\footnote{The questionnaire received 400 responses (280 lay followers and 120 ordained priests), mostly from practitioners of the two main branches, the Honganji-ha (213), and the Ōtani-ha (174). Cf. Dessi (2009c; forthcoming).} In this case, an average of 38% of the respondents
is against the visits, a low percentage that contrasts with the strong emphasis placed on this issue at the institutional level.

This is not to say, however, that the majority of the practitioners are in favor of these activities. Only 25.8% agree strongly/agree, due to the high rate of undecided. It is interesting to note that the rate of those who allow the visits is higher when lay followers (montō 門徒) alone are taken into consideration. As far as lay followers are concerned, the rate of those who agree strongly/agree is 31.1%, which is even higher (45.9%) in the case of the representatives of the laity (sōdaï 総代) and the temple caretakers (sewagata 世話方), who should allegedly provide some sort of connection between the institutions and the community of lay practitioners. As might be expected, the number of lay followers who agree strongly/agree with the statement in Table 1 is much lower in the case of those practitioners who meet the required standards of Shin Buddhist practice in relation to the rejection of kami worship: never worship at the Shintō household altar (17.4%), never keep amulets (23.3%), never participate in religious activities and festivals at local Shintō shrines (17%), and never make the initial visit to a shrine at the first of the year (15.2%).

On the other hand, the strong institutional commitment against visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by state officials is reflected by the high rate of temple chief priests (jūshoku 住職) and ordained priests (sōryo 僧侶) who share this view, 81.3% and 59.2%, respectively.18 This state of affairs within the religious community also finds expression in the different percentages of those among ordained priests (23.3%) and lay followers (5.3%) who are or have been engaged in social action related to the Yasukuni Shrine issue (Table 2).

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18 The category of ordained priests also includes temple chief priests and the ‘temple-keepers’ (homori 坊守), who are often their (female) spouses. The item in Table 1 was also in the Seventh Basic Survey (1996) of the Honganji-ha (Dai 7 kai shūsei kihon chosa 第7回宗勢基本調査). In this case, the rates of those who agree strongly/agree among lay followers (mostly representative followers, caretakers of local temples, and members of the Buddhist Women’s Association) and the temple chief priests are 50.4% and 5.8%, respectively. Sixteen point four percent and 71% disagree/strongly disagree, respectively. See Kuchiba (1997: 66).
Another item in the same questionnaire regarded the issue of the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education (Table 3). This revision was implemented by the Japanese Diet in 2006, and was preceded by a series of discussions and proposals, including one by the Japan Buddhist Federation, which fostered the insertion of education in religious sentiment in the public school curriculum (which has not found a place in the revised law). This seemingly represented an attempt to weaken the principle of the separation of state and religion in the educational sphere, which has also been criticized within Shin Buddhism at the institutional level.\textsuperscript{19} In this case, the rates of those who disagree/strongly disagree among the ordained priests (15\%) and the laity (17.5\%) are quite similar, but the difference between those who agree strongly/agree among the two groups (53.3\% and 41.1\%, respectively) is significant.

These results suggest that there are ambiguities in the interpretation of the principle of separation of state and religion within Shin Buddhism. As far as the laity is concerned, it seems that the principle found in the Japanese Constitution that 'the State and its organs shall

\textsuperscript{19} For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Dessi (2009b).
Table 3. *The Fundamental Law of Education should be amended, so that education in 'religious sentiment' can also be implemented in public schools (%)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Lay followers</th>
<th>Ordained priests</th>
<th>Temple chief priests</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to say</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

refrain from religious education or any other religious activity’ does not find much support.\(^{20}\) However, it should be noted that temple chief priests, and ordained priests in general, who may also be seen as the expression of the institutional sphere, support (81.3% and 59.2%, respectively) the opposition to official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine (namely, that fact that ‘the State and its organs shall refrain from any other religious activity’), but also give considerable support (53.1% and 53.3%, respectively) to the aforementioned introduction of education in religious sentiment in the classroom, which is against the principle that ‘the State and its organs shall refrain from religious education.’

4. Shin Buddhism and Pluralism

*The Organizational Level*

The aforementioned Yasukuni Shrine issue is also related in Shin Buddhism to another aspect: the expression of a positive approach toward globalization. That is to say, the statements and activities within institutional Shin Buddhism that are related to the Yasukuni Shrine issue also combine a distinctive concern for pluralism and peace. In particular, great stress is put on the link between the glorification of death performed through the enshrinement of Japanese military per-

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\(^{20}\) Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution states: “1. Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority. 2. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious act, celebration, rite, or practice. 3. The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity.”
sonnel in the Yasukuni Shrine and the imperialist policies and atrocities of war.

Significantly, this criticism of past Japanese imperialism and militarism is typically accompanied in Shin Buddhism by the admission of the religious community’s war responsibility. The Otani-ha and the Honganji-ha have formally acknowledged their role in supporting Japanese wartime policies beginning in 1987 and 1991, respectively, calling upon the Shin Buddhist community to reflect on its having betrayed Shinran’s teaching, especially his concern for fellowship and a peaceful world (Dessi 2007: 147–148). In these documents, the link between the positive attitude toward pluralism and the choice for non-violence and peace is also apparent. For example, here is a passage from the Fusen ketsugi 不戰決議, the anti-war declaration issued by the Otani-ha in 1995:

Overcoming all ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious differences, we vow to walk together with all people of the world along the path toward the creation of a prosperous and peaceful international community that rejects war.21

This resolution not only once again expresses regret for the support given by Shin Buddhism to Japanese imperialism but also makes clear that the realization of a peaceful world is inextricably bound to the acceptance of different cultures and religions, that is, of a pluralistic society.

A similar concern for pluralism and peace may be seen, for example, in this statement issued by the Honganji-ha in 2003, an official protest against the dispatch of Japan Self-Defense Forces units to Iraq to provide logistic support to American and British troops:

The Honganji-ha, having received the spirit that aspires to what our founder Shinran called ‘May there be peace in the world (yo no naka an’on nare), and may the Buddha’s teaching spread! (buppo hiromare)!’, feels ashamed of terrorism and war, through which fellow beings kill each other, and, aiming at a society of fellow companions where each life’s dignity is respected, has been engaged in various occasions against war, for peace.22

22 See Honganji shinpo 本願寺新報 (December 20, 2003).
From this passage, it is also apparent how these ideas are deeply connected, in Shin Buddhism, to the aforementioned ideal of “fellow companions” (dōbō) emphasized by Shinran. Indeed, this is not only a basic doctrinal assumption indicating the equality of all Shin Buddhist practitioners as a consequence of the universality of Amida’s Vow but also lies at the core of the current self-representations of the Shin Buddhist denomination as a religious community of equals (cf. Porcu 2009).

It is also worth noting that the current Shin Buddhist emphasis on pluralism and peace is closely connected with another distinctive trait, which also manifests a positive approach toward globalization. This is the critical attitude toward the 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 something to be defended at any cost, but can be subjected to criticism. This is the same attitude that informs at the institutional level those social activities on behalf of the hisabetsu buraku and former Hansen’s disease patients, which are typically accompanied by a critical reflection on the past responsibilities of the religious community. It may be seen that this approach implies a positive reaction to the relativizing trend promoted by globalization.

It should also be added here that in Shin Buddhism a tendency toward religious tolerance can also be related to some aspects of Shinran’s teaching, which seems to exert a certain influence on the general Shin Buddhist attitude toward other religious traditions. This is reflected in participation in organizations such as the Japan Buddhist Federation, the Forum of Research Institutes Associated with Religious Organizations, and in forms of interreligious dialogue in Europe and the United States.

However, there is reason to believe that the Shin Buddhist approach to pluralism is not without ambiguities. Indeed, it is also possible to trace in Shin Buddhism the presence of elements of exclusive religious particularism. In this connection, it should be noted that Shinran’s writings contain problematic statements that deny the possibility of religious liberation not only outside Buddhism but also within other forms of Buddhism (termed “Path of Sages”).

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23 See, for example, CWS I: 459, 527; and SSZ II: 628, 660.
24 Cf. CSW I: 240; and SSZ II: 166: “Truly we know that the teachings of the Path of Sages were intended for the period when the Buddha was in the world and for the
this fundamental doctrinal assumption may in fact represent a serious obstacle to inter-religious dialogue. This point was neatly expressed by Jan Van Bragt in a report of the dialogue between representatives of Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity held in 1989 within the context of the Nanzan Symposia:

Three questions, directed at Christianity by the commentator, were then turned back at Pure Land Buddhism... (3) Does not the Pure Land doctrine have the same difficulty with the salvation of the non-believer as Christianity? In other words: Can I be saved? The answer, in a nutshell, was the following: Indeed, there is no salvation without a positive relationship (en) with the Nembutsu, but at some time in the future everybody will obtain that (Van Bragt 1950: 30).

The presence of exclusive religious particularism within Shin Buddhism is, however, especially evident in critiques of ‘humanism’ that also emerge at the official level. This is, for example, the case of the Joint Declaration for the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Foundation of the Shin Buddhist Federation (Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō kessei sanjū shūnen kyōdō senen 真宗教団連合結成30周年共同宣言), a document that is meant to represent the position of the Shin Buddhist denomination as a whole. This declaration is structured along the lines of the opposition between “Buddhist spirituality” (Bukkyō seishin 仏教精神) and “the spirit of humanism” (hyūmanizumu no seishin ヒューマニズムの精神), an updated version of the old opposition between the spiritual ‘East’ and the materialist ‘West.’ The term ‘humanism’ is used in this context to indicate an anthropocentric vision of reality that tends to see human life in purely utilitarian terms, and leads to the technologization of life (Dessì 2006; and 2007: 131–140).

right dharma-age; they are altogether inappropriate for the times and beings of the semblance and last dharma-ages and the age when the dharma has become extinct. Already their time has passed; they are no longer in accord with beings’ and CWS I: 286; and SSZ II: 199: “The Larger [Nirvana] Sutra teaches: ‘There are ninety-six kinds of paths; only the single path of the Buddha is the right path. The other ninety-five are all nonbuddhist paths.’ Discarding the nonbuddhist paths, I serve the Tathāgata. If there are lords who make this same vow, let them each awaken the aspiration for enlightenment. Luo-tzu, the Duke of Chou, Confucius, and others guided people as disciples of the Tathāgata, but they already followed wrong paths. Their teachings concern only mundane good; through them, one cannot part from the worldly and attain the sacred. Let lords and ministers, together with the nobility and the king and their families, turn from the false and adhere to the true, discard the wrong and enter the right. Thus, the Treatise on the Establishment of Truth, setting forth the teaching in the sutras, states: ‘If your adherence to nonbuddhist paths is great and your adherence to the Buddha-dharma is light, you are possessed of wrong views...’”
On the one hand, according to this text, it is to ‘humanism’ that pressing contemporary problems such as the dangers for the environment, competition, the collapse of the family, should be ascribed. On the other hand, as is clear from this passage, Buddhism is indicated as the only way to save humanity:

Thus, the twentieth century is the time in history when humanism itself has eventually become a danger for human existence, and its limits have become evident. Along the search for a wisdom that can overcome humanism, there is no other way than that offered by Buddhism. Now is the time to return to the Shin Buddhist teaching, which has made clear the nature of the quest for the essence of human life through Buddhist spirituality (Shinshū Kyōdan Rengō 2000).

Thus, the critique of ‘humanism’ reveals itself as a rhetoric that emphasizes the uniqueness of particular socio-cultural values, in this case Buddhism, and more specifically, Shin Buddhism. In this sense, this critique goes against pluralism.

Indeed, this approach to social ethics in the context of globalization implies a strong reassertion of the religious tradition against the relativization of religious values, and the ‘dichotomization of the world’ into the religiously pure (Buddhism) and impure (‘humanism’) (cf. Beyer 1994: 92). Moreover, it should also be understood as an attempt to face globalization and the problems of modern society by giving the religious sphere first place among the various functional spheres.

The Individual Level

It is noteworthy to see how this cluster of issues related to globalization and pluralism is approached at the individual level. In the aforementioned survey on the religious consciousness and social behavior of Shin Buddhist practitioners, a series of items was inserted that might be relevant to this purpose. One of these is related to the issue of equality in Shin Buddhism.

As has been noted above, equality in Shin Buddhism is strictly related to the ideal of fellow companions or dobō, which also gives the name to the reform movement within the two main branches in the postwar period. Within this context, the focus has been especially on the hisabetsu buraku issue, which can be taken as an indicator of the general Shin Buddhist attitude toward equality. The data in Table 4 show indeed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents is not willing to discriminate against the hisabetsu burakumin. This is
Table 4. *Discrimination toward the burakumin is not acceptable* (%) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Lay followers</th>
<th>Ordained priests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to say</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

particularly true of ordained priests (90.8%), but also of lay followers (80.4%), and these data indicate that there is a noticeable consistency between the institutional and individual levels.\(^{25}\)

As mentioned above, the Shin Buddhist attitude toward pluralism is somewhat problematical. In particular, it has emerged how, in spite of the reference to a true pluralistic society that one finds in many official documents as the way for the realization of a peaceful world, there are aspects of Shin Buddhist thought that are more oriented to religious exclusivism. This is the case of the attitude toward liberation in other religious contexts. The data in Table 5 indicate that the understanding of one’s own tradition as the only way to salvation is not marginal among ordained priests (30.8%). This seems to be even truer for temple chief priests, who are in charge of the rituals and spiritual care of the mass of lay followers at the local level. Indeed, 43.7% of temple chief priests agree strongly/agree with the statement “Liberation outside Shin Buddhism is not achievable,” while only 25% disagree/strongly disagree. The case of the lay followers is quite the reverse, however, because only 16.8% of the respondents agree strongly/agree, while 33.9% disagree/strongly disagree.

\(^{25}\) It should be added here that the high awareness of the *hisabetsu buraku* issue within the Shin Buddhist community is probably also due to the fact that this has a public dimension in contemporary Japan, and has long been on the agenda of the government, which has promoted a wide range of activities on behalf of this cultural minority. Cf. Kitaguchi (1999).
Table 5. *Liberation outside Shin Buddhism is not achievable (%)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Lay followers</th>
<th>Ordained priests</th>
<th>Temple chief priests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to say</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another indicator of the Shin Buddhist attitudes toward pluralism that has been previously taken into account at the institutional level, the critique of ‘humanism,’ was inserted in another item, which is shown in Table 6. Also in this case one can see that a significant rate of ordained priests (35.8%) support the view that only Buddhist spirituality can solve the pressing issues of modern society. The rate among temple chief priests is much higher (56.3%), and in this case, only 12.5% oppose the official version of the critique of ‘humanism.’ It is interesting to note that the rate of those who agree strongly/agree among lay followers, despite the many undecided, is much lower (22.5%), while the rate of those who disagree/strongly disagree (20%) is similar.

The data in Table 5 and 6 indicate that lay followers might be less permeable than the institutions and their local representatives to the claims of religious exclusivism based on traditional teachings. In this connection, it should be added here that there seems to be a positive correlation between a deeper involvement in Shin Buddhist practice and religious exclusivism. In fact, the rate of lay followers who agree strongly/agree with the statement in Table 5 (16.8%) tends to be higher, for example, among those who have undertaken the *kikyōshiki* (27.1%), often visit the temple for the *Hō-onkō* (28.5%), attend sermons (28.8%), and read the scriptures or religious books (25.3%), all of which can be taken as indicators of a higher level of Shin Buddhist religious consciousness.26

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26 The *kikyōshiki* 帰敬式 is a rite involving the attribution of a “Dharma name” (*hōmyō* 法名) to the practitioners, which is strongly recommended by the institutions. The *Hō-onkō* 報恩講 is the memorial service for Shinran, the major annual ceremony in Shin Buddhism. Attending sermons (*hōwa* 法話) is quite important in the Shin Buddhist context, because the doctrine of “other-power” (*tariki*) and the limitation of the fundamental religious practice to the utterance of the name of Amida Nyorai
Table 6. Anthropocentrism and humanism are the causes of many social problems, which can be solved only by Buddhist spirituality (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Lay followers</th>
<th>Ordained priests</th>
<th>Temple chief priests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to say</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At a more general level, as I have shown elsewhere, it is also possible to notice within the Shin Buddhist community a strong correlation between religious exclusivism and instances of ethno-cultural centrism. From the data in Table 7, it is clear that the inclination to practice religious exclusivism found in Tables 5 and 6 (21% and 26.5%, respectively) tends to increase among those practitioners who find patriotism very important (29.1% and 40%, respectively), and who agree with a classical statement of past ultra-nationalism, namely the rhetorical opposition between ‘the spiritual East’ and ‘the material West’ (39.2% and 58.2%, respectively) (cf. Dessi 2009c; forthcoming). This data provides further evidence of the close relation between religion and the shaping of national identity within the framework of modernity and globalization in the Japanese context.27

As has been noted above, the link between the positive attitude toward pluralism and the admission of the war responsibility of the religious community is apparent at the institutional level in various documents. As far as the individual level is concerned, the data in Table 8 indicate that a strong majority of ordained priests (77.5%) support the institutional effort to rethink Shin Buddhist war responsibilities, which is also an indicator of the general attitude toward war and peace issues. Also in the case of lay followers, the rate of those who agree strongly/agree (48.6%) is quite significant if compared with that of those who disagree/strongly disagree, a very low 3.6%. These last data also represent a suitable indicator of another distinctive attitude.

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*nenbutsu* (念仏) have invested the act of 'listening' to the teachings with a particular significance. Cf. Dessi (2009c; forthcoming).

Table 7. Religious exclusivism by ethno-cultural defense: “Liberation outside Shin Buddhism is not achievable” and “Anthropocentrism and humanism are the causes of many social problems, which can be solved only by Buddhist spirituality” (% “Agree strongly” and “Agree”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Liberation outside Shin Buddhism is not achievable</th>
<th>Anthropocentrism and humanism are the causes of many social problems, which can be solved only by Buddhist spirituality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All*</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think that patriotism is very important</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the opposition between spiritual ‘East’ and materialist ‘West’*</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The percentage is a total of those responding “Agree strongly” and “Agree.”

Table 8. It is a good thing that Shin Buddhism apologized for its war cooperation (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Lay followers</th>
<th>Ordained priests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to say</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

toward globalization, namely, the espousal of one’s religious tradition as a process of ‘learning to learn.’ In this connection, it would seem that for the Shin Buddhist practitioners in general it may be a good thing to look at the tradition in a critical way, trying to learn from the past mistakes of one’s own religious community.

**Conclusion**

From the analysis of two distinct areas of contemporary Shin Buddhism, namely the attitude toward politics and that toward the relativization of religious values and pluralism, it is possible to trace in this major tradition of Japanese Buddhism the presence of different attitudes toward the dynamics of globalization.
As far as the institutional level is considered, Shin Buddhism shows in many cases a positive approach toward these dynamics. This is apparent in the case of the Yasukuni Shrine issue, in which the Shin Buddhist institutions strongly defend the principle of separation of state and religion, in the stress on pluralism and peace found in various official documents, and in the capacity to look at tradition in a critical way—a choice that is also noticeable at the individual level. In other cases, however, as in the aforementioned critique of ‘humanism,’ the process of globalization tends to be seen as a danger that can be opposed only through the strong reassertion of traditional values.

Many of the results referring to the individual level, however, show quite a different picture. As far as the approach toward the differentiation of politics and religion is concerned, the strong emphasis placed at the official level on the Yasukuni Shrine issue is not confirmed by the attitudes of lay followers. Less than one third of the latter oppose the prime minister’s visits to the shrine as an infringement of the principle of the separation of state and religion, while the rate of the temple chief priests, who in this case faithfully reflect the institutional viewpoint, is more than 80%. A similar attitude is also visible in the issue of the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, where only 17.5% of the lay followers oppose the adoption of religious elements in public education. In this respect, the fact that more than half of the temple chief priests would instead agree with the statement in Table 3 (‘The Fundamental Law of Education should be amended, so that the education to religious sentiment can be implemented also in public schools’) suggests that the opposition to the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education found at the institutional level is not immune to internal ambiguities and has not been enforced without frictions and mediations.28

In terms of the relativization of religious values, despite the strong homogeneity between the institutional and individual attitudes found in the hisabetsu buraku issue (which is related to equalitarianism), there are clear signs of a divergence of views concerning pluralism. Liberation outside Shin Buddhism, that is, the full recognition of religious pluralism, is not achievable for a significant number, though not the majority, of temple chief priests (43.7%), while it is so only for a rate of 16.8% of lay followers. This tendency is even more evident

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28 This may be seen, for instance, also in the prudent attitude of the Honganji-ha in his opposition to the revision process. See Dessi (2009b).
in the issue of the critique of ‘humanism,’ where it emerges than more than half of the temple chief priests might see Buddhism as the only source of salvation for humanity, while only about 20% of the lay followers share the same view. At the same time, there are indications of the presence within the Shin Buddhist community of a strong link between religious exclusivism and instances of ethno-cultural defense.

The previous analyses point to the complexity of Shin Buddhism’s current responses to globalization. Indeed, at the general level there are indications of a positive approach to these dynamics at the institutional and individual levels. However, there are also clear signs that this tradition of Japanese Buddhism is still entangled in the dilemma between the full acceptance of the challenges of a pluralistic society and the strong reassertion of religious identity as a tool against the progressive relativization of religious values. The reluctance to accept some important aspects of the differentiation of politics and religion is also apparent, when secular public education is seen as a field that may be colonized by the authoritative discourses of the religious subsystem.

Finally, another point emerges from the present discussion, which also suggests a serious reconsideration of the commonplace idea that the Shin Buddhist institutions and leaders are generally ‘liberal’ and the great majority of lay followers are ‘conservative.’ That is to say, there are instances when the lay followers do not agree with, or simply do not understand, institutional attempts to adapt the tradition in a defensive way against globalization. And, conversely, there are indications that this hesitancy to claim religious exclusivism may weaken the more they conform to the orthodox standards of religious practice.

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