A Way of Living as a Nembutsu Follower

We would like to share this message from the Gomonsō — the head of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha — which was issued shortly after his accession in 2016. We would like to be reminded of his wish to live a Nembutsu life, both privately and publicly.

— Rev. Kudo Umezu, Bishop, Buddhist Churches of America

Buddhism began when Sakyamuni attained enlightenment and became a Buddha about 2500 years ago. In Japan, Buddhism was originally referred to as the Buddha Dharma. The Dharma here refers to the true reality of how the world is and the nature of humanity itself. It is the universal truth that transcends both space and time. The one who awakens to this truth is called a Buddha, and the teaching of the Buddha is the wisdom that teaches us how we can live, while dealing with many anxieties and sufferings we may experience in life.

Buddhism describes the true reality of this world and humanity using such phrases as ‘impermanence’ and ‘dependent origination.’ ‘Impermanence’ refers to the fact that everything changes moment by moment. On the other hand, ‘dependent origination’ explains that all things and phenomena are interconnected with one another, which bring about various causes and conditions that then give rise to second causes and conditions and so on and so forth. Therefore, in this world we cannot find an unchanging and fixed ‘self.’

However, we are unaware of this reality and thus we try to find some unchanging and fixed entity we call the self. This mindset is in fact the basis of our egocentric mindset and self-oriented inclinations, and through such awareness, we naturally become gentle in word and deed in our efforts of minimizing our egoistic way of thinking. For example, we are deprived of our liberty and bound to this world of suffering. Ignorance and blind passions are represented as greed, anger, and foolishness also known as the ‘three poisons.’

Shinran Shonin pursued religious practices for 20 years on Mount Hiei with the hope to attain enlightenment by conquering his blind passions. However, being aware of the depth of human desires which are irremovable by religious austerities, he descended Mount Hiei and under the guidance of Honen Shonin, finally encountered the salvific working of Amida Tathagata. Amida is the Buddha who not only wishes for but is actually working in accordance with the wish to save all beings. This mindset is the basis of our egocentric mindset and self-oriented inclinations, and through such awareness, we naturally become gentle in word and deed in our efforts of minimizing our egoistic way of thinking. For example, with regard to how we live our lives, we “learn to be content without wanting too much” with regard to how we may treat others “without being critical.” Even though our efforts may pale in comparis-
Old Age

By Rev. Yukiko Motosyoshi, Buddhist Church of Stockton

The last time I spoke to my aunt Mitsue in Japan was years ago, by telephone. A year later, she passed away, alone. She was my mother’s younger sister. My mother and aunt were born in Hawaii and sent to Japan at the age of eight and six. Fortunately, my mother was able to return to Hawaii, but due to her parent’s financial difficulties, her aunt was left with her grandparent’s in Japan. Mitsue was a strong woman. She was able to get a good education and a good job, and retired in a small village in Yamaguchi. She did not have any relatives or close friends near her, however. She longed as she was surrounded by her beloved flowers and trees. When I spoke to her over the phone two years ago, she was sad. She lamented that she no longer had a dream. I was startled to hear that. She was living where she wanted to be, and she was doing well physically. I didn’t quite understand her despair.

Then I remembered what an elder member once said. She once asked me, “Can there be any place to go?” I asked her, “Where would you like to go? I can take you there.” She said, “I don’t have any energy to go out. Besides, I don’t know where I want to go.” She felt hopeless, frustrated, and empty. Is this how members feel when they are old? Does our old age do to a person? Does no longer having a dream because of old age mean no hope, no direction? It is a very painful thing.

Once I knew a very devoted Nembutsu follower who found happiness in every day in her later life. When she had to move to a long-term care facility, she was grateful to be free of making her bed every morning and cooking three meals every day. When she was confined to a wheelchair, she was grateful to be free from falling. She thanked Amida Buddha for her good fortune.

I am not sure what will happen to me in the future. If conditions allow, I could have a very long life. There is a great possibility that I could become completely senile with dementia and complain every day about everything. However, I find comfort in the following Wason from Shinran Shonin’s Hymns of the Pure Land, which says.

Seeing the sentient beings of the Nembutsu, Through the world, countless, particles, as in the ten quarters, The Buddha grapps and never abandon them. And therefore, is named “Amida.”

(Collected Works of Shinran, p.347)

Regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, or ability, Amida Buddha embraces us all and never abandons us. That means regardless of my mental and physical condition, I will be always embraced by Amida Buddha and my birth in the Pure Land is guaranteed. I do not know what my future holds, but I won’t be alone. Now I can concentrate on this moment.

By Rev. Kodo Umezu, BCA Bishop

You might have already noticed that we use a lot of acronyms such as MAP, IHOPE, WEHOPE, SHARE, MICL, and CATS for our educational programs. Do you know what each one stands for? (See below.)

In response, the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) National Board approved a program, giving Japanese ministers opportunities to experience actual temple life in the U.S. It gives them a chance to get to know what we are like and helps them prepare to serve in one of the Hawaiian’s overseas districts. It has been very successful and many IMOP graduates have been assigned to temples throughout the world.

This year, we had three wonderful Kakehashi aspirants who want to serve in the Buddhist Church of America. The letter was copied to Rev. Roninaka Imada, Etsuko Mikame, and Rev. Hibiki Murakami. They stayed at the Jodo Shinshu Center for three months and visited temples and churches to learn about how they do things. They finished the program in July and went back to Japan. Each of them has shown their commitment and willingness to share the Dharma. I am certain that they will be great additions to our Jodo Shinshu temples.

Old speaking of the dharma is not limited by geography. Family means a lot of human society, family is one of the most important foundation of the dharma. Shin Buddhism, and the teachings of Shinran Shonin, join us together as one family. In the context of human society, family is one of the ties that connect us in the English language. Family is not limited by geography. Family means to feel secure, to have someone you can count on in good times, and also in times of need. It means someone who willingly shares your problems.

To me, we cannot be fully engaged Buddhists, or human beings, until we embrace the notion that our survival is connected to the survival of every person on this planet. It is important that we continue to nourish the family ties between us. It is important that we continue to share the dharma. It is important that we continue to share our problems. We trust this expression of dana and of the dharma, and an appreciation of the mutual connections between BCA and HHMH.

In Gassho,

Eric Matsumoto, HHMH Bishop, and Rev. Kodo Umezu, BCA Bishop

July 4, 2018

The accompanying letter from Terri Omori, Chair of the Social Welfare Committee of the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), amply and accurately expresses the sentiments of all of us as well as Rev. Kodo Umezu, Bishop of BCA. The Buddhist Churches of America considers each and every member of the Jodo Shinshu Mission of Hawaii’s temples (HHMH) to be our sisters and brothers in the dharma. Shin Buddhism, and the teachings of Shinran Shonin, join us together as one family. In the context of human society, family is one of the ties that connect us in the English language. Family is not limited by geography. Family means to feel secure, to have someone you can count on in good times, and also in times of need. It means someone who willingly shares your problems.

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In Gassho,

Richard A. Stamba, President

Buddhist Churches of America

Acronyms
By Rev. Kodo Umezu, BCA Bishop

MAP = Minister’s Assistant Program; IHOPE = Interna-
tional Honganji Youth Overseas Propagation Exchange; WEHOPE = West and East Hong(n)ji Overseas Propagation Exchange; SHARE = Staff of Honganji Advanced Research and Education; MCE = Ministers’ Continuing Education; CATS = Chaplains’ Advanced Training Seminar.

MOP ministers show the gifts they received at their going away party on July 13.

We are all learners like them. We should humble ourselves before the real meaning of our life. Venerable Jitsun Kakusha once said, “Let’s put our thoughts to the side while we listen to the words of the Buddha.” We have lost our humility and always blame others for our difficulties. Let us stay humble and learn from everyone and everything around us.

Like the Buddhist Churches of America

Wheel of Dharma

BCA Extends Disaster Assistance to Hawai’i

Like the Buddhist Churches of America

Old Age

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In response, the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) National Board approved a recommendation from the BCA Social Welfare Committee, chaired by Terri Omori, to provide financial support for their efforts.

The following letter written by BCA President Richard Stamba was sent to Pierpont Toyama, HHMH President, and Dean Sakamoto, Chair, HHMH Social Welfare Committee, along with $25,000 in funds. The letter was copied to Rev.

Eric Matsumoto, HHMH Bishop, and Rev. Kodo Umezu, BCA Bishop

July 4, 2018

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In Gassho,

Richard A. Stamba, President

Buddhist Churches of America
President’s Message: Eradicating World Poverty…

By Richard A. Stambul, BCA President

A few months ago, in the May issue of the Wheel of Dharma, I shared my vision for a part of BCA’s future when I suggested, “I think BCA ought to be ‘roaring like a lion’ when it comes to ending suffering. Ending our suffering, we must look at our friends, that of our neighbors and our countrymen. BCA Buddhist concept of how we could see life. I Dharma talk I spoke at great length about the Buddhist Temple of Alameda before his retirement on May 31, 2018. Taniguchi Sensei served the BCA for over 50 years, ministering at the Buddhist Church of San Francisco, on June 19, 2018. Taniguchi Sensei served the BCA for over 50 years, ministering at the Buddhist Church of San Francisco, and Rev. Dr. David Kazarian at anita@kazarian.com.

Rev. Taniguchi Honored at Hongwanji

By Rev. Kurt Rye, Placer Buddhist Church

I recently gave a Dharma talk on the subject of the “non-duality of emotions” as a core concept of the Buddhist concept of how we could see life. I stressed that we should see children as they are and not attempt to change the perception with misdirected thoughts and assumptions. We all too often give in to the temptation to judge or analyze our emotions rather than to live with them. Often, we try to suppress our sadness by pretending to be happy in the hope that the event or events that cause the sadness will somehow disappear. It is human nature to want to escape the feeling of sadness. We are taught as children to “be strong” and that sadness is weakness. We are admonished to “keep a stiff upper lip” and not show emotions. Unfortunately, this only adds to our suffering. As Buddhists we must look at our life as a process. Events happen during our lifetime. How we interpret them is often unclear and can cause an increase of dukkha (suffering). If we are feeling sorrow, it does not help us pretend not to be sorrowful.

This article is prefaced by a quotation by Dr. Shoma Morita (1874-1938) a prominent Japanese psychiatrist who developed a specific form of psychological treatment called Morita therapy. Though not specifically a Buddhist theory, it was based on Dr. Morita’s studies of Zen Buddhism and other elements of Japanese culture. His emphasis was on analyzing our feelings or emotions, but rather working with them. This is a very Buddhist approach to living. Dr. Brian Ogawa, an internationally known Morita therapist and professor, has elaborated on this concept when he discusses the non-duality of emotions as “Life flows from being emotional.” He describes emotions as a natural flow of life and causes us distress. This is how Buddhism looks at our life process. By attempting to change a natural condition we add and extend the suffering due the time and energy it takes to refuse to accept life as it is. I am reminded of a phrase I once heard: “Do not look for refuge from the storm, look for refuge in the storm.” Life can be a storm. It can also be a sunny day. Life is a non-dualistic experience. When you feel sorrow, then mourn. When you feel glad, then rejoice. This too is a very Jodo Shinshu concept we call gratitude. They say in Jodo Shinshu Buddhism the entire expression of our teachings is living a life of gratitude. We must be grateful not for “positive feelings” this is blocking the ultimate expression of our teachings is living a life of gratitude. We must be grateful for all that happens to us. This does not mean a “created” gratitude but rather an all-inclusive gratitude for all that we go through in our lives.

By Rev. Kurt Rye, Placer Buddhist Church

I welcome and applaud this new initiative from Hongwanji. I urge all of us to search for ways in which to move our temples and churches, to move all of us a tiny bit closer to the goal of overcoming world poverty. Let’s search together to find constructive ways in which to begin implementation of this worthy campaign.

Namo Amida Butsu!

Rev. Taniguchi Honored at Hongwanji

For nearly 50 years, a large Dharma wheel with the wisteria crest of the Hongwanji has adorned the front of the Cleveland Buddhist Temple (CBT). The CBT is selling its Euclid Avenue building and is hopeful that another BCA affiliate temple can use this beautiful symbol on their building. The symbol is approximately 48 inches (4 ft.) in diameter and is attached to a metal frame. The cost of removing the symbol is estimated at about $250, plus packing and shipping costs of $50. For more information, please contact Anita Kazarian at anita@kazarian.com.

The CBT will continue to spread Shin Buddhism and to function on donations from BCA temples that are acquiring the contents of its building. Their temporary space is at the First Unitarian Church of Cleveland in Shaker Heights, OH.

Cleveland Buddhist Temple Dharma Wheel Available

I concluded that we ought to be talking about the pressing humanitarian concerns of society. We ought to be finding ways to be of service to those suffering horrifically right in front of our eyes: the homeless, the impoverished, those without medical care, those less fortunate.

I welcome and applaud this new initiative from Hongwanji. I urge all of us to search for ways in which to move our temples and churches, to move all of us a tiny bit closer to the goal of overcoming world poverty. Let’s search together to find constructive ways in which to begin implementation of this worthy campaign.
Shinran Shonin

Shinran, the founder of Shin Buddhism, broke with Japanese tradition to start a religion of radical egalitarianism that opened the benefits of Buddhism to everyone.

By Rev. Dr. Mark Unno

The nembutsu is derived from the Sanskrit Namō Amitābha Bodhisattva. Namo is the same as the “namu” of the South Asian greeting “namastē,” “I bow to you.” In Pure Land practice, “Namō” or “Nama,” “bow,” is an expression of deepest humility, naturally following from the awareness of oneself as a foolish being with blind passions. Amida Buddha’s name comes from the Sanskrit “Amitābha” which means “the Buddha of Infi-

In the daily rhythm of the nembutsu, of saying or chanting, “Nama Amida Butsu,” the smallest moments of reflection and appreciation carry as much significance as great realizations that one experiences in the moment of saying “Nama Amida Butsu” or not, our life becomes transformed over time by being steeped in the totality of dharma, through hearing the teachings as well as chanting, bowing, and other bodily practices. Thus, seeing a plant beginning to sprout and release a bit more easily. In Shin Buddhism, we do complain; we still prejudge. However, once we turn to Shin practice in Rinzai Zen, the series of nonlinear problems that the practitioner must pass through. Some experience a great moment of realization, a kind of “aha!” experience, from which the world is a different place. Others may experience a series of smaller moments that are no less significant. There is a certain similarity between the experience of becoming a disciple of Amida’s boundless compassion and experiencing a profound awakening.

Shinran On Having an Honest Heart

Those who do not even know the characters for good and bad, All have honest, real hearts.

Those who pretend to know what is good and bad, Are just putting on a show.

I do not know what is really right or wrong, orthodox or heterodox.

Though without the slightest mercy or compassion, I want to be recognized and teach others.

(Shozomatsu Wasan)

This is a universal message that anyone can relate to. Even the most accomplished Buddhist masters in history had their foibles and limitations, which are subject to error and human fallibility. Thus, among the followers of Shin’s path of Shin Buddhism there were learned monks as well as illiterate peasants, and certainly other who stood somewhere further along the bodhisattva path than a mere layperson. Yet Shinran saw things a bit differently. Whereas the norm is to see the learned monk as well advanced on the path, Shinran saw his lay followers, many of them illiterate peasants, as equal to or even superior to the monks of his day.

Shinran’s egalitarianism is rooted in the realization of profound oneness with all beings. It is radical in its inclusivity, beyond words and in the depth of self-awareness. Any criticism leveled at his contemporaries in the priesthood, as well as his own, is the result of a sincere desire to present oneself as “good” in order to avoid practice in Rinzai Zen, the series of nonlinear problems that the practitioner must pass through. Some experience a great moment of realization, a kind of “aha!” experience, from which the world is a different place. Others may experience a series of smaller moments that are no less significant. There is a certain similarity between the experience of becoming a disciple of Amida’s boundless compassion and experiencing a profound awakening.

This is our dance with reality and with ourselves, the rhythm and song of “Nama,” our foolishness, and “Amida Butsu,” the wellspring of boundless compassion. The subtle point here is that Buddhism is a dance first, in which one speaks the nembutsu aloud. Then the heart may open and the mind may follow, but only if one is sufficiently humble and clear of the need to desire and control.

Shinran defined two key moments in the arc of the nembutsu path: stiltsin, true entrusting, as the moment of realizing boundless compassion, and gnih, birth in the Pure Land, which comes at the end of life. There is a parallel with the story of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni: his attainment of nirvana at age 35 and his entrance into tathagatagarbha, the complete release, at the age of 80. These two moments are also known as “nirvana with a remainder” versus “nirvana without a remainder.” Where “remainder” denotes the residue of karma that remains while living this finite life. To truly realize entrusting is to be illuminated, embraced, and dissolved into the great light of Amida’s boundless compassion, but it is only at the end of life, entering into the Pure Land beyond conception, that one is fully released from the bonds of existence. Even then, the Shin Buddhism promise is to stop short of release and return to this world to complete the bodhisattva journey of universal liberation in service to others.

While some may experience a great moment of realization, a kind of “aha!” experience, from which the world is a different place. Others may experience a series of smaller moments that are no less significant. There is a certain similarity between the experience of becoming a disciple of Amida’s boundless compassion and experiencing a profound awakening.

This is the moment of saying “Namu Amida Butsu” or not, our life becomes transformed over time by being steeped in the totality of dharma, through hearing the teachings as well as chanting, bowing, and other bodily practices. Thus, seeing a plant beginning to sprout and release a bit more easily. In Shin Buddhism, we do complain; we still prejudge. However, once we turn to Shin practice in Rinzai Zen, the series of nonlinear problems that the practitioner must pass through. Some experience a great moment of realization, a kind of “aha!” experience, from which the world is a different place. Others may experience a series of smaller moments that are no less significant. There is a certain similarity between the experience of becoming a disciple of Amida’s boundless compassion and experiencing a profound awakening.

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Snapshots from the BCA Summer Youth Retreat, July 1-7, 2018

Join us for an inspiring day of Compassion in Action!
Visit our Walks to Feed the Hungry Page:
firstgiving.com/event/BuddhistGlobalRelief/2018-Berkeley-CA--Walk-to-Feed-the-Hungry

Buddhist Global Relief (BGR) projects are designed to provide direct food aid to people afflicted by hunger and malnourishment, to promote ecologically sustainable agriculture, to support the education of girls and women, and to give women an opportunity to start right livelihood projects to support their families.

To raise funds, BGR holds annual “Walks to Feed the Hungry” in cities and towns around the US and elsewhere, including Cambodia and India. We invite you to join us in this effort. You can help by mobilizing the members of your temple, dharma group, or community to participate in a walk, near you, or you can start a walk in your area. For help in organizing a walk, contact info@buddhistglobalrelief.org.

2018 BCA Educational Events
Programs subject to change.
Events at the Jodo Shinshu Center (JSC) unless otherwise noted.

September 9-16 ~ Tomoshie Tour. A group of young Jodo Shinshu priests will perform shadow graph storytelling, followed by Dharma talks on the stories’ themes. Three stories will be performed at LA Betsuin (Sept. 9 & 10), San Mateo Buddhist Temple (Sept. 12), and Seattle Betsuin (Sept. 16). Free admission, donations gratefully accepted. Visit BuddhistChurchesofAmerica.org. Sponsored by BCA Center for Buddhist Education (CBE).

September 14-16 ~ 45th BCA Federation of Buddhist Women’s Associations’ National Conference, Marriott Hotel, Visalia, CA. Keynote speakers: Rev. Bob Oshita and Rev. Ryuta Furumoto. Contact your BWA to register. Email BuddhistWomensAssociation.Reg@gmail.com for details.

September 25-27 ~ Ministers’ Continuing Education (MCE) Seminar. Study and discussion for BCA ministers. Schedule TBD. Sponsored by CBE.

September 29 ~ Creating Inclusive Youth Programs Seminar: Supporting LGBTQ Youth & Families: Nurturing Compassionate Communities. Keynote speaker: Aiden Azumi. A half-day seminar for leaders of youth programs with focus on supporting LGBTQ youth and families at our temples and affiliated youth programs. Speakers will be from Jodo Shinshu Buddhist and Christian perspectives. Register by September 21; $20 donation includes lunch. Visit buddhistchurchesofamerica.org to download form or register online.

October 26-27 ~ Adult Buddhist Association (ABA) Leaders Workshop for ABA Leaders and Aspiring Leaders: Topics include: What is ABA? Why have an ABA? How to grow an ABA. Visit buddhistchurchesofamerica.org to download form or register online.

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The 2018 British Columbia Jodo Shinshu Temple Federation Convention and Annual Meeting will be hosted by the Vernon Buddhist Temple on September 8-9, 2018. The theme: “Buddhism and Moving Forward Just As You Are: Living in These Uncertain Times,” will be addressed by Hongonji minister and author, Rev. Dr. Kenneth Tanaka, and professional photojournalist, Wayne Ern. Vernon, BC is located in the beautiful Northern Okanagan region of Canada, known for its lakes and beaches. Convention hotel accommodations are at the Village Green Hotel. For further information, please contact cameron37@shaw.ca.
Postscript: For the last ten years, the BCA Center for Buddhist Education and more recently this Wheel of Dharma has been enhanced by the contributions and efforts of Edythe Vassall. It is with a heavy heart that I announce to all of you that Edythe will be leaving CBE and the Wheel of Dharma for which I offer her my deepest respect. As we will all miss her presence, I am happy for her in the beginning with the fulfillment of a personal obligation that she is moving on to the next chapter in her life, as we will all miss her presence, I am happy for her in the beginning with the fulfillment of a personal obligation that she is moving on to the next chapter in her life, as we will all miss her presence, I am happy for her in the beginning with the fulfillment of a personal obligation that she is moving on to the next chapter in her life.

I wonder if she is not a sign of respect to the next guests. A sign of respect to the next guests. A sign of respect to the next guests.

When we’re eating our peanuts and throwing the shells on the floor or spilling our drinks and throwing the paper wrappers and other waste on the floor, we’re doing it because it’s a matter of convenience for ourselves. We don’t think about a particular instance that may cause damage to their ears and cleaning the stadium after their match.

When I think about how much we’ve grown. To the students, I hope you are all proud of what we have accomplished, and especially of how much we’ve grown. To the students, I hope you are all proud of what we have accomplished, and especially of how much we’ve grown. To the students, I hope you are all proud of what we have accomplished, and especially of how much we’ve grown. To the students, I hope you are all proud of what we have accomplished, and especially of how much we’ve grown.

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When we’re eating our peanuts and throwing the shells on the floor or spilling our drinks and throwing the paper wrappers and other waste on the floor, we’re doing it because it’s a matter of convenience for ourselves. We don’t think about a particular instance that may cause damage to their ears and cleaning the stadium after their match.

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私事半分、5月の末に第2の子供が生まれました。大歓迎で、家族全員で喜んでいます。この成長もまた、私たちにとって大きな喜びと感謝の場です。自分たちの家族の成長を見守っている全ての人々に感謝の意を表します。

最近は旅行や仕事のため、家にいる時間が少なく、子どもたちとの時間も減っています。しかし、この成長を共有することは、私たちにとってとても価値ある体験です。子どもたちの成長を見守るのは、父や母としての大きな役割であり、多くの喜びもあります。

ところで、このたびの記事では、私達の家族生活について少し触れることにします。家の中では、それぞれが自分の役割を果たしている様子が見受けられます。母親は毎日、食事の準備や清掃を担当し、父親も仕事の真っただ中で子どもたちを支えています。家族の関係は、日々の生活の中で自然と築かれることでしょう。

家族生活は、喜びと悩みが混ざり合った世界であり、その中で自由に成長することを願っています。子どもたちが健やかに育つよう、私たちは心より願っています。
7月28日に米国CA本部の三間寺真言宗・オランジューム・ジュロムで開催された。テーマは「AIと仏教」で、スライドショーやホワイトボードを使ったセッションが行われた。参加者は、AIの普及に伴う仏教の解釈や役割についての考察を交えつつ、AIが仏教の教えをどのように支えているのかについて議論した。

日本を含む各国の仏教徒らが参加し、AIと仏教の関わりについての新たな視点を提供した。