

Stand By Your Founder

Honganji's Struggle with Funeral Orthodoxy

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Pure Land Buddhist texts and practices have been part of the fabric of Japanese Buddhism since the Nara period, but they grew to have significantly greater impact in the Kamakura period when the first independent schools of Pure Land Buddhism were founded by Hōnen and Shinran. This article looks at the evolution of ritual funeral practices carried out within the Pure Land school of Shinshū, particularly the Honganji establishment, and discusses the apparent conflict many of these practices have had with orthodox Shinshū doctrine. The core issue here is twofold: 1) the ways in which Honganji decided to participate in mortuary rites to assuage the anxiety of its lay followers and strengthen its own financial base through the revenue it generated, and 2) the degree to which these practices could be rationalized in terms of their doctrinal orthodoxy. After tracing the historical links between Pure Land Buddhism and the afterlife in Japan, the article looks at the views of Shinran as well as the interpretations of Tokugawa-period scholars who tried to issue "rulings" on where Honganji orthodoxy should stand regarding the funeral rituals performed by Shinshū priests. By the Tokugawa period, mortuary rites had come to dominate Shinshū culture, and the most common of such rites are examined here: the kue-issho, o-toki, eitai-kyō, and hōon-kō.

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AS SCHOLARS IN the social sciences and humanities struggle with the means for cross-cultural comparisons in the face of interpretivist assumptions about the uniqueness of events, the study of Buddhism offers a particularly fruitful historical example of unity-cum-diversity in the plethora of orthodoxies and orthopraxies that evolved within each of its cultural spheres. While the Buddhist philosophical imperative has always professed itself to be *universal* in offering various strategies

for liberation based on general principles, this global, often meta-psychological, dimension was in continual negotiation with none other than those who practiced Buddhism within the confines of their *particular* social contexts. The most salient example of this evolving reformulation of the Buddhist tradition is evident in the accretion of new practices and beliefs only partially related, or at times even wholly unrelated, to those early forms of praxis and doctrine appearing in the *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas*. When the tension inherent in the conflict between competing belief systems became too strong, authoritative intellectuals within the clergy attempted to regulate the debate, often handing down rulings on matters of controversy.

There are numerous examples of this as recorded in a genre we may call “rulings.” Those works still extant are with us because they were canonized at some point in recognition of the important role they played in redefining or, as is often said in Jōdoshinshū, “reforming” their tradition in response to perceived changes in belief and practice. These texts appear in different literary forms or subgenres but all were intended as public statements about orthodoxy and offer us a snapshot of what Bakhtin called the centripetal (canonizing) and centrifugal (hyperglossic) forces within a culture.¹ Examples include scholastic analyses of disparate positions told from a sectarian viewpoint as presented in Abhidharma works like *Kathāvattu*, *Mahāvibhāṣā*, or *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* of Vasubandhu; compendiums of hermeneutic norms like *Ta chih tu lun* 大智度論 attributed to Nāgārjuna or *Ta-cheng i-chang* 大乘義章 by Hui-yūan of the Ching-ying ssu; treatises “settling doubts” like *Ching-t’u shih-i-lun* 淨土十疑論 attributed to Chih-i or *Kettō jujūin gimonjō* 決答授手印疑問鈔 by Ryōchū; sectarian identity statements like Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā*, *Ch’ing-te chuan-têng-lu* 景德傳燈錄 by Tao-yan, *Fo-tsu t’ung-chi* 佛祖統紀 by Chih-p’an, *Risshū kōyō* 律宗綱要 by Gyōnen, or *Gaijashō* 改邪鈔 by Kakunyo; and openly polemic works such as Shen-hui’s *Pu-t’i-ta-mo nan-tsung ting shih-fei lun* 菩提達摩南宗定是非論, *Hossō kenjinshō* 法相研神章 by Gomyō, *Zaijarin* 摧邪輪 by Kōben, or Nichiren’s *Risshō ankokuron* 立正安國論.

All these works operate on a discourse level defined by the community of the sangha. That is, they illustrate hermeneutic debates among intellectuals who shared a culture of values and beliefs defined by common oral and written traditions. But for someone without a spe-

¹ Bakhtin saw a tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces in language use as the basic paradigm of human speech. Centripetal forces are those that draw energy toward the normative center, implying homogeneity, unification, and order. Centrifugal forces move away from the center, expressing nonconformity, creativity, diversity, and so forth. See BAKHTIN 1981.

cialist's knowledge of Buddhist vocabulary and its doctrinal systems, these writings are more or less impenetrable. Thus what we call Buddhism inevitably embodies very different functions and meaning structures to people depending on their proximity to this group of literate cognoscenti who alone have been able to not only decode but also interpret this philosophical tradition. This article examines one historical example of the fact that this state of affairs did not preclude participation in the religion by a great many outside this perimeter of specialist knowledge, and it is my hope that it will shed some light on the ways in which "popular" aspirations were accommodated by the Buddhist clergy in one particular historical example. Indeed, it is often far more difficult to gain a clear picture of what Buddhism meant as a civil religion than to reconstruct the philosophical debates that dominate ancient and medieval Buddhist literature. The issue here is the care and ritual treatment of the dead by their families in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japan.

Given the historical differences between Indian Buddhist presumptions about rebirth and native Japanese views of the afterlife, conceptual conflicts regarding the care and treatment of the dead within Japanese Buddhist institutions were bound to arise. The case of the Pure Land Buddhist sects that arose in the Kamakura period is particularly poignant in that these conflicts are often expressed in terms of the very doctrines that gave these organizations their religious identities. I will present a few particularly telling examples of the funerary rituals that had become common in temples of the Honganji branch of the Jōdo Shin sect (Jōdo Shinshū or, simply, Shinshū) from the late medieval and early premodern periods, and the doctrinal quandary they engendered. I will discuss four popular ceremonies, all of which have left an imprint on the religious consciousness in Japan today. The doctrinal implications of these rituals, including such practices as interring the remains of the dead in the sacred locale of Shinran's own grave, inevitably clash with this school's doctrinal idealism, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the scholars who were responsible for systemizing those doctrines in the middle Tokugawa period. The writings on such problems by two prominent priests, Ekū 慧空 (1644–1722) and Genchi 玄智 (1734–1794), will be considered here. Both men devoted their careers to clarifying and upholding the doctrinal orthodoxy of their sect, and both were extremely influential among sectarian scholars even into the twentieth century. Hence their writings on this subject have come down to us in the form of rulings. But first I will present an overview of religious care for the dead in the formative period of this tradition; specifically, how this subject was dealt with by the founder Shinran and the two most influential church

leaders who followed him in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Kakunyo 覺如 (1271–1351) and Zonkaku 存覺 (1290–1373).

Japanese Pure Land Buddhism and Funerary Ritual

Care for the dead seems to have been implicit in the Buddhist mission from the beginning of its arrival in Japan. Among the earliest records of how Buddhism was practiced in Japan we have the example of Gyōki 行基 (668–749, also Gyōgi),² a self-ordained monk who is well known for spreading Buddhism among the countryside populace by his itinerant preaching and performance of social work. What is less well known is that social work for Gyōki included taking care of the dead as he found them—often abandoned. Gyōki is seen as the archetype of the itinerant *hijiri*, usually written 聖 but also found as 仙衆 and 非事吏. Typically these *hijiri* were eremitic holy men who straddled the line between monk and layman and who became conduits for communication between the populace embedded in the native religious sentiment and the academically trained clergy.³ *Hijiri* were always close to funerary practices in one way or another, even if only to lend their sacrality to the removal of pollution from a grave site. Gyōki's religious message for the masses seems to have been focused on purification rituals associated with the *Lotus Sutra* and the promise of rebirth in Amida's Pure Land, and he is often referred to as a *nenbutsu hijiri* 念佛聖. Gyōki inspired a number of other *hijiri*,⁴ and through their efforts Amida's Pure Land became firmly planted in the Japanese popular imagination.

At the opposite end of the social spectrum, the late Heian *ōjō-den*

² There are many studies on Gyōki, including a dictionary. See, for example, INOUE 1997, NAKAI 1991, and NEMOTO 1991.

³ The word *hijiri* long predates the influx of Buddhism and Chinese culture, so the written form 聖 is clearly a translation of the original concept. Scholars have come up with a number of different etymologies, such as “knowledge of the sun” 日知 (i.e., knowing the calendar), “knowledge of spirits” 靈知, “knowing what is not” 非知, and so forth. In ancient and medieval literature it appears in a variety of contexts to describe holy, pious, charismatic, or simply powerful individuals, and is commonly used to express respect or awe for kings and influential monks. The historians' category called *hijiri* typified by Gyōki is a subcategory of the broader term, defined by the lack of a fixed abode and by religious activities outside the urban areas (see GORAI 1975). A study has been made on the travelling *hijiri* who raised money for temple construction in the Kamakura period in GOODWIN 1994.

⁴ The most famous example of a *nenbutsu hijiri* who modeled himself on Gyōki is Kūya 空也 (903–972), founder of Rokuharamitsu-ji in Kyoto and nicknamed “Amida-hijiri” for his activities promoting *nenbutsu* practice. Kūya also had a loose association with the monastic establishment: after receiving the name Kūya as a novice at twenty, he did not take the full monastic precepts until the age of forty-nine, after which he rejected using the name he received at that time, Kōshō 光勝. See FUTABA 1987.

往生伝 records present stories of prominent individuals who “attained the Pure Land.”⁵ Strong religious interest among the ruling classes in Pure Land Buddhism to secure their future rebirths is evident from the tenth century onward under the influence of the Tendai patriarch Ryōgen 良源 (912–985), who died uttering the *nenbutsu*. In the same year as Ryōgen’s death, two important literary works on this theme written in *kanbun* appeared that had wide circulation among the educated: *Nihon ōjō gokuraku-ki* 日本往生極樂記 by Yoshishige Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (d. 1002) and *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 by Genshin 源信 (942–1017). Both authors were members of a group that gave center stage to Pure Land Buddhist rituals both at the time of death and at funerals. Emblematic of this interest among the oligarchy of the Fujiwara clan were Michinaga 道長 (966–1028), the most powerful politician of the mid-Heian period who spent a fortune building the Byōdō-in as a retreat, and his son Yorimichi 頼通 (992–1074), who erected on the Byōdō-in site to his father’s memory a magnificent mausoleum, which is popularly known as the Phoenix Hall though the actual name is Amida Hall. Although Michinaga engaged in and supported a host of different Buddhist practices, including a pilgrimage to Mt. Kōya, it is this overt display of faith by the Fujiwara elite in the role of Buddhism as mediator with the forces of the next world that had arguably the greatest impact on at least the society of the capital, if not the nation as a whole. As so much of what Michinaga did was copied by others with means, his Buddhist preparations for his own death seem to have provided an enormous stimulus for the eventual marriage of monastery and graveyard.

In the Kamakura period, a number of changes occurred in Japanese funerary culture. One of the most significant was the awarding of monastic names to laymen on their deathbeds (and even after death in some cases) to prepare them for the challenges in the next world. The practice of using memorial tablets on family altars to commemorate the dead is Confucian in origin, but gradually over the Kamakura and Muromachi periods a change occurred in which the tablets began to carry the monastic name of the deceased rather than the original family name. The implication is obvious: in life father may be head of the family, but in death he has joined the sangha. Thus membership in the professional community pledged to maintain the Dharma was seen as a prerequisite for salvation in the afterlife. These monastic names are called either *kaimyō* 戒名, which means something like “precept

⁵ These ninth-century figures do not appear in Yoshishige Yasutane’s first *ōjō-den*, which is mostly restricted to the most famous of people, but they do appear in the later collections. See a list of ninth- and tenth-century names of recorded *ōjō* attainers in ITO 1974, pp. 19–20.

name,” or *hōmyō* 法名, which expressed the more generalized religious commitment of “Dharma name.” Shinshū adherents also participate in this practice, insisting on using only the term *hōmyō* because, as EKŪ reasons, “How can we give someone a name signifying the precepts when they are in fact not obeying the precepts?”⁶ (1698, p. 289).

The Tokugawa period is well known as a time of relative political isolation for Japan. The military government evolved a policy that regarded Buddhism as largely an administrative institution, and this led to a variety of consequences. For example, tight controls were now set by law regarding the minimal educational requirements a monk needed to become the abbot of a temple or monastery, and even the maximum time allowed to complete those requirements. Various restrictions were also put on relations between the monasteries and lay society. Perhaps best known is the fact that the monastic networks in Japan were asked to serve as census takers. Each family was required to register with a Buddhist (or Shinto) institution, and the monasteries as religious institutions were expected to provide certain services for their newfound parishioners, including care for the dead. This assumption reflects the fact that by the end of the sixteenth century, a great many small temples had come to depend upon income derived from mortuary rites.⁷ Both Ekū and Genchi note that there are many kinds of funerary culture throughout the land, not only Buddhist. Ekū in particular frequently refers to entrenched local traditions that he considers secular or worldly (*zoku* 俗), remarking that even Buddhist monks have no choice but to follow them at times. Comments like this indicate that the funerary role of the Buddhist clergy at this time was not entirely at the discretion of the monks themselves.

Funeral Consciousness in Shinshū

The Jōdo Shin school, or Shinshū, developed as a religious institution with unswerving loyalty to the normative doctrines outlined by its founder, Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), whose writings retained an authoritative status tantamount to *buddhavacana* throughout this period. Because Shinran publicly abandoned monasticism to take a wife, this school has sanctioned marriage for its clergy since the thirteenth century,

⁶ Ekū notes that some people think the *kaimyō* are not for people who have maintained the precepts, but for those who have not; hence they change the written form from the usual 戒名 “precept name” to 改名 “rectified name.”

⁷ As larger, older monasteries commanded greater respect in the general population when it came to funerals and graves, it was not uncommon for smaller temples at this time to change their sectarian affiliation not on religious grounds but in order to align themselves with these prestigious institutions (TAMAMURO 1987, pp. 44–45).

and this fact seems to have aided its spread among rural, working class populations. In combining blood and doctrinal lineage as legitimating tools for Dharma succession, Shinshū has a unique history among pre-modern Buddhist schools, and in many ways it expresses a religious culture that can be seen as an amalgam of Mahayana Buddhist idealism and native Japanese sentiments about the world and human nature.

By the dawn of the Tokugawa period, the Honganji branch of the school had grown so large and powerful that it was able to establish itself as an independent political domain, and today it is acknowledged as the largest religious institution in Japan. Together with its size and influence, its ideological iconoclasm often led others to regard it as a potential threat to the status quo, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century the largest faction within Shinshū, Honganji, had been deftly split in two by the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu. It is these two branches of the Honganji institution that our scholars Ekū and Genchi represent.

The orthodox Shinshū position on death is standard Mahayana, and the postmortem goal of reaching the Pure Land must be understood within this paradigm. That is, the rebirth process includes a liminal state between death and rebirth called *antarābhava* (J. *chūin* 中陰 or *chūu* 中有). Texts such as the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (J. *Kusharon*) explain that transitional beings called *gandharvas* wander in this state with a subtle form of the *pañca-skandha*, looking for suitable conditions for their next place of birth. In the Abhidharma literature this intermediate state is a time when the karmic residue from one life is reorganized and reunited with a new identity in the next. The typical duration of *antarābhava* in Mahayana as well as the Sarvāstivādin school is forty-nine days, the same length of time that still marks the arrangement of postmortem memorial ceremonies in Shinshū today.⁸ At the popular level of Shinshū faith, however, the *antarābhava* condition is understood as the period of time required for ritual purification of the dead soul, a process that transforms it into a suitable participant in the sacred grave of Shinran, from which it will enter the Pure Land where the Founder resides. No matter how saintly a dead family member may have been in life, everyone is polluted by the physical transformation of death and needs to be purified before embarking on the important journey. Although the forty-nine day period marks the end of formal mourning on a daily basis, in Japanese Buddhism memorial services to benefit the dead typically continue

⁸ NISHIKAWA (1991, pp. 65–68) gives an example from the sixteenth century of an accelerated ceremonial timetable used for the funeral of Jitsunyo 實如 (1458–1525), ninth abbot of Honganji and fifth son of Rennyō.

for many years afterward. By the Tokugawa period, similar to today's custom, people generally held services on the death anniversary for the first three years. After that it varied, but ten-, thirteen- or seventeen-year services were common, usually followed by a twenty-five-year memorial, and finally ending at either thirty-three or fifty years. At that point the family's obligation has ended because the deceased has become either a buddha or a kami. Such services are generally conceptualized as a means of sending karmic merit to the deceased to assist this process of purification required for progress toward the Pure Land. As an expression of filial piety, however, despite the usual cut-off of thirty-three or fifty years, for many the felt need to continue sending weal remained, and this could be passed on to their progeny as what we might call a Confucian obligation. Writing in the eighteenth century, GENCHI refers to Honganji memorial services that were held as many as two hundred years after someone's death (1774, p. 50b).

But Shinshū's approach to funerals is complicated by the fact that its doctrine is monistic in nature, giving rise throughout its history to heightened concern for orthodoxy in thought and practice together with its sibling fear of heresy. Shinran attributes all religious gain to the power of one buddha, Amida, spawning interpretations that place Amida Buddha as the progenitor even of Śākyamuni Buddha. In addition to not recognizing the spiritual power of kami, orthodox Shinshū doctrine regards faith in other buddhas or bodhisattvas as antithetic to faith in Amida. Building on Pure Land Buddhist discourse in Japan going back to the Kamakura period, Shinshū makes great use of the terms *jiriki* 自力 and *tariki* 他力, or "power of the self" and "power beyond the self," to clarify that the locus of responsibility for individual spiritual progress along the Pure Land path lies with the enactment of the vows made by Amida Buddha eons ago. It is worth mentioning that in Kamakura-period usage *jiriki* is always used pejoratively, reflecting a strong sense of the holy in the word *tariki*. Indeed, *jiriki* and *tariki* may be translated "self-dominant" and "self-transcendent."

While all forms of Pure Land Buddhism doctrinally assert the accessibility of the Pure Land of Amida as an idealized intermediate goal, assuring its inhabitants quick progress to final enlightenment, Shinran's monistic standpoint understood Amida's Pure Land as equivalent to Nirvana itself, collapsing the distance between the two goals. Because he often referred to the occasion of Birth in the Pure Land, or *ōjō* 往生, in terms of the phrase "immediate Birth," or *sokutoku ōjō* 即得往生 as found in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*. Sectarian scholarship for centuries has argued over whether this means that Shinran's view was that one's Birth in the Pure Land occurs at death or whether the event of Birth itself is to be understood as a religious epiphany

experienced within this lifetime, paralleling the two kinds of nirvana attainment in Indian Buddhist doctrine. But regardless of one's interpretation of when *ōjō* occurs, there is no argument that the cornerstone of the Shinshū creed is that anyone fortunate enough to reach the Pure Land will do so only by the will of Amida: this is the proper *tariki* position. Even for those taking the position that *ōjō* occurs at death, to attempt to control one's postmortem fate by one's own efforts or the efforts of remaining family members therefore reflects an incorrect, heterodox *jiriki* position, and a rather embarrassing lack of faith.

Orthodox Shinshū doctrine would therefore seem to preclude any church involvement in funerary ritual. Shinran does not address this issue directly in any of his extant writings, but, speaking in opposition to prevailing *nenbutsu* rituals for the dead, he is quoted as having made the following statement:

I have never said the *nenbutsu* even once for the repose of my
father and mother. (*Tannishō*, ch. 5)⁹

In this statement Shinran is not rejecting filial piety. Rather, he is clarifying that his notion of the Pure Land Buddhist path precludes the use of its sacred invocation for funerary purposes. Can we infer from Shinran's words that the dead *do not need* ritual *nenbutsu* recited on their behalf? Or merely that *nenbutsu* was not bestowed by the Buddha for this purpose? The answer is not entirely clear. But for the Shinshū believer used to *nenbutsu* recitation at funerals in other schools of Buddhism, the only possible interpretation is either that Shinran's parents are already in the Pure Land and do not need any further assistance or that Shinran viewed the *nenbutsu* as something too sacred for what he regarded as a mundane ritual. Indeed, both meanings may apply.

On the other hand, the religious significance of death occupied a central position in the identity of the Honganji church practically from its inception. Despite the fact that Shinran explicitly told those around him that he did not want a grave, suggesting it made more sense to feed his body to the fish in the Kamo River, his death was publicly memorialized almost immediately at Shinshū *dōjō* throughout

⁹ *Tannishō* 歎異抄, T. no. 2661, 83.728. There are many translations of this work, among them BLOOM 1981 and BANDŌ 1996. The *Tannishō* contains a series of dialogues as recorded by a student of Shinran, and Shinran himself had nothing to do with its composition. It was not initially considered canonical within Shinshū, and there are scholars today who do not accept it as an authoritative source for Shinran's voice. The earliest extant manuscript is a copy made by Rennyō, but even he instructed his students not to show it to the rank-and-file members. My usage of it here does not reflect any judgement about its provenance but rather recognition of the fact that today it has become a centerpiece of Shinshū thought and is generally accepted by both branches of Honganji as representative of their stated doctrine. On Rennyō and the *Tannishō*, see TERAKAWA 1999.

Japan.¹⁰ For the group of followers led by his family members, these memorials took place on a regular basis at Shinran's grave. One of the most significant events in the early years after Shinran's death was the decision of his widow Eshinni in 1277 to donate land for the construction of a mausoleum at a new grave site to serve as the basis for the religious community in the capital, if not all lineages stemming from Shinran. And it was Shinran's great-grandson Kakunyo who is generally given credit for the important step of transforming Shinran's mausoleum into a temple called Honganji. Consciousness of the importance of this physical memorialization of Shinran can also be seen in the fact that for centuries even after the establishment of the Honganji designation, the official title of the head of the Shinshū community in Kyoto was custodian or caretaker (*rusushoku* 留守職) of Shinran's grave, a position that was never assigned outside the family.

Kakunyo's Hard-line Rejection of Funeral Ritual

Kakunyo's literary legacy is heavily weighted toward rulings. One could even argue that Kakunyo invented the genre for Shinshū with his *Gaijashō* 改邪鈔 (Notes rectifying heresy).¹¹ He also devoted considerable time to producing official biographies of Shinran, usually in the form of picture scrolls with text to create a more iconic representation. These scrolls begin to appear at the end of the thirteenth century and thereafter were widely copied, becoming a standard form of pious expression. Even the most widely read first biography of Shinran, known by the title *Godenshō* 御傳鈔, is actually the text portion of one of the biographical scrolls Kakunyo had commissioned, which he called "Biographical Illustration of Shinran, His Eminence of Honganji."¹² This work contains little more than a series of panels depicting Shinran's virtues, its hagiographic intent manifest in the fact that Shinran is revealed as an incarnation of Amida Buddha. But Kakunyo is not the first to use apotheosis; Eshinni herself refers to Shinran as an incarnation of Kannon in her letters, from which the later sectarian tradition justifies her decision to ignore his burial wishes.

At the time of Kakunyo, the Honganji structure was centered

¹⁰ This involved changing the custom set up by Shinran of memorializing Hōnen's death day. However, not all groups immediately switched to the day of Shinran's death, which was perceived to be an obstacle to the formation of a separate sectarian identity. See DOBBINS 1989, p. 80.

¹¹ A published version of *Gaijashō* can be found in SHINSHŪ SHŌGYŌ ZENSHO HENSANSHO 1941, vol. 3.

¹² *Honganji Shōnin Shinran denne* 本願寺聖人親鸞傳繪, also called *Shinran denne* or *Shinran den'z*. Original dated 1295, amended in 1345. See KOBAYASHI 1983.

around a shrine to Shinran; there was no hall to Amida Buddha. Today, in both branches of Honganji, the hall dedicated to Shinran stands side by side with the hall dedicated to Amida. Although Shinshū scholars today typically identify widespread Honganji participation in funerary ritual as representative of Tokugawa culture, Kakunyo's writings reveal that he saw enough of such activity in his time to prompt him to issue warnings of impropriety.¹³ His *Gaijashō*, written in 1337, admonished Shinshū clerics who engaged in Pure Land rituals for the deceased that such practices were contrary to Shinran's intent. It was a classic confrontation between taking care of doctrine versus taking care of the dead:

ISSUE: It is unwarranted for colleagues in our school who, at memorial assemblies honoring the virtues of our Founder, do nothing in regard to [enabling] those present to [attain] faith (*shinjin*) that leads to Birth in the Pure Land, but rather use these meetings as an occasion for funeral rituals for the dead.

COMMENT: We do not say the kind of things one finds in the path to self-perfection, but in Tantric discussions the stage of quickly realized great enlightenment in the body born from one's father and mother is extolled, and [it is claimed that] whether one reaches the Pure Land or falls into a realm of suffering is determined by a single *dharma* in the mind. We never say that an ordinary person in his state of the five *skandhas* can immediately ascend the platform of the Pure Land. Our notions of what is acceptable and unacceptable are different from other sects in essence and form; this is our standard. Thus to completely put aside addressing [the issue of] faith as it relates to Birth in favor of concerning oneself with aiding and assisting in funeral rituals for the dead is, from the point of view of the discourse (*dangō* 談合) central to our school, not representative of the realization of our Founder. We must recognize the fact that many people only regard us as if we were a shallow, worldly funerary organization, and they have no knowledge of [our teachings] of the path to Birth in the Pure Land for monastic and lay, male and female. In the past our Eminent Teacher said, "When my eyes close, just put me in the Kamo River and feed me to the fish." This statement expressed none other than disparagement of the body and the importance of faith in the Buddha's Dharma. For this reason I

¹³ See, for example, KANEKO et al. 1983, p. 331.

believe we really should not regard funerals as the most important thing we do. We should put a stop to this.

(*Gaijashō* 16, SHINSHŪ SHŌGYŌ ZENSHŌ
HENSANSHO 1941, vol. 3, pp. 80–81)

This passage tells us a number of important things about the debate within Shinshū regarding the issue of church involvement in funerals. First of all, Shinran's statement about what he expects for his own funeral (to be thrown in a river), together with his *Tannishō* rejection of invoking *nenbutsu* for his deceased parents, forms an important expression of his doctrine. Shinran rejects any sense of obligation on the part of the Pure Land practitioner to engage in ritual based on one's faith in Amida Buddha for dead friends and relatives, including the praxis he designated as most sacred: *nenbutsu*. Insofar as family observance of funerary ritual universally serves to solidify the family's internal bonds, particularly across generations, Shinran's position on rites for the dead reflects not Shinran the son and father but Shinran the Buddhist monk. That is, his statements express both his deep faith and the fact that his religious concerns are directed to this world, not the next. For Shinran, the postmortem destiny of anyone who has turned to the Pure Land path is never at issue, for the Buddha's covenant with sentient beings is not dependent on any form of ritual.

Zonkaku: The Compromise Begins

More evidence of the active role of Shinshū clergy in funeral ritual in the late Kamakura period is found in *Haja kenshō-shō* 破邪顯正抄 (Notes assailing heresy and revealing truth), a subsequent statement of rulings composed in 1324 by Kakunyo's son Zonkaku. This treatise is written in the form of an official document presented to court to defend the exclusive *nenbutsu* monks from attacks by religious leaders in other communities. One of the complaints is that *nenbutsu* practitioners do *not* provide any ritual assistance to the dead. Zonkaku responds:

ISSUE: Is it not extreme heresy that *nenbutsu* practitioners do not provide guidance on the path [to the next birth] for someone who has died?

COMMENT: There is something to this issue, but I will not argue against the accusation that adepts dedicated [to *nenbutsu*] do not provide guidance for the dead. But it is unreasonable to claim that [we] are saying that the heresy of withholding information is a good thing. Do the rituals performed by funeral leaders in the countryside that supposedly guide the dead really

lead them in the direction of the Land of Bliss among the possible directions available to them of the six realms? There is no need to lecture those who are headed for Birth through *nenbutsu*, as they will not be lost in the dim light of the six realms.¹⁴ This is because they will reach the Pure Land [regardless]. Even for someone who has not attained Birth, we do not stress the need to show him the way because, if we did so, that person would still not be born in the Pure Land. Therefore, in mourning [someone] on that mysterious path, the best method for promoting his or her release is the true words of the Buddha, according to what is provided in the holy teachings. People often teach the dead ridiculous things, having themselves ignored the correct explanation of scripture, and instead use their own skills at understanding. Thus what the deceased receives depends on the state of mind of the person doing the guidance.... Probably of all the merit accumulated for transfer to the deceased with the chanting of hymns, sutra lectures, and so forth, 70% stays here and perhaps only 10% reaches that mysterious path. How much less valuable is it for someone to try to assist [the dead] by his or her own devices! That is why we do not make use of these funerary rituals for *nenbutsu* practitioners. Looking at the *Kanbutsu zanmai-kyō* (Sutra of Buddha Samadhi Contemplation),¹⁵ however, we see that *nenbutsu*-samadhi functions as a signpost for people who have lost their way; it is indeed a lamp in the dark. Therefore, for one who has stopped on the dark intersection of the Six Realms... if someone [here] practices *nenbutsu* in mourning [to affect] where [the deceased] will be born, this will become a signpost [for him or her]. The Buddha has already made clear how bright a lamp this could be,

¹⁴ This is a reference to the practice of sutra reading and preaching to the deceased in a ritual context soon after death has occurred. As the exegetical tradition in Buddhism generally accepted the notion that consciousness, indeed all five *skandhas*, exist in subtle form in the state between death and birth, the belief was (and still is, in Tibet, for example) that for a time the deceased was still capable of exerting its will in a way that could influence its next birth.

¹⁵ *Fo-shuo kuan-fo sanmei hai-ching* 佛說觀佛三昧海經 (J. *Bussetsu kanbutsu zanmai kaikyō*, T. no. 643, 15.645). Thought to be based on the *Avatamsaka sūtra*, this text both exalts the *nenbutsu* and extols the virtues of samadhi attainment. See pp. 693a–697a for its discussion of *nenbutsu*-samadhi. Although it does not distinguish soteriologically between buddha visualization practice (*kanbutsu*) and buddha-name recitation practice (*nenbutsu*)—a key element in Hōnen's hermeneutic—its doctrines were well studied within all traditions of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Hōnen cites it in *Kanmuryōjūkyō-shaku*, and Shinran uses it as a proof-text for *nenbutsu*-samadhi in his *Kyōgyōshinshō*, citing a passage from Tao-ch'ō's *An-lo chi*.

and the effect would be immediate. For this reason, practitioners devoted to *nenbutsu* profoundly maintain the true words of the Buddha [in their funeral ceremonies], but they do not employ the skillful methods of fools.¹⁶

In contrast to Kakunyo's rigidity on the issue of funerals, Zonkaku thus takes a characteristically conciliatory tone. He skillfully manages to assert confidence in the Pure Land path by stating that those who have succeeded in attaining Birth (*ōjō*) are destined for Amida's Pure Land after death and therefore need no funeral service whatsoever. At the same time he recognizes that not everyone is so lucky and makes it clear that in these cases what Honganji monks refuse to perform is funerals *not based on Buddhist scripture*, but they have no aversion to rituals that express the true words of the Buddha. Zonkaku thereby opens the way for a reconciliation between doctrinal purity and social custom.

The differences between Kakunyo and Zonkaku over funeral orthodoxy for Honganji are indicative of the deep conceptual gap that divided them, and in some sense of the ambivalence within *honzan* leadership over mortuary rites in general.¹⁷ Kakunyo does not specify which groups were leading funerals or precisely what the content of these funerals was. But the passages certainly confirm not only that funerals were being performed by Shinshū clergy but that this was a widespread practice even though the church's proper role was still uncertain. We can also sense a tension between what the public wanted from the church and what the church leaders (at least Kakunyo) saw as its mission. It is worth noting that Kakunyo's transformation of Shinran's grave site into the Honganji church inevitably invited pilgrimage by the faithful, yet there is no reference in the *Gaijashō* passage to the grave and its central place in the Honganji identity. In other words, Kakunyo is either oblivious to or intentionally silent about the association that many Shinshū followers are apparently making between the foundational role of the sacrality emanating from Shinran's grave for Honganji continuity and the need for ritually transforming graves of intimate kin in a similar way for the continuity of families.

¹⁶ Point number eleven in the *Haja kenshō-shō* (see SHINSHŪ SHŌGYŌ ZENSHO HENSANSHO 1941, vol. 3, p. 175).

¹⁷ It is worth noting that despite the fact that Zonkaku was Kakunyo's son, Kakunyo's treatise was written thirteen years after that of Zonkaku and therefore can be assumed to include Zonkaku's positions, if only to distance himself from them. See discussion on these two works in DOBBINS 1989, pp. 88-98.

*Burial near Shinran and Sending Merit:
Premodern Precedents of Contemporary Shinshū Rituals for the Dead*

By the Tokugawa period, a strong connection had been established between the sacred locale of Shinran's grave and the church that stood upon it—conceptually if no longer physically—on the one hand, and the need of individual families to ritually transform their recent dead into a more sacred status by means of that same source of transcendent power, on the other. Individual families affiliated with either of the two Honganjis now saw both the physical temple as well as the grave site of the founder as embodying a unique soteriological power, and they clamored to bury their dead either at the founder's grave site or within the Honganji grounds. In the popular imagination, the mausoleum/cathedral complex had become the manifest gateway to the Pure Land, a final resting place for the community as a whole. In some sense, this is the fulfillment of the Shinshū mission to erase all distinctions between monk and layman, between Shinran's descendants and any person who stakes his or her future on the Buddha's salvific vows of compassion. Kakunyo's rejection of funerals had thus become untenable by at least the end of the fifteenth century, if not earlier, when the authoritative voices speaking for the church no longer tried to prevent their clergy from participating in funerals.¹⁸ They had their hands full simply trying to pass judgment on the propriety of the many forms of what were now institutionalized Shinshū rituals of interment.

It seems clear that by the onset of the Tokugawa period, both branches of the Honganji organization had become actively involved in funerary ritual,¹⁹ and most temples and *dōjō* had become financially dependent on money received for these services. Ekū and Genchi are concerned not about the question of whether Shinshū clergy should do funeral services, but how they should do them. Both scholars

¹⁸ For a discussion of the widespread practice of cremation and of Shinshū care for the cremated remains of Rennyo, Jitsunyo, and Shōnyo, see NISHIKAWA 1991.

¹⁹ In Shinshū, both Zonkaku and Rennyo contributed to the closer link between the clergy and their followers by allowing the use of the *Ti-ts'ang shih-wang ching* 地藏十王經 (Ti-ts'ang sutra of the ten heavenly kings), *Manji zokuzōkyō* No. 20, 1.404, in funeral liturgies. This apocryphal text proffers ten mythical kings as governors of ten stages for the deceased. In Japan the first seven kings appear at the seven weeks that make up the crucial forty-nine-day period between death and rebirth, and the final three kings then arrive to review the case. The ten kings can also be identified as manifestations of famous buddhas and bodhisattvas, and this usage is found in Hōnen, for example. Zonkaku advocates devotional practices to the ten heavenly kings for those who lack enough understanding of Pure Land doctrine to effect their own spiritual transformation to the Pure Land directly. See TAMAMURO 1963, p. 119, and TEISER 1994.

bemoan the inability of Shinshū intellectuals in Kyoto to “correct” some of the practices occurring in local Shinshū congregations throughout the country. A comparison of local temple records would undoubtedly reveal wide variation in funeral customs, but such a project has not yet been undertaken. Without exploring regional differences, however, there is ample evidence of funerary practices taking place at the administrative centers of Shinshū in the capital itself. In the process of accommodation to and appropriation of folk belief patterns, the institution of Honganji had thus created an economic base that ensured its continuation and growth, but the philosophical consequences were not insignificant.

Four Shinshū Mortuary Rites

The desire to tap into the charisma of holy sites for burial purposes seems to have spread rapidly in the Kamakura period. In some cases this led to the revival of relatively moribund institutions. In the case of Gangō-ji and Mt. Kōya, for example, from at least as early as the thirteenth century lay people brought human bones, sometimes cremated but sometimes not, to be buried. Such beliefs were closely tied to the goal of reaching Amida’s Pure Land, suggesting that the Pure Land in the popular mind was not something abstract and immensely distant, as described in the *Smaller Sukhāvatyūha Sutra* (100,000 x 100,000,000 worlds away), but actually located in remote yet reachable sacred locations, such as mountains and oceans. For many, paths to that realm could be trod at sacred locales consecrated by pilgrimage and/or places where the relics of important saints were interred. These were just some of the ways in which large numbers of people began to participate in Buddhist religious culture in the medieval period. To return to the example of Shinshū, below are four patterns of widespread ritual activity enacted at official funerals, all performative to some degree, that emerged from within this school from at least as early as the fourteenth century. The latter three demonstrate particular concern for sending karmic merit (*puṇya*) to the deceased.

1. TOGETHER FOREVER: *KUE-ISSHO* 俱会一処

As mentioned above, by the seventeenth century the two most sought-after burial grounds for Shinshū believers had become the site of the grave of Shinran, located at the foot of Higashiyama on the eastern side of Kyoto at what is called the *Ōtani honbyō* 大谷本廟 (Ōtani Mausoleum), and the Honganji compound itself. Originally located at the grave site, during Rennyo’s lifetime Honganji was rebuilt in Yamashina,

Osaka, and under Tokugawa Ieyasu it was split into two orders located in the center of Kyoto, about one hour's walk from the Ōtani Mausoleum.

Many families at this time followed the common Japanese custom of dual interment (*ryōbosei* 両墓制), dividing the remains of the deceased between the Shinran mausoleum or Honganji complex and a grave site close to the family residence. Although there are numerous examples of cremation among the upper classes in the Heian period, Shōnyo 證如 (1516–1554, the tenth abbot of Honganji) alludes to places where commoners (*zōnin* 雑人) were cremated in Rennyō's time, i.e., the second half of the fifteenth century, and Ekū confirms that cremation was the norm in his world of the late seventeenth century. But there were also communities that buried their dead uncremated and then dug up the bones after the first post-mortem Bon festival to divide them for reinterment. This meant that the bones of the deceased were mobile in that (1) the individual's passage into the next world did not require that the body remain intact, and (2) rituals were in place that effectively removed the pollution associated with corpses, a problem that otherwise would hinder or prevent the process of removing all or part of the skeletal remains.

Interment at the site of Shinran's grave was referred to as meeting together in one place (*kue-issho*), meaning the follower's remains were merged with the relics of Shinran. It is worth noting that when the remains are interred at Honganji rather than at Shinran's grave site, it is not because of a desire to be near Amida Buddha nor because of the Honganji monks' power as sangha. Believers seek burial at Honganji because the image of Shinran is enshrined there. In other words, both forms of *kue-issho* reflect the same construct that Kakunyo used to create the Honganji institution: the apotheosis of the founder, Shinran. Kakunyo used the medium of hagiographic biography affixed to the founder's likeness in iconic display to explain his vision of Shinran's transcendent charisma. What we are seeing in the *kue-issho* ritual is essentially the same vision now embodied in Shinran's relics and holy image, the latter enshrined on the church's most sacred altar as the central object of veneration, or *honzon*. Thus does the Honganji rest upon a fixed point of sanctity.

The advantages of the dual interment system are obvious. Whereas the local grave affords the family the opportunity to serve the deceased directly with offerings and prayers, the charismatic site in physical proximity to the founder serves as a guaranteed link with the Pure Land in the world beyond. It goes without saying that the local grave affords a family not only convenience in fulfilling filial duties but an appropriate locale within their known world where they can

ease the pain of severance at their own pace while resting assured that they have also served the deceased in his or her new state. Interestingly, in the mid-Tokugawa period the belief in the value of interment at either Honganji or Shinran's mausoleum grew so strong that some communities dispensed with local burial altogether.²⁰ That people were willing to sacrifice these emotional ties to family and home for a costly burial in the distant capital shows the foundational importance in the Honganji branch of Shinshū of an implied postmortem promise to benefit the faithful. In fact, at some point making a pilgrimage to Honganji was conflated with the devotional act of bringing a loved one's remains to the capital for interment, resulting in the phrase "pilgrimage to the Pure Land" (*ojōdo mairi* お浄土詣り) (SASAKI 1987, p. 252). As the practice of *kue-issho* grew in popularity, the competing mausoleums of the two Honganjis both ran out of space and in the middle of the eighteenth century they applied to the government for permission to expand. Competition between them only seems to have stoked this fire, for by 1861 Higashi Honganji had to establish a separate "bone office" to regulate the acceptance of cremated remains for interment at the Shinran Mausoleum (FUJISHIMA and HOSOKAWA 1963, pp. 226–27).

2. VEGETARIAN BANQUET: *O-TOKI* 御齋

Today the most common ritual used by Buddhist organizations in Japan as an occasion for raising money by sending karmic merit to the dead is the Ullambana or Bon (short for Urabon-e) festival. Both Honganjis have stubbornly refused to recognize this aspect of the yearly Bon festival. But that does not mean the practice of ritually sending weal or merit to the dead has been categorically excluded from Pure Land Buddhism under Honganji leadership. The need to provide this service has simply been too compelling to ignore, with the result that over time this function has been shifted to other ritual forms.

O-toki or *toki* is an ancient ceremony still observed by most Buddhist schools in Japan today that, in its generic form, designated the formal serving of a vegetarian meal before noon in compliance with the precepts. A religious service usually accompanied these events, within which some schools included offering rituals (*kuyō*) as well. Since the

²⁰ Some scholars have called this phenomenon of abandoning the local grave in favor of the single communal grave site at Honganji a "noninterment" (*mubosei* 無墓制). But *mubosei* is also used to refer to situations where there is no grave at all, such as when cremated remains are thrown over a cliff or into the ocean; *mubosei* only designates the lack of a grave or a marker for a grave within the local community. In an ethnographic study in Mie Prefecture, MORIOKA 1965 finds the motivation for not keeping local graves among Shinshū families to lie in Shinshū theology itself.

Heian period *toki* has been written either as 時 or 齋, with the latter form typically found in Shinshū records.²¹

Mention of the *toki* ceremony first appears in Honganji records during the sixteenth century, in the diaries of the Honganji leaders who lived just after Rennyō 蓮如 (1415–1499). In these events a donor makes a cash gift to a temple and also provides a meal for all monks present. In return the donor receives memorial services for the deceased of his choosing, including ritual transfer of all merit accruing from both the services performed and the donation to the sangha. Frequently referred to as the second founder of Shinshū, Rennyō deserves credit for turning Honganji into the dominant institution we know today. The diaries show repeated performance of the *toki* ceremony, strongly suggesting that the practice begins under Rennyō's leadership, as his legacy cast a long shadow over everything in Honganji, including institutional issues, doctrines, ceremony, and ritual.

The diary of Shōnyō, grandson of Rennyō, is filled with references to *toki* ceremonies.²² A typical entry for 1551 mentions a *toki* ceremony for the deceased parents of a Shinshū priest from Etchū, who in turn sponsored a meal for all priests at Honganji and donated 200 units of cash (*hiki* 疋) to the monastery.²³ Shōnyō records whom he divided the money with and often notes how much each person received. Some money went to individuals (for example, Rennyō's thirteenth son Jitsujū 實從 [1498–1564] usually received thirty units of cash), some to powerful temple allies such as Busshō-ji 佛照寺, some to the imperial court, and some to subtemples under Honganji leadership. These subtemples are referred to as *sanjūnichichi banshu* 三十日番衆 (the group of thirty days) because they performed services for thirty days for their remunerations, beginning on the twenty-eighth of each month, the anniversary of Shinran's death. The frequency of the *toki* ceremonies at Honganji as recorded by its abbot, the amount of money involved, and the systematic way in which it was used to maintain Honganji's extensive network of political relationships make it clear that there

²¹ The kanji 齋 is usually pronounced *sai*, as in the compound *saijiki* 齋食, designating a vegetarian meal served either to the monks by temple donors or to the donors by the monks. The form 御時 appears in the *Eiga monogatari*, for example. The reason for pronouncing 齋 as *toki* comes from the fact that food was often eaten after the noon hour in violation of the precepts. The pre-noon meal thus became known as the one with a properly designated "time" (*toki* 時), while the afternoon meals were without such time, hence *hiji* 非時.

²² During Shōnyō's life, the Honganji that Rennyō had reconstructed in Yamashina was burnt down by Tendai monks of Mt Hiei in retaliation for Honganji forces having appropriated Kaga province. As a result, the so-called Ishiyama Honganji based in Osaka became the center of Honganji activities.

²³ *Shōnyō Shōnin nikki* 證如上人日記, Tenmon 20 (1551), 5th month, 10th day. See UEMATSU 1966, vol 2, p. 627b.

was deep institutional support for this type of ceremony. In this particular record, Shōnyo notes that he agreed to accept the parents' remains, implying interment at Honganji or the Shinran burial grounds.

If Honganji accepted money to perform services for the common dead, as in the above example, it also seems to have taken money for the uncommon dead. In the record of this same Jitsujū (called Kenchi 兼智 by Shōnyo), there is a mention of a memorial service held for his father at Honganji in 1537 in which he offered twenty units of cash to the same Shōnyo.²⁴ In this case, Shōnyo led the service but returned the money, saying that the thirty-third death anniversary of Rennyo had already passed and therefore the (obligatory) period for mourning had ended.

By reasoning that the period of ritual mourning had ended and yet carrying out the ceremony anyway, Shōnyo indicates that for Honganji at this time the chanting of sutras, *nenbutsu*, or the words of Founder Shinran were all affirmed means for sending weal to the dead regardless of how much time had passed since the death event. Shōnyo's comment suggests not that the service was inappropriate, only that the accepting of money for it was. That is, receiving donations for such rituals was rationalized as acceptable only for thirty-three years after a death. I interpret this to reflect church policy that put a limit on family ceremonial obligations to the dead. Never mind that Rennyo's *antarābhava* state had long since passed and he should certainly have arrived in the Pure Land by that time. Not only should Rennyo hardly have needed blessings in the first place, but the very idea of transferring merit to the dead through the recitation of scripture would seem to be a perfect expression of the Shinshū notion of misguided *jiriki* (self-delusional) praxis. This is precisely what Shinran rejects in the *Tannishō* because all merit required for Birth comes from the Buddha. While such services are still conducted at Honganji today in special circumstances, sixteenth-century records describe them as daily events (日中), and their frequency in diaries of the time confirms how routine they had become as Honganji religious activities.

3. PERPETUAL SUTRA RECITATION: *EITAI-KYŌ* 永代経

Another ritual structure to emerge in Shinshū mortuary ritual is called *eitai-kyō*, short for *eitai dokkyō* 永代読経, perpetual sutra reading. The *eitai-kyō* service seems to have no other purpose than to recite scriptures for the dead in exchange for monetary gifts. This practice is

²⁴ *Shishinki* 私心記, Tenmon 6 (1537), 3rd month, 25th day. See UEMATSU 1966, vol. 1, p. 259ab.

performed by other Japanese Buddhist schools as well, usually under the names *eitai kuyō* 永代供養 (perpetual offerings) or *shidō-kyō* 祠堂經 (sutras [offered] at the ancestral hall). Dating at least to the early Kamakura period, the *shidō-kyō* ceremony developed in response to requests from lay believers to use the power of the *Lotus Sutra* to help their deceased family members. By the Tokugawa period it was a firmly established Pure Land practice in Shinshū as well. Today, as in the past, the individual makes a donation to a temple specifically requesting performance of the *eitai-kyō*, whereupon a document or scroll is made on which the ritually bestowed “Dharma name” of the deceased is prominently written. Called simply *hōmyō-jiku* 法名軸 (Dharma name scroll) or *hōmyō-ki* 法名記 (Dharma name record), these are hung on the altar of the temple during the sutra readings. After the initial ceremony, the name-scroll is then brought out again on a monthly or yearly basis, or in some cases at the spring and autumn equinox ceremonies called *higan* 彼岸, with the expectation that the monks would forever be sending merit to those whose names are displayed on such scrolls.²⁵ Hence the ritual meant perpetual offerings to the dead from the believer’s perspective, but from the sect’s point of view it meant the individual had become a permanent member of the lineage. If a group of people, not an individual, makes the donation, the day of the ritual does not have to be the same as the day of death but rather any day convenient for everyone to attend. It is not clear when the practice of *eitai-kyō* began, but Genchi writes that the first instance of it that he could find was in 1678 (GENCHI 1785).

Custom has traditionally required that this ceremony begin only after both the initial forty-nine days of *antarābhava* existence and the first Bon festival had been observed. This delay signifies that the conception of the *eitai-kyō* ritual required a transformation in the status of the dead before it could occur. It suggests the deceased needed to be prepared for this new, higher postmortem status, probably as ancestor in a more formal sense, and that this status could only be attained through the rituals of the sutra readings during the *antarābhava* period and all the rituals associated with Ullambana, regardless of formal church doctrine. On the other hand, the perpetual dimension of the *eitai-kyō*—I have seen reference to a ceremony performed two hundred years after the death—ensures that the ritual benefits of the sutra recitations will continue to accrue long after anyone with personal knowledge of the deceased is still alive, suggesting that even in

²⁵ In one form of this ceremony called *muen eitai-kyō* 無縁永代経, the ritual continues to be performed as part of the spring and fall equinox ceremonies even after the support from the original donor had ceased.

this elevated postmortem state, the deceased was still somewhat dependent upon the performance of the ritual.

The *eitai-kyō* tradition appears to have grown out of an older custom of reciting the *Lotus Sutra* repeatedly for patrons who made an appropriate donation. This practice was called either *senbu-dokkyō* 千部読経 (a thousand sutra readings) or *manbu-dokkyō* 萬部読経 (ten-thousand sutra readings). Even Shinran at one point endorsed the same practice for the three Pure Land sutras²⁶ but later changed his mind, deciding that it was against his understanding of proper belief in the salvific vows of the Buddha.

4. GRATITUDE TO THE FOUNDER: *HŌON-KŌ* 報恩講

The fourth mechanism for transferring merit to the dead began during the yearly gatherings to memorialize Shinran called *hōon-kō*. Such formal ceremonies for showing gratitude toward a patriarch with lectures and scriptural recitation are not unique to Shinshū. For example, Japanese Tendai created a ceremonial form of reverence for Chih-i that included a scriptural recitation and a lecture on Tendai doctrine. In the case of Shinshū, this tradition began with Shinran's own creation of *hōon-kō* to recall the legacy and teachings of Hōnen. After Shinran's death, part of Kakunyo's efforts to apotheosize Shinran consisted of surpassing the Hōnen *hōon-kō* with a much grander *hōon-kō* for Shinran at Honganji that would continue for seven full days beginning on the anniversary of Shinran's death, the 28th day of the 11th month. Eventually this ceremony grew in importance and spread to branch temples throughout the Honganji network. Rennyo used the event to solidify his influence, reformulating the ceremony as a kind of religious retreat that succeeded in increasing pilgrimage to the Honganji, even when the temple was not located in Kyoto. By the Tokugawa period, this annual gathering had become the most important religious event of the year for the Shinshū community. Strict vegetarianism was observed during the *hōon-kō*, giving the lay participants a chance to join in the restrained lifestyle of the monks.

By the seventeenth century, the yearly *hōon-kō* had become a grandiose affair. From the viewpoint of the leaders of Honganji, the chief goals of the gathering were to increase the sense of community among the entire organization, to engage the lay community in intense practice sessions, and to provide lectures and study sessions on Buddhist doctrine. For those unable to make the pilgrimage to Hon-

²⁶ Stated by Shinran's wife Eshinni in a letter to her daughter Kakushinni. See *Eshinni shōsoku*, Kōchō 3 (1263), 2nd month, 10th day, in SHINSHŪ SHŌGYŌ ZENSHŌ HENSANSHO 1941, vol. 5, p. 101.

ganji, *hōon-kō* gatherings were also held in local temples. But a week of such concentrated, disciplined practice made lay participants feel that they had heaped up a significant amount of merit and it was only natural that such merit should be transferred to their deceased relatives. There is little doubt that in the countryside, the *hōon-kō* retreat took on the flavor of ancestor reverence. Often after the Buddhist lecture, offerings were made to the ancestors of the community as a whole, and in rural settings this served as an important means for community solidarity.

What distinguishes the *hōon-kō* ritual of merit-transfer to the dead is its impersonal nature. As the timing of the ritual precludes the recitation of sutras and invoking of *nenbutsu* on an individual's death anniversary, merit-transfer rituals in the context of a *hōon-kō* instead take the form of generalized vows to help the participants' ancestors. Since this event occurred at the end of the year, the sense of gratitude toward the Buddha and the Founder Shinran was inevitably combined with a sense of gratitude for the harvest, which in turn brought on a sense of gratitude toward the ancestors for ensuring the harvest. The combination of all these emotive forces created powerful urges to give something back to one's parents and grandparents. Sometimes the *eitai-kyō* ritual was practiced during the *hōon-kō* as well.

Dogmatic Quandary: The Reactions of Ekū and Genchi

Let us now turn to the writings of Ekū and Genchi as representative scholars of the two branches of Honganji during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for a glimpse of their feelings about the issues raised by the mortuary ceremonies performed by Shinshū priests. Ekū served both as an advisor to the head of the Higashi (Eastern) Honganji and as its senior lecturer, at times in its training center.²⁷ Ekū is arguably the most influential scholar for the Higashi Honganji church during this period, not only because of his efforts to create a kind of reformed Shinshū credo, but also because his editions of many important texts were accepted as authoritative and remain so today. Ekū's interest in funerals is evident in his influential work on Shinshū history and doctrine, *Sōrinshū* 叢林集 (Collection of scattered trees),²⁸ and is even clearer in his *Go-sōrei jitsuroku-shū* 御葬禮實錄集 (Collection of

²⁷ For a biography of Ekū see AKEGARASU 1909 and WASHIO 1911, p. 35b. Also found in YAMAZAKI 1842. All are presumably based on the 1766 holograph of *Ekū rōshi gyōjōki*, held at Zenryū-ji in Shiga Prefecture.

²⁸ The earliest edition, in nine fascicles, is a 1698 manuscript in the Ōtani University collection. Printed in TSUMAKI 1913–1916, vol. 63, pp. 1-410, and SHINSHŪ TENSEKI KANKŌKAI 1937, vol. 10.

actual accounts of the funerals of the [seven Shinshū] patriarchs).²⁹

Genchi³⁰ had a similar career in the rival Nishi (Western) Honganji. His ideas on what constituted acceptable funerary practices can be found mostly in chapter two of his *Kōshinroku* 考信録 (Record of considerations in the faith),³¹ which, like Ekū's *Sōrinshū*, presented a normative interpretation of proper Shinshū practices. In sum, these texts are massive rulings on a wide array of topics. Both men served as the preeminent preceptors of their day, adopting a mantle of authority that placed them in the center of the doctrinal canonization efforts of their respective sects. While the Tokugawa period produced a number of remarkable sectarian scholars, Ekū and Genchi stand out as particularly influential in defining their respective Shinshū orthodoxies.

The following passage from the *Sōrinshū* reflects one of Ekū's attempts to rationalize religious services for the dead. It appears as part of a discussion of merit-transference rituals in the *hōon-kō* ceremony.

QUESTION: In our school, the rituals and praises [for the Buddha] are services to express gratitude toward the Buddha. How can these, then, be directed to the dead? If we actually perform services for the dead, would we not fall into a *jiriki* form of merit-transfer?

ANSWER: Services to express gratitude to the Buddha have the same meaning as they usually do. That is, [in the context of the *hōon-kō*] these are also done to express gratitude to our Founder (祖師). Sutras read during the state between death and birth may also be for deceased teachers or someone's father. There are also offerings made to the relics of the dead, and many people following other teachings also use this ritual.... But the *jiriki* merit-transference you speak of is something else.... To provide [religious] teachings for the deceased is [a form of merit-transfer] called "Dharma providing," and we know that if the deceased can be influenced by merit, then he can be influenced by the [Buddhist] teachings in the same way. If a different teaching is provided, he will not gain anything. If what one actively practices [in these rituals] is *tari* in nature, then what the [deceased] gains is merit that is also *tari* in nature. (EKŪ 1698, p. 286b)

Ekū's move is typical of Japanese Pure Land doctrinal debates dating

²⁹ A 1731 manuscript is held by Ōtani University. No publication of this text exists.

³⁰ See the biography of Genchi in MAEDA 1901. See also the summary in WASHIO 1911, p. 305b. From the Edo period, see KAKUO 1833 (1793–1856, a.k.a. Ryūgo 龍護).

³¹ Seven fascicles, completed in 1774. Printed in TSUMAKI 1913–1916, vol. 64, pp. 3–238.

back to the Kamakura period about the significance of the *jiriki/tariki* distinction when the outward form of practices such as *nenbutsu* recitation or meditation look the same. The usual solution to the dilemma was to say that *nenbutsu* praxis can have totally different meanings depending on the intentionality of its intoner. In this passage Ekū raises the issue of ritual recitation of *nenbutsu* and other liturgical texts performed on the occasion of Shinshū funerals for the kin of lay patrons and the monks themselves, problematic because such practices have a long tradition in Japan (and all of East Asia) of being employed for the expressed purpose of transferring merit to the deceased to improve his or her karmic status. His ruling is an attempt to diffuse the tension that must have arisen from those who saw such ritual as contrary to Shinshū doctrinal authority. He does this by framing the practice in terms of the hermeneutic categories of unacceptable *jiriki nenbutsu* versus acceptable *tariki nenbutsu*, and the reader is left to infer the primacy of intentionality operating within the ritual, for he does not explain *how* this distinction is effected. But note that Ekū has not questioned the orthodoxy or religious efficacy of practices that send merit, Buddhist teachings, or offerings to the dead as long as the deceased is still in the *antarābhava* state. Ekū is explicit only about the fact that he prefers transferring something with semantic significance, but since he does not deny that all of it is meaningful, his readers may have inferred that Ekū tacitly approved.

Genchi, for his part, is more specific. In his *Kōshinroku*, he confirms just how widespread the practices of both *eitai-kyō* and *senbu-dokkyō* had become, and he expresses an odd ambivalence at the doctrinal principles underlying them. First are his comments on the *eitai-kyō* ceremony:

These days we have something called perpetual sutra reading in which the donor puts forth a sum of money and the monks, as long as they reside in that institution, read sutras on the anniversary of someone's death. While there are some differences, all the schools have some form of this practice. I believe, although they call it "perpetual," that... it is not necessarily forever, but probably after fifty or a hundred years the ceremony tapers off.... Our school did not perform this in earlier times, as we do not see this term *eitai-kyō* in [our] old records.

(GENCHI 1774, pp. 58–59)

Next, Genchi comments on *senbu-dokkyō*:

The original meaning of the Buddha's message is that offerings to the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha generate karmic good. [Thus] when a patron requests a monk

to read sutras, this is not necessarily a hardship. But the Buddhist services we have now involve gathering a lot of monks together and abbreviate the sense of offering. People today require a ceremony in which we have to go through the trouble of chanting a sutra a thousand times. This was not the intention of the Buddha. (GENCHI 1774, p. 54)

These days the practice of chanting a sutra a thousand times is being done everywhere... but scholars have their doubts about this practice.... Such activity in pursuit of money may be justified by some, but this kind of thing must be regulated by the *honzan* for the branch temples and young monks.... Regarding the [proper] perspective on attaining the mind settled in faith (*anjin*), among the five Pure Land practices it is recitation of the Buddha's name that is primary and recitation of the [Pure Land] sutras that is secondary. When we make sutra recitation primary, we commit the error of [orienting ourselves to] miscellaneous practices [rather than focusing properly on the *nenbutsu* as orthopraxy].... The Lotus and Pure Land teachings are not the same in what they regard as primary and secondary, but they have a similar approach in stressing the importance of devoted practice to one form as their fundament. I am just arguing from the way I see it. Sutra reading itself reflects an imperial command from the Buddha with enormous benefits; it is much better to practice this than the mistakes of empty practices. The way of practice is quite profound, one should not make light of it.

(GENCHI 1774, pp. 161-62)

These statements show that Genchi felt obligated to set some kind of standard for normative funeral ritual in the Nishi Honganji. If this is an admission that some Shinshū temples had gone too far in accommodating the funerary needs of their communities, in the following statement Genchi is even more explicit about the doctrinal implications of these practices. Here he admonishes clergy who, in the performance of these ceremonies, are perpetuating ritual mechanisms that violate orthodox Pure Land Buddhist principles.

Some have asked about what to do when someone comes forth to explain that the dead spirits of his mother and father have appeared and reported that after death they fell into one of the unfortunate realms and are suffering. He wants to save them and asks if there is not some means (*hōben* 方便) by which he can do so. In this case one must respond with a ques-

tion about whether the person himself is resolved on the issue of his own liberation. If one believes in the Pure Land teaching, he relies on the power of the Buddha to be born in the Pure Land, and on this point it works the same way for saving others. All one can do is beg for the salvation coming from the mercy of the Buddha. Thus all these practices making use of the power that comes from reading sutras and reciting the Buddha's name ultimately come back to the principle that one's own liberation is grounded in relying on the power of the Buddha. How can the salvation of others come merely from the merit produced by religiously good practices?

(GENCHI 1774, pp. 146–47)

As these comments show, by the time of Ekū and Genchi—that is, the middle of the eighteenth century—an array of funerary customs had already become institutionalized at various levels of the Honganji branches of the Shinshū religious organization that were questionable if not heterodox in terms of their doctrinal correctness. The people responsible for the academic training of young monks, like these two men, seem overwhelmed by the situation. Although both scholars decry these practices as nontraditional, the fact that they complain but do not condemn them outright suggests just how deeply both—the scholars and the funeral customs of which they are speaking—had become entrenched in an institutional system that had already become dependent on the fund-raising benefits of providing these services to the public. Although I have included only a few of their comments, both Ekū and Genchi wrote in great detail about the philosophical and material aspects of funerary culture. The conflicts to which they allude reflect the enduring power of pre-Buddhist Japanese notions of death and the importance of caring for the dead, which, combined with Confucian norms of ancestor reverence, struggled to find homeostasis with the Buddhist doctrines of reincarnation, karma, and, in the case of Shinshū, the salvific promise of Birth in the Pure Land at death for those who realize, in Genchi's words, “the principle that one's own liberation is grounded in relying on the power of the Buddha.”

Postmortem Rites for Rennyō

The memorial event requested by Rennyō's son nearly forty years after his father's death is perhaps the most curious of everything discussed here. I have generally argued that the appropriation of rituals for sending merit to the dead reflects accommodation with popular reli-

gious notions. But this case appears to reflect an entirely different mechanism. On the one hand, the dead beneficiary is Rennyo, who nearly single-handedly rebuilt Honganji, redefining both its philosophical and administrative structure. Are we to understand that Rennyo's own son felt his father needed karmic help in settling in the paradise of Amida's Pure Land? If Rennyo, the recognized representative of Shinran himself and a source of religious authority for millions, had not reached the Pure Land, what hope could there be for ordinary believers? The fact that the representative of Honganji, Shōnyo, accepted the request to perform the ceremony despite refusing the donation suggests that, to church elders, its performance was seen as meaningful.

Should we infer the obvious, namely that the patriarchs of Shinshū do not immediately reach the Pure Land upon death? If so, then the validity of the doctrinal foundation upon which the entire spiritual edifice of this sect has been built would be called into question—a move that would not bode well for the future livelihood of the institution. We must therefore look for a more plausible explanation, one that supports the structure of the church rather than weakens it. It is my contention that the motivation behind Jitsujū's request for the memorial service had nothing to do with sending merit or weal to the spirit of Rennyo, wherever it was, but rather had everything to do with bringing the spirit of Rennyo back to Honganji. In other words, like calling the dead back during the Bon festival, this is an example of that category of memorial service in Japan that does not express the need to help or please the dead so much as the desire to reverse the death process by inviting the dead to return home, in a kind of ritual reversal of severance. The overlap and/or integration with Buddhist notions of merit-transfer is therefore only superficial, while the actual pragmatic force of the ritual is of an entirely different nature. This explains why Ekū can rationalize the ritual process by saying that if one engages in services for the dead with a *tariki* attitude, the effect will be *tariki*. In orthodox Pure Land doctrine, there is, after all, a second form of *parināmana* (transformation) originally proposed by Tānluan that occurs after the individual has reached the Pure Land, wherein he returns to our world to fulfill his bodhisattva vows of aiding those still mired in *kleśa*. In this way, important ancestors or recently deceased family members are purified and sanctified in their postmortem state because they have reached the Pure Land, becoming compatriots of transcendent saints, yet they are not lost to the family. Thus what takes the form of a *parināmana* ritual to send weal to the dead is actually an appeal to the dead to send weal to the living.

Apropos of this interpretation, I will close with the following pas-

sage from the *Itokuki* 遺徳記, a 1525 biography of Rennyo compiled by his sons Rengo and Jitsugo:

In the year Meio 9 (1500), when we observed the first year [of Rennyo's passing], we had a [memorial] service we put our hearts into that especially gave form to our sense of gratitude [to Rennyo]. The fervor of our voices raised to the heavens (*sorayomi*) went beyond the time when [Rennyo] was still alive in this world. The legacy of the kindness he showed us that we bore [in our hearts] reached followers everywhere in all directions, causing it to spread with a flourish to countries and counties where our school had never been. Thus, on the occasion of the first commemoration service, reports of flowers raining down [from the sky] occurred not only in one place but cropped up in town and country alike. After that, every time the yearly ceremony came around, there would be a flood of these reports of miraculous events.

Stirred by the mourning of the brothers and disciples who survived him, that [Vital Spirit] of caring touch (*ondoku*) [embodied in Rennyo] makes its way through the vast cloud-like ocean [of expanse] that extends back a thousand leagues and, bearing kind thoughts toward us, takes upon itself the treacherous journey along the mountain path ten thousand furlongs in length, [winding] among ethereal peaks to arrive at this memorial hall. Inquiring as to tidings of the black and white of [the lives of both] the civilized and uncivilized, of the aristocrat as well as the poor far and near, [Rennyo] admonishes us to heed the wishes he left on his deathbed, on the occasion of his return year after year to that solemn gate [of our temple] in the pine grove—how impressive!³²

In Japan, if not in all Buddhist countries, lay support for the sangha has always included some degree of expectation that the clergy would provide rituals for the dead. Although there are a number of different Buddhist teachings that provide postmortem goals to the lay community, from its initial dissemination in the Nara period up to the end of the medieval period, belief in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha as an afterlife paradise grew steadily and rebirth in Amida's Pure Land became markedly more accepted as a generalized religious goal. I have tried to show the basic themes in this process of expansion, specifically as they pertain to the school of Pure Land Buddhism

³² The full title of the *Itokuki* is *Rennyo Shōnin itokuki* 蓮如上人遺徳記. This text, which was compiled by Jitsugo, can be found in SHINSHU SHŌGYŌ ZENSŌ HENSANSHŌ 1941, vol. 3, p. 888.

known today as Shinshū. For the laity, the activities surrounding the death of a family member are often the most concrete and best understood expressions of the soteriological goals presumed in their faith.

It is important to remember that what we are looking at in this scenario is not a problem or issue defined by a handful of priests serving a large community, but the relationship of two distinct communities; for as the passages quoted above have shown, the question of what a particular sectarian tradition's orthodox position should be on the issue of death and funeral ritual spoke to the very core of the priests' own religious and professional identities. Thus not only do the clergy serve the spiritual needs of the "people," the clergy themselves are to a significant degree defined by those same lay communities. While we would like to know more about how this relationship of mutual dependence functions, the published literature is far more heavily weighted toward preserving the stated—assumedly publicly stated—positions of the priests. Scholars like Tamamuro Fumio are working at a painstakingly slow pace to uncover handwritten materials saved at local temples during the Tokugawa period so that we may eventually know more about the dynamic between temple and community. The author fully recognizes that the paper suffers from the fact that the views of the lay Shinshū believers have only been inferred from priestly statements.

Today it is well known that the death of a family member is often the only time an individual may have close contact with the temple he supports financially and expects support from spiritually. While the tradition of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan has always been suggestive of afterlife concerns, the everyday nature of funerary involvement by priests exhibited in the writings quoted here suggest that all established Buddhist sects by the mid-Tokugawa period had relationships with their supporting lay communities in which mortuary rituals occupied an important if not central role. I think we can also infer from this degree of proximity to lay society that the clergy were well aware of the significance for the remaining family members of what they did and how they did it, irrespective of how far such duties may be from the original role of the sangha. Where I think the Buddhist clergy are decidedly weak in this context—from the point of view of the family—is in understanding the importance of funeral rituals for the deceased himself. This impression is particularly strong in Shinshū because merit-transfer to the dead is clearly a *jiriki* endeavor. Thus does Zonkaku state that no more than 10% of the merit accrued at a funeral will ever reach the deceased, and the implication in the statements of Ekū and Genchi is that if the individual did not achieve the proper faith while he was alive, we should not expect that any ritual has the

power to change his karmic future after he has died.

What I have tried to show is one case of how long-standing Buddhist institutions in Japan negotiated the conflict between doctrinal ideal and parishioner expectation during the better part of the Tokugawa period. The remarkable state of financial dependency on funeral “work” today in Japanese Buddhism thus had a long, somewhat agonizing, evolution. As this example shows, at the institutional level the temptation to exploit lay aspirations for peaceful resolution of the emotional trauma of grief and bereavement has often proved irresistible. For the learned clergy conscious of the need to maintain doctrinal rigor, however, defining the parameters of the officiating priest’s role and, in this case, rationalizing the *honzan* as second burial site have always been problematic. It may seem to some that this dilemma is less difficult for any school of Pure Land Buddhism since reaching the Pure Land is often accepted as a postmortem goal. But just because the Pure Land is accessible to everyone does not mean that everyone goes there. There is still a path, a kind of *bodhicitta* is still required. In the end, the problem for the elite intellectual community in the Genroku era (1688–1704) was not much different from the problem faced by Buddhist priests in Japan today. As these records show, regardless of the expectations placed upon Buddhist institutions to accommodate the demands of their lay community, the educated monks could not have been unaware of the doctrinal, historical, and even emotional contradictions between their positions as representatives of their respective doctrinal traditions and the religious beliefs implied in the rituals they performed or endorsed.

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