

**Sosen Sūhai to Nichijō Seikatsu** (Ancestor Worship  
and Japanese Daily Life)

By Hashimoto, Tatsumi, Tokyo: *Inochi no Koto*  
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**Ancestor Worship and Japanese Daily Life**

By Tatsumi Hashimoto, Translated by Dr. Percy  
T. Luke, Tokyo: *Word of Life Press*, 1962, pp.  
63, ¥200.

In his original work in Japanese,\* of which this essay is a review, the author tries to distinguish between original or true Buddhism, on the one hand, and Japanese Buddhism, on the other. This he does by carefully studying the vernal and autumnal equinox festivals (*Higan-e*), the summer festival for the dead (*Urabon-e*), mortuary tablets (*ihai*), Buddhist family altars (*butsudan*), and ancestor worship (*sozen sūhai*), etc. As a result he comes to the conclusion that such rituals, ceremonies, and customs are observed improperly by the Japanese people and that, consequently, original or true Buddhism has disappeared from this country. As a student of

Japanese Buddhism I heartily support his final conclusion. I regret to say, however, that there are a number of elementary errors which greatly detract from the book from a scholarly point of view. For example, there are mistakes in the reading and interpretation of technical Buddhist terms, in the understanding of the original Buddhist ideas, and in regard to the origin of certain rites.

**Misreading of Chinese Words.**

Examples of corrections that should be made in the reading of Chinese words are as follows: change *pari* to *pāri* 巴利 (*Pāṭi*) (p. 17, 6), *donyoku* to *tonyoku* 貪欲

\* Page references in this review are generally to the Japanese edition. However, the figures in parentheses within parentheses refer to the English translation.

(pp. 24, 11, 38), *kyōka* to *kuge* 供花 (p. 34), *gubutu* to *kumotsu* 供物 (p. 34), *shūchaku* to *shūjaku* 執着 (p. 38), *hatsu-bodaijin* to *hotsu-bodai-shin* 発菩提心 (p. 45), *hōzō* to *hossō* 法相 or to *hosshō* 法性 (p. 59), *shūtai* to *jūtai* or *juttai* 集諦 (p. 59 42), *seitai* to *shōtai* 聖諦 (p. 59), and *shoku* to *soku* 触 (p. 62(44)).

### Errors in Chinese Ideographs

Change the following:

*haramita* 婆羅蜜多 to 波羅蜜多 (p. 11),

*hannya* 槃若 to 般若 (p. 12),

*anjiki* 飯食 to 飲食 (p. 19),

*jōdōmon* 淨道門 to  
jōdomon 淨土門 (p. 21(10)),

*butsunin ichinyo* 仏人一如 (Buddha and man are one) to

*shōbutsu ichinyo* 生仏一如 (Buddha and living beings are one),

or to *butsubon ittai* 仏凡一休 (Buddha and ordinary man are one) (p. 58 (41)).

### Misinterpretation of Technical

#### Terms

The author interprets *shujō* 衆生 to mean "human beings" (*ningen* 人間) (p. 11(1)), but the correct meaning of this word is "all living

beings."

The expression, "*Fuse* 布施 is also called *danna* 檀那," should be changed to "The meaning of the Sanskrit word *dāna* is fuse 布施. *Danna* 檀那 is the Japanese phonetical reading of *dāna*." He mistakenly interprets *fu* 布 as heart (*kokoro* 心) (p. 12 (2)), but the correct meaning of *fu* 布 is the same as *se* 施, that is, giving. Moreover, he says at this point that "the word *danka* 檀家 is also derived from this source," but *danka* 檀家 is a word derived from the Sanskrit word *dānapati*, that is, *dan* is the phonetical reading of *dāna* (giving) and *ka* is the meaning of *pati* (master).

The expression, "*Hannya* 槃若 is also called *chie* 知恵" (p. 12 (2)), should be changed to "*Hannya* 般若 is the phonetical reading of *prajñā* in Sanskrit, or *paññā* in Pāli, and means *chie* 智慧." He also says, "*Butchi* 仏智 is also called *zen-chishiki* 善知識," but the latter is different from the former, for *butchi* 仏智 is the Buddha's wisdom, and *zen-chishiki* 善知識, *kalvāṇa-mitra* in Sanskrit, means "the good teacher."

*Goyoku* 五欲 is interpreted as the

lust of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body (p. 13 (3)), but strictly speaking, *goy ku* 五欲 indicates the five objects which cause the five organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body) to arouse lust. Therefore, *goyoku* 五欲 should be interpreted as the lust of matter (*shiki* 色), voice (*shō* 声), perfume (*kō* 香), taste (*mi* 味) and touch (*soku* 触).

One page 18 (7) the author says, "the word *Uraben-e* 盂蘭盆会 is a phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit word *ullambana*," but this is incorrect, because *Uraben-e* 盂蘭盆会 means "the ceremony of *Urabon* 盂蘭盆" and *Urabon* is phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit word *ullambana*.

Moreover, he says that *kie* 皈依 is a translation of a Sanskrit word *nātha* which has the meaning of "lord" (p. 21 (10)); but this is based on a misunderstanding, because *kie* is *śaraṇa* in Sanskrit, which means "devotion."

*Shaku* 釈 at the top of the Buddhist posthumous (*kaimyō*) is interpreted as an indication of enlightenment (*shakuzen* 釈然) (p. 26 (14)), but this also is incorrect,

because *shaku* 釈 is put at the head of the Buddhist name or the posthumous name in the meaning that one has become a disciple or believer of the Buddha, that is, Shaka 釈迦 or Sākya (Skt.).

Again, it is incorrect to say that *shiki* 色, one of five elements (*go-un* 五蘊) is sensation (*kankaku* 感覺) (p. 38(24)). *Shiki* 色 means matter (*busshitsu* 物質).

The author refers to *shō-u* 生有, *shi-u* 死有 and *chū-u* 中有, and interprets *u* 有 in each case as cause and effect which continue forever (p. 56 (39)). In this case, however, *u* 有 means the "state of existence."

Finally it is incorrect to say that *shiki* 識, one of *jūniinnen* 十二因縁 means nature (*seishitsu* 性質) (p. 61 (44)). *Shiki* 識 means consciousness (*ishiki* 意識).

### Questions about the Origin of Rites and Thoughts

*HIGAN-E* The author also states that "in accordance with the *Jōdo Zanmai-kyō* 淨土三昧經 the practice of Higan-e was observed eight times a year. But with the growth of Jōdo (Pure Land) Buddhism which is Japanese Buddhism,

the practice of observing these days was reduced to twice a year, mid-spring and mid-autumn" (p. 13(3)). This is a very vague statement. An accurate expression would be as follows: "The Jōdo Zammai-kyō states that the practice of *higan* was observed eight times a year, but the Pure Land Buddhists in China established the custom of observing it only twice a year, mid-spring and mid-autumn. (*higan* 彼岸 means literally "the other side," originally "the world of enlightenment," and in Pure Land Buddhism "the Western Pure Land of Amida.") As for *Higan-e* 彼岸会, the ceremony of *higan*, which is connected with ancestor worship, this appears only in Japan. Therefore, we should differentiate between the observance of *higan* 彼岸 and the ceremony of *higan*, that is, *Higan-e* 彼岸会. Moreover, *Higan-e* seems to have become a part of Japanese folk-belief about ancestral spirits. Accordingly, the author's saying that *Higan-e* taught by the founder of Buddhism has nothing whatever to do with the spirits of the deceased ancestors (p. 14 (4)) should be changed to "the observances

related to *higan* taught by . . ."

*URABON-E* The author says that Buddhist scholars are all agreed that the *Urabon-kyō* is neither a teaching of the Buddha, nor of his disciples in India, but that it is actually the writings of a Chinese priest (p. 16 (5)). This is not entirely correct, because the origin of *ullambana* can be found in India. In ancient India, it was thought that a man who died without an heir would descend into hell. From this there arose in India the notion that a father whose son becomes a Buddhist priest would suffer the agony of "hanging upside-down (*ullambana*) in the world of devils, because becoming a Buddhist priest means that a man will have no heir. A story concerning this concept can be found in the *Mahābhārata*. Therefore, some Buddhist scholars insist that not all of the *Urabon-kyō* was written in China, even though many phrases were added in China. Incidentally, there is an opinion that *Urabon-e* in Japan originated in welcoming the spirits of the dead (*tama-mukae* 魂迎え), a Japanese folk-belief, and that it was connected with *Urabon-e* in

Buddhism after Buddhism was introduced into Japan.

The author also states that Buddhism first entered China from India through central Asia and Sinkiang (p. 20 (9)) in 67 A.D. This is a well known tradition, but of late it has been discarded. The prevailing opinion is that in 2 B.C. a messenger who came to China from central Asia taught about Buddhism. Moreover, there is a record that as early as 65 A.D. a member of the royal family had faith in Buddhism.

IHAI The author's opinion that mortuary tablets (*ihai*) originated in Confucianism may be right (p. 23 (11)), but he has not mentioned the origin of the form of the *ihai*. The custom of entrusting the mortuary tablet (on which a man's name and official rank were written in his lifetime) to a "divine soul," arose in Confucianism in China, and it is believed by some that Buddhism adopted this. It was introduced into Japan with Zen Buddhism. But there is another opinion that the *ihai* had its origin in the concept of a "substitute spirit" (*tama-shiro* 霊代) in ancient

Shinto. In other words, the *ihai* was a kind of *yorishiro* 依代, that is, "a thing possessed with a divine soul."

RINNE TENSHŌ The author asks, "For what reason should we have to pray for the relief of a man who has departed from ignorance (*mumyō* 無明) and entered the spritual world?" (p. 38 (23)) Moreover, he insists that the question of our eternal salvation is determined while we are still living on this earth (p. 45 (29)). According to the theory of transmigration (*rinne tenshō* 輪廻転生), however, all men do not necessarily go to a buddha-land. Even though some may fall into hell as the result of bad actions before death, they still have the possibility of going to the buddha-land. Therefore, it is argued, we should transfer the merit of our own good actions and prayers to the dead, and, by the way of adding it to their own virtue acquired through good action in the life after death, enable them to enter the buddha-land. Of course, the concept of transmigration or transference (*ekō* 回向) of this kind is not an original but a developed Buddhist concept.

## REVIEWS

Originally, Buddhism adopted the theory of transmigration with the intention of establishing man's subjectivity, that is, stressing man's personal activity and responsibility. Transference is also stressed from the viewpoint of accumulating one's own virtuous deeds and transferring them for the sake of other people's happiness. Accordingly, the author's opinion that "in the doctrine of transmigration the dignity of man's personal character and individuality, as well as man's sense of conscious personal responsibility,

become indistinct"(p. 45(29)) seems to be based on a misunderstanding.

**Note:** The English translation is satisfactory for the general reader, but not for those concerned with technical accuracy. For example, there are many errors such as the one on page 7 where the Sanskrit word *ullambana* is mistakenly written *Ururambara*; but it is not worthwhile to call attention to these. Before being sent to a printer, translations of this type of publication should always be checked by specialists.

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