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Fukudenkai

Sewing the Buddha's Robe in Contemporary Japanese Buddhist Practice

This paper discusses twentieth-century Buddhist robe study and sewing groups called *fukudenkai* that were established after World War II by the Sōtō Zen priest and scholar Sawaki Kōdō (1898–1965) and his disciples. The term *fukudenkai* refers to a metaphor of spiritual efficacy (a field of merit) that the robe embodies, and many participants believe that the act of sewing the robe in a context of meditation and formal Zen practice produces merit. Sawaki's promotion of faith in the Buddhist robe as equivalent to faith in the Buddhist teaching is based on two essays by Dōgen (1200–1253), who is revered as the founder of the Japanese Sōtō Zen lineage. In addition to Sōtō commentaries on Dōgen's essays, Sawaki also made use of the texts and practical robe sewing techniques developed by the pioneering Shingon scholar, Jiun Ōnkō (1718–1804). The form and materials of *fukudenkai* robes are quite different from the modern forms established by the Sōtō administrative office, whose regulations guide commercial robe makers. *Fukudenkai* groups thus provide an alternative to the centrally controlled commercial culture of robe making in contemporary Japan.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist robe – *fukudenkai* – *kesa* – Sawaki Kōdō – Jiun Ōnkō – *vinaya* – *nyoho e*

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THIS PAPER is primarily concerned with my fieldwork during 2003 and 2004 at Buddhist robe sewing groups called *fukudenkai* 福田会 of the Sōtō Zen 曹洞禅 school of Japanese Buddhism but also includes a discussion of the historical background of these groups. The term *fukudenkai* (assembly of the field of merit) is taken from one of the names of the Buddhist robe, as the original design was said to be based on the pattern of rice fields.¹ In this paper I use the term *fukudenkai* to refer to robe-sewing groups affiliated with Sōtō Zen teachers who see themselves as carrying on the teachings of Sawaki Kōdō 澤木興道 (1880–1965) and Hashimoto Ekō 橋本恵光 (1890–1965). These groups are a small but growing movement among lay people and priests to reconnect to aspects of traditional Buddhist practices such as sewing one’s own robe and practicing meditation.

The set of three robes described in *vinaya* (monastic regulation) literature refers to rectangular, pieced cloths designed to wrap around the body in much the same way as the sari that is currently worn in India, and is referred to as *kesa* 袈裟 in Japanese. When Buddhism spread to colder climates such as China and Japan, accommodations for cultural and climactic differences were made in the Indian clerical dress. Chinese monks wore Chinese style robes underneath the rectangular Indian-style garments, which were subsequently introduced to Japan as Buddhist clothing. The layered syncretism of these religious garments (Indian, Chinese, and Japanese) encourages the view held by many in contemporary Japan that the Buddhist robe is a symbolic remnant from the ancient India of Śākyamuni Buddha’s time, a kind of Buddhist decorative cloth.² As a step toward developing English terminology for these garments in this paper I refer to the rectangular garment as “Buddha’s robe” or simply “the robe,” as a translation for the Japanese word, *kesa*. Although sewing the Buddhist robe is an ancient practice described in early *vinaya* and *sutta* (scriptural) sources, these sewing groups are creating new traditions that address contemporary Japanese religious and social concerns. The *fukudenkai* allow mixed groups of lay and ordained as well as male and female believers to participate in sewing Buddhist robes together, a practice that almost certainly was unheard of in premodern

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1. The *vinaya* source is *Shi song lü* (Jpn: *Jūjuritsu* 十誦律 *Ten Recitations Vinaya*) T. #1435. 22, 194c. See also KYŪMA 2000, pp. 9–13.

2. For a discussion of the Japanese *kesa* as a symbolic garment see FAURE 1995; for art historical treatments of the *kesa* see TILL and SWART 1997, and KENNEDY 1993.

times. *Fukudenkai* also challenge the dependent relationship between commercial robe manufacturers and contemporary Buddhist institutions. Contemporary Japanese Sōtō Zen clergy routinely order robes from catalogues of robe manufacturers at prices ranging from approximately \$850 to \$3200 for a seven-panel robe, and nine-panel robes used for ceremonial occasions can cost as much as \$22,000 for an embroidered robe (MATSUMOTOYA 2003, pp. 1–65). The clergy order by phone and have little if any direct contact with the robe maker, nor can they alter the design of the robe or ask for alternate fabrics as the Sōtō Zen organization (Sōtō Shūmuchō 曹洞宗務庁) has established strict guidelines for the robe makers. *Fukudenkai* present an alternative to the commercial relationship to robes that the Sōtō organization recommends.

The first half of this paper briefly outlines the history, key figures, and texts that provided the scholarly grounding for two twentieth-century teachers: Sawaki Kōdō and Hashimoto Ekō. Their interpretation of Dōgen's 道元 (1200–1253) view of the robe and subsequent Tokugawa-period Sōtō research on the robe was implemented and expanded by their disciples and has become the foundation for the practice of hand sewing the Buddhist robe as an integral part of Buddhist practice. The second half of the paper presents the methodology and data of fieldwork conducted at these *fukudenkai* groups over the last year. The data includes participant-observer fieldwork at *fukudenkai* as well as interviews with Sōtō and Shingonshū 真言宗 teachers and a visit to a commercial robe manufacturing business in Kyoto.

The Buddhist Robe in Sōtō Zen and Background of the Fukudenkai Ethos

A central tenet of contemporary Sōtō Zen *fukudenkai* groups is a teaching from the fascicles *Den'e* 伝衣 (Transmission of the Robe) and *Kesa kudoku* 袈裟功德 (Merit of the Robe) in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (Eye Storehouse of the True Law) that the Buddhist robe is one and the same as the Buddha's teaching, *ehō ichinyō* 衣法一如.³ This teaching was reinforced in the late Tokugawa period by a group of clergy who were convinced that Dōgen's understanding of the Buddhist robe was an essential element of his teaching. They supplemented their study of the *Shōbōgenzō* with research into monastic regulations.⁴ Since many of them lived in the city of Nagoya, this area became a magnet for others interested in studying Dōgen's teaching about the Buddhist robe. Much of contemporary

3. The full four-character phrase, *ehō ichinyō*, does not appear in Dogen's writings; Dōgen uses *ehō*, to indicate transmission of the teaching and the robe (DZZ 1: 623). I have included it here, however, because this four-character phrase often appears as a teaching in *fukudenkai*. See also "ehō" in KOMAZAWA DAIGAKUNAI ZENGAU DAIJITEN HENSANJO 1985, 104a.

4. The main teachers in this group were Zuikō Chingyū 瑞岡珍牛 (1743–1822) of Banshōji 萬松寺, and Kōsen Mujaku 黄泉無著 (1775–1838) of Daikōin 大光院, both of whom encouraged Mokushitsu Ryōdō and Sōkō Raizen to provide a guide to Dōgen's teachings on the robe. See KAWAGUCHI 1984, pp. 5–12.

scholarship on the Buddhist robe continues to come out of universities in the Nagoya area, especially Aichi Gakuin University 愛知学院大学, where Kawaguchi Kōfū 川口高風 (1948–) publishes and teaches.⁵

Most of the first works written on Buddhist robes during the Tokugawa period by Sōtō monks were written in Chinese (*kanbun*), so the study of Buddhist robes remained the province of specialists and was not commonly known or understood.⁶ The 1768 *Shakushi hōe kun* 釋氏法衣訓 [Regulation of Śākya-muni's robe of the teaching] by Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683–1769) was the first work to be written in Japanese (KAWAGUCHI 1984, p. 6). This work was frequently reprinted and became an important introduction to the study of the Buddhist robe that raised awareness of the issue for Sōtō monks. Menzan was criticized, however, by the Nagoya *Shōbōgenzō* scholars for having compromised his understanding of the Buddhist robe to accommodate contemporary styles.

These early *Shōbōgenzō* scholars were concerned about understanding Dōgen's fascicles about the robe in the context of *vinaya* studies, a project that could result in the broadening of Sōtō Zen claims to authenticity in regard to the robe. Dōgen's two fascicles on the Buddhist robe are the only two substantial essays entirely devoted to religious aspects of the Buddhist robe before the Tokugawa period. By choosing to emphasize the importance of the robe in Dōgen's thought, the *Shōbōgenzō* scholars had hit upon an aspect of Buddhist thought that had not been addressed as vigorously by the founders of other sects.

Two texts central to the development of *fukudenkai* groups in the twentieth century came out of this Nagoya group: the *Hōbuku kakushō* 法服格正 [The correct standard for Buddhist clothing] written in Japanese by Mokushitsu Ryōyō 黙室良要 (1775–1823) in 1821; and the *Fukuden taisui* 福田滯濂 [Deep meaning of the field of merit (robe)] written in Chinese by Sōkō Raizen 祖光来禅 (1795–?) in 1825 (KAWAGUCHI 1984, p. 7). Both authors sought to explicate *Kesa kudoku* and *Den'e*, using citations from scriptures, *vinaya*, and treatises, as well as Chinese texts and commentaries. For the succeeding seventy years, however, Mokushitsu's work was kept in private hands, passed down to close disciples who made handwritten copies of the text. Only Sōkō's work, *Fukuden taisui*, was publically available from 1825 to 1896.⁷ Kawaguchi has recovered some premodern

5. The following discussion summarizes KAWAGUCHI 1984, pp. 5–12.

6. These early works include *Bussō kesa kō* 佛祖袈裟考 [Considering of the robe of the Buddhas and ancestors], 1703, by Tokugon Yōson 得嚴養存 (?–1703); *Den'e zōbi shōkō* 伝衣象鼻章稿 [Chapter on the transmission of the elephant nose robe], 1759, by Gyakumizu Tōryū 逆水洞流 (1684–1766); and *Hōbuku shōgi zukai ryakushaku* 法服正儀図会略积 [Illustration and brief explanation of the true meaning of the Buddhist robe], 1766, by Sōdō 祖道 (fl. 1766). For a discussion and complete list of Tokugawa period research on Buddhist clothing in different Buddhist groups see KAWAGUCHI 1976, pp. 348–74.

7. Kawaguchi suggests that Sōkō's use of *kanbun* indicates that he was more influenced by Jiun Onkō's 1751 *Hōbuku zugi* 法服図儀, than by Mokushitsu's work.

private study books on the *Fukuden taisui*, which suggests that although the text was readily available and lectured on during this period people could not easily understand the text without annotation.

The *Fukuden taisui* is a short, dense work, studded with citations.⁸ Sōkō explains that when he was ordained as a child, he noticed the difference between the robe he had received in ordination, and the robes depicted in ancient statues. His search for the answer to these questions led him to Nagoya where he joined the group of monks engaged in studying the *Shōbōgenzō*. It was among these monks that Sōkō first learned that Dōgen's teaching was intimately connected with the Buddhist robe. The *Fukuden taisui* is a product of his studies with his fellow students, including Mokushitsu Ryōyō, but it also relies heavily on the research on the Buddhist robe conducted by most other sects during the Tokugawa period.⁹ The *Fukuden taisui* discusses names for the robe, its origin as the Buddha's teaching, the materials to be used in making the robe, the colors for dying, and details of construction such as the dimensions, the number of panels, the ties, and how the robe is to be sewn. It also includes instructions for putting on the robe and preserving it as well as illustrations.

The *Fukuden taisui* continued to influence later generations of people interested in the Buddhist robe. Sawaki Kōdō learned about the work from his teacher, Oka Sōtan 丘宗潭 (1860–1921) who often used Sōkō's *Fukuden taisui* when he lectured on the *Kesa kudoku*. In 1922 Morie Shōten published the *Fukuden taisui* in a single volume with *Kesa kudoku* from an original text included in Oka Sōtan's personal library. Both Sawaki and Hashimoto used the *Fukuden taisui* when lecturing on the *Kesa kudoku*; and Sawaki had the text republished in 1939.

Mokushitsu's work, the *Hōbuku kakushō*, also drew together earlier Tokugawa period research on the robe. In addition to the categories in Sōkō's text, Mokushitsu used a wider definition of Buddhist clothing (*hōe* 法衣) and included sections on the bowing mat (*zagu* 坐具) and the garments such as the *jikitotsu* 直綴 and kimono worn under the rectangular Buddhist robes. Throughout the *Hōbuku kakushō* Mokushitsu emphasizes the identity of the robe with the teachings of Buddhism. He and his collaborator, Gettan Zenryū 月潭禅竜 (?–1865), consulted with *vinaya* scholars in the Nagoya region, including a Tendai *vinaya* scholar, Gōchō Kankai 豪潮寛海 (fl. 1822).¹⁰

8. Although only twenty-five pages of *kanbun* in the modern edition, the text contains seventy-five citations from thirty-four different texts. KAWAGUCHI 1984, p. 11.

9. The earliest call for a reform in Sōtō Zen attire came in 1703 with the publication *Bussō kesa kō* in which Tokugon decried the indiscriminant use of purple and red robes, but research on the Buddhist robe in the context of the *vinaya* regulations had been a feature of nearly every major Buddhist sect during the Tokugawa period since the latter half of the seventeenth century (KAWAGUCHI 1976, pp. 348–60).

10. Gōchō was a member of the Tendai Anrakuritsu movement which was started in the seventeenth century by Myōryū (1637–1690), Reikū (1652–1739), and Genmon (1666–1752), and lasted until

Nishiari Bokuzan 西有穆山 (1812–1910) published an edited and corrected copy of the *Hōbuku kakushō* in 1896, making this more readable work available to a wider audience.¹¹ The two works became important sources for the *fukudenkai* movement begun by Hashimoto and Sawaki. Hashimoto published a series of articles on the *Hōbuku kakushō* in the journal *Dōgen* from 1938 to 1940.¹² Sakai Tokugen 酒井得元 (1912–1996), Sawaki's disciple, published Sawaki's articles on the *Hōbuku kakushō* as a series in the journal *Daihōrin* 大法輪 from 1976 to 1979, based on Sawaki's lectures on the text during the last year of his life at Antaiji in Kyoto.¹³

Both of these texts sought to inform and correct lapses in the understanding of the Buddhist robe by referring to Dōgen's *Kesa kudoku* and *Den'e* fascicles. These fascicles promote faith in the religious significance of the robe rather than strictly defining its form. Dōgen often uses the device of delivering precise instructions followed by a proviso that the true robe is without set boundaries and is not limited to a particular form. For example, in the section on rag robes (*funzōe* 糞掃衣), Dōgen lists the kinds of fabric that the *vinaya* traditionally defined as appropriate for making rag robes, but he ends by saying that any kind of cloth, even new cloth is suitable (DZZ 1: 629). In another section he claims that since the robe is not limited or defined by its size, there is no contradiction in the teaching that Śākyamuni Buddha passed on his own robe to be held in trust for the future Buddha, Maitreya, whose physical size was believed to be much bigger than Śākyamuni (DZZ 1: 636–637). So although Dōgen gives some practical instructions about the robe in these two fascicles, he does not explicitly define the manner of construction nor the dimensions of the garment. It is quite likely that he expected his followers to rely on the instructions in the Chinese translation of the *Dharmagupta vinaya*, the *Ssu fen lü* 四分律 (Jpn: *Shibunritsu*) and the commentaries on this *vinaya* by the seventh-century Chinese *vinaya* master, Daoxuan 道宣 (Jpn: Dōsen, 596–667) that had been transmitted to Japan by Chien-chen 鑑真 (Jpn: Ganjin, 688–763) in the eighth century. Dōgen focused on issues concerning the monastic regulations only on those points in which he disagreed with Daoxuan's interpretation, such as the time limit for making robes, or whether silk is appropriate fabric for robes (KAWAGUCHI 1976, pp. 337; 340–43).

For Mokushitsu and Sōkō, however, the form of the robe was an important

the Meiji Restoration. This faction promoted the use of the forty-eight precepts in the *Fan-wang jing* 梵網經 (Jpn: Bonmōkyō; Brahma-net Sutra) in conjunction with the two hundred and fifty precepts used in Chinese Buddhist ordinations and in Japanese ordinations before Saichō's 最澄 (766–822) establishment of Tendai Buddhism. See NAKAMURA 2002, 25b.

11. For information regarding Nishiari Bokuzan's participation in efforts to revive the precepts in Sōtō Zen and his resistance to clerical marriage, see JAFFE 2001.

12. The journal *Dōgen* was published from 1934–1936 by Hyakugōsha 百毫社 and from 1936–1944 by Meicho Fukyūkai 名著普及会.

13. The journal *Daihōrin* 大法輪 has been continuously published since 1934 by Daihōrinkaku.

religious question that had to be researched carefully in the face of various external pressures. The bakufu government insisted that Buddhist organizations standardize clerical dress. At the same time the bakufu had established a congregational system (*danka seido* 檀家制度), which included elaborate funeral ceremonies and demanded that the robes worn by the priests on these occasions be properly formal and of expensive and bright designs, following to some degree, the newly imported style of Chinese Ōbaku Zen robes, which were quite gaudy (KAWAGUCHI 1984, p. 145). Mokushitsu and Sōkō's approach in using monastic regulations and other sources to supplement the *Shōbōgenzō*, therefore, was not simply to return to Dōgen's idea of the robe, but to establish a form of the robe that was as close as possible to the teaching of the Buddha. By joining the *Kesa kudoku* and *Den'e* fascicles with instructions about the robe from the *vinaya* they could maintain fidelity with Dōgen's teaching about the robe as an expression of the Buddha's wisdom, while at the same time establishing guidelines for the physical robe. This notion that by restoring the physical form of the Buddhist robe one would in turn restore the authenticity of the Buddha's teaching and that this authentic robe could provide a focal point for transcending sectarian differences was the prime motivation for the third major author who shaped Sawaki's vision of the Buddhist robe: Jiun Onkō 慈雲飲光 (1718–1804).

One of the characteristics of Sawaki's teaching about the robe is his intense personal commitment to his search for the authentic Buddhist robe. As the following biographical section discusses, Sawaki had developed early in life a physical impression of what such a robe would look like. His efforts to match reality with this ideal mental picture of the robe led him to study Jiun Onkō's texts about the robe, unlike his contemporaries whose main interest was in understanding Sōtō Zen texts about the robe.

Although a cleric of the Shingon Risshū 眞言律宗 school that emphasized monastic regulations, Jiun Onkō's interests were not limited to that sect.¹⁴ At the age of nineteen Jiun left his post as abbot of Hōrakuji to study meditation for two years with Hōsen Daibai 法環大梅 (1682–1757), a Sōtō Zen teacher. Even after returning to his duties, Jiun continued throughout his life to have a high regard for the Sōtō style of meditation and often recommended it to his lay disciples. In 1749 Jiun decided that it was essential to revive the true teaching and practice of the Buddhist way, a movement which he called the *Shōbōritsu* (True Teaching Regulation). In writing *Konpon Sōsei* 根本僧制 [Basic regulations for monks], Jiun placed monastic regulations as the highest authority, followed by scriptures and commentaries; and finally the instructions of past teachers and

14. The Shingon Risshū branch was founded by Eizon 叡尊 (1201–1290) who promoted the revival of the two hundred and fifty precepts ordination transmitted by Ganjin. Eizon also led many precepts assemblies for lay people at Saidaiji 西大寺. Although the Shingon Risshū branch had languished, it was revived in the sixteenth century, and Jiun was an important factor in its continued vitality. The following discussion of Jiun's biography relies on WATT 1982.

the advice of the community of monks (JSZ VI, 70–75; WATT 1982, p. 87). He declared that there is no sectarian obstacle to following this movement. Jiun's stance towards the precepts was that one should follow the outward practice of the *vinaya* with the inner attitude of a Bodhisattva.

In 1750 Jiun began a series of lectures on the Buddhist robe at Keirinji 桂林寺 that were later assembled into his commentary, *Butsumon ebuku shōgihen hyōshaku* 佛門衣服正儀備評釈 [Critique of “Correct explanation of Buddhist apparel”] to show how Buddhist garments in China and Japan violated monastic regulations (JSZ II, 1–306).¹⁵ Over the next eight years Jiun produced his three major works on the Buddhist robe, beginning with the 1751 text, *Hōbuku zugi* 法服図儀 [Explanations with illustrations of monastic attire], a revision of Hōtan's work and the most technical of the three major texts (abridged JSZ I, 1–83; unabridged, 87–324). In 1756 Jiun wrote *Shōtoku Taishi kesa kenshōki* 聖徳太子袈裟験證記 [A record of the investigation of Shōtoku Taishi's robe], which concerns his study of robes preserved at Shitennojō, Osaka (JSZ I, 329–339). Because the Shitennojō was believed to be founded by Shōtoku Taishi in 593, Jiun believed that these robes were the original robes of Prince Shōtoku. Jiun made two physical copies of the robes, giving one robe to Shitennojō and keeping one for himself. A lesser known work is Jiun's *Hōbuku kasan gi* 法服歌讚議 [Verses in praise of the Buddhist robe], which first introduced Sawaki Kōdō to the significance of research on the Buddhist robe (JSZ I, 341–354).

Other works by Jiun contributed to a broader understanding of how attitudes toward the Buddhist robe were formed by the transmission of Daoxuan's interpretation of the *vinaya* to Japan. In 1758 Jiun wrote *Konpon setsu issai ubu esō ryakuyō* 根本説一切有部衣相略要 [Brief explanation of the form of the robe in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*] a commentary on the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* in regard to monastic clothing (JSZ III, 307–339).¹⁶ Finally, his *Nankai kikiden geranshō* 南海寄記帰伝解覽抄 [Explanation of the record of travel to the Southern Seas] is a commentary on Yi-jing's (Jpn: Gijō 義淨, 635–713) record of his travels that contains some references to the Buddhist robe (JSZ IV, 39–555). Yi-jing, a contemporary of Daoxuan, was critical of Chinese attitudes toward the robe, and was particularly critical of some of Daoxuan's interpretations of the monastic regulations about the robe. Yi-jing thus provides an alternative view that was important to Dōgen as well as Jiun. For example, in *Kesa kudoku*, Dōgen argues that silk, because of its easy accessibility, is an appropriate fabric for robes, directly contradicting Daoxuan's prohibition against using silk

15. Jiun was inspired to write about the robe after reading *Butsumon ebuku shōgihen* 佛門衣服正儀備 [Correct explanation of Buddhist apparel], written by the Kegon priest, Hōtan 鳳潭 (1654–1738). See WATT 1982, pp. 91–92.

16. Jiun, like a number of his contemporaries, studied the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* as an alternative to the *Dharmaguptaka vinaya* (Chn. *Su fen lü*). Shayne CLARKE surveys this literature in his “Miscellaneous Musings on Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya Revival in Tokugawa Japan.”

because it involves the death of living creatures. Dōgen's position is so similar to Yi-jing on this point, that it is likely that he relied on Yi-ching's record.

These studies on the significance and the form of the Buddhist robe have become the main textual authority for the development of twentieth century lay-based practice of *fukudenkai*. Jiun, Mokushitsu, and Sōkō were primarily concerned, however, with ensuring that Buddhist robes for ordained clergy conveyed the authenticity of the early Buddhist tradition. They did not conceive of Buddhist robes as having possibilities for lay practice. This shift in focus toward serious lay practice combined with robe sewing is the work of Sawaki Kōdō and Hashimoto Ekō, whose lecture tours and serialized publications interpreted and publicized these works among dedicated Sōtō lay people as well as among the clergy. The following section discusses the biographical details of Sawaki Kōdō's life that were significant in developing faith in the Buddhist robe and the practice of sewing robes by hand. I have chosen to concentrate on Sawaki Kōdō because three out of the four *fukudenkai* groups where I have done fieldwork were founded by either his direct disciples or by the next generation from those direct disciples.

SAWAKI KŌDŌ AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUKUDENKAI GROUPS

Sawaki Kōdō was born in Mie prefecture to a family of rickshaw artisans.¹⁷ At the age of seventeen, Sawaki determined to become a monk and applied to the head temple of the Sōtō sect, Eihei-ji. After a year at Eihei-ji he received clerical ordination from Sawada Kōhō 沢田興法 in Kyushu. Although Sawaki was to receive transmission of the teaching from Sawada six years later, he only stayed a few months after his ordination, leaving to study at Ryōun-ji 竜雲寺 in Hyogo prefecture, where he met Fueoka Ryōun 笛岡凌雲 (1845–1923). Fueoka, who had been Nishiari Bokuzan's close disciple for twenty years, left a strong impression on Sawaki, who saw this quiet monk as the personification of Dōgen's teaching. Still an impressionable young man of twenty, Sawaki also deeply admired the Buddhist robe that Fueoka wore. This robe became a model for Sawaki and his feelings of reverence for this robe are a key factor in the incident that motivated him to seriously begin his study of the Buddhist robe.

After this formative experience, however, Sawaki's career as a Buddhist monk was interrupted by six years in the army where he served during the Japanese Russian war. In 1906 at the age of twenty-seven he resumed his Buddhist studies,

17. Biographical details are drawn from various sources, including the *Zengaku daijiten* (KOMAZAWA DAIGAKUNAI ZENGAKU DAIJITEN HENSANJO 1985), 387a; TANAKA 1990; SAKAI 1984; and SAWAKI 1938 and 1956, on which much of Tanaka and Sakai's biographies rely. These biographies are widely available: Tanaka's biography was in its third printing by 1995; Sakai's biography has been published as part of *Kodansha bunkobun* series; and Sawaki's semi-autobiographical *Zendan* 禅談, originally a series of essays published in the magazine *Daihōrin*, is in its sixth printing.

receiving transmission from Sawada, and attending lectures at Hōryūji 法隆寺 and Eiheji 永平寺 for the next four years. In 1908 Sawaki visited Jiun's Shōbōritsu temple, Kōkiji 高貴寺, in Mt. Katsuragi 葛城山, Osaka prefecture, where for the first time he saw Jiun's robes. Not long after this Sawaki had an encounter with two nuns from Katsuragi who were in the fourth generation in the line of Jiun. Sawaki often uses the story of this meeting as an illustration of mysterious connections (*en* 縁) through which he came to value the study of the Buddhist robe. In his autobiography Sawaki entitles this incident, "The two beautiful nuns and robe research" (SAWAKI 1956, pp. 120–29).

This event occurred when Sawaki was attending a wake for a friend's father who had been a Shingon priest at Kichidenji 吉田寺. At the wake he saw two nuns wearing Buddhist robes. The robes of these Shingon nuns so resembled those of his old teacher that Sawaki felt a great shock of recognition. In spite of the gravity of the situation, he could not help asking the two nuns about their robes. When the nuns explained that they were the fourth generation of Jiun's line and that they had made these robes themselves, Sawaki resolved to learn all he could from them. The nuns were interested in Dōgen's teachings and invited Sawaki to lecture at their retreat temple. Sawaki lectured on the *Gakudō yōjinshū* 学道用心集 [Summary of essential attitudes in studying the Way] fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* and the *Zuimonki* 随聞記, a record of Dōgen's talks about Zen practice traditionally attributed to Koun Ejō 孤雲懷賢 (1198–1280), Dōgen's close disciple. It was the first time that Sawaki had delivered a lecture series even to such a small group. After some time, one of the nuns brought a copy of Jiun's collection of songs of praise about the Buddhist robe, the *Hōbuku kasan gi*, and asked him to lecture on this text. Thinking that he could simply read the text and lecture on it, Sawaki brought it home and tried to read it. But the text was nearly incomprehensible to him, so Sawaki began to search through Jiun's works for guidance. It was at this point that Sawaki discovered the extent of his ignorance about the robe and began his studies in earnest. He realized that these nuns, although they had not studied the texts, understood the Buddhist robe very well and he absorbed as much of their practical knowledge as he could.

Shortly after this, in 1913, Sawaki met Oka Sōtan 丘宗潭 (1860–1921) and joined the *Shōbōgenzō* study group in 1915 that Oka was leading at Eiheiji. Sawaki followed Oka until his death in 1921. During these years Sawaki gradually took on more responsibilities as a teacher, including leading a meditation group for high school students. Sawaki continued his studies of the Buddhist robe with such enthusiasm that the high school students he taught in Kumamoto and Kyoto began to refer to him as the "Japanese Carlyle."¹⁸ Because he moved around so frequently, leading

18. Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) was widely read by Japanese students during the Taisho era, and this appellation was in reference to Carlyle's semi-satirical philosophic essay on clothing, *Sartor Resartus*, translated into Japanese in 1922 as *Ishō no tetsugaku* 衣裳の哲学. Some scholars of dress recognize Carlyle as having laid the theoretical foundation for contemporary theories of dress. See KEENAN 2001.

meditation groups wherever he travelled, Sawaki also came to be called the Itinerant Temple (*idō sōrin* 移動叢林). In 1935 Sawaki became a teacher at Komazawa University 駒澤大学 in Tokyo about the same time that he was appointed to the high ranking position of Godō 後堂 at Sōjiji 總持寺, one of the two head temples of the Sōtō sect.

Throughout the 1930s Sawaki lectured on the *Shōbōgenzō*. But it was his lectures at the Nagoya convent on the *Shōbōgenzō* and the *Hōbuku kakusho* that inspired the women there to begin sewing their own ordination robes. The activity seems to have attracted some resistance, however, from the Sōtō headquarters.¹⁹ During the Meiji period a dispute between Eiheiji and Sōjiji impelled the Sōtō organization to try to standardize priest's attire. This effort continued for some years; directives were issued frequently during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and gradually tapered off during the mid-twentieth century.²⁰

Sawaki's study of the Buddhist robe came during a period of intense realignment of competing factions about the Buddhist robe in Sōtō Zen. It is not surprising, therefore, that his promotion of hand sewing Buddhist robes and his claim that these were closer to the Buddha's original intention than commercially-made robes would have been met with some suspicion by Sōtō headquarters. Sawaki Kōdō was outspoken in his belief that an authentic Buddhist robe had to be made by hand with a mind of faith, and that it would therefore be impossible to buy such a robe at a commercial robe makers. In present day Sōtō these *fukudenkai* groups have been allowed to continue, but the Sōtō headquarters insists that priests attending ceremonies at the main temples of Eiheiji and Sōjiji must wear robes bought at commercial robe retail stores that have been made according to official regulations.

Sawaki came to be well known for a few phrases about the importance of the Buddhist robe, "Shave the head, wear the robe, that's all"; and "my school is the robe school." These phrases, repeated frequently at meditation groups and public lectures also appear in his writings, usually set in an autobiographical context. His commentaries on fascicles of the *Shōbōgenzō* combine scholarly exegesis with personal accounts; many of these collected works were initially public talks that were later published serially in *Daihōrin*. Sakai Tokugen, Sawaki's disciple, edited these talks and published them as Sawaki's collected works. One exception is *Zendan* 禪談, published originally in 1935 as a series of articles in *Daihōrin*, including one chapter, "Okesa no hanashi" お袈裟の話 [Talks on the robe]. These articles were published as an independent volume in 1938, and have since been republished a

19. TANAKA (1990 vol. 1, pp. 64–65) relates but questions the validity of the story that an official of the Sōtō head organization went to the convent in Nagoya and told them that making such robes was a violation of sect regulations, and that soon afterward Sawaki stopped his lecture series at the convent.

20. KAWAGUCHI (1984, pp. 167–249) lists the contents for proclamations issued in 1801, 1858, 1860–1861, 1886, 1888, 1896 1903, 1905, 1913, 1925, 1952, and 1982.

number of times. In 1997 a modern edition was published and is now in its sixth printing. This collection of lectures about Zen practice is quite readable and, given the number of times it has been republished, appears to be the most popular of Sawaki's writings.

Sawaki's disciples rather than Sawaki himself are primarily responsible for extending the practice of sewing robes to lay believers and expanding the activity of *fukudenkai* groups. Sawaki's students established meditation and robe sewing groups in the cities of Tokyo, Kyoto, Nagoya, Obama, and in Hokkaido and Kyushu and many other small locations as well as in Europe and the United States. The guide for many *fukudenkai* groups is *Kesa no kenkyū* 袈裟の研究 published by KYŪMA Echū 久馬慧忠 (1934–) in 1967 under Sawaki Kōdō's editorial direction.

In 1964 Kyūma established a *fukudenkai* group in Ichinomiya city near Nagoya. The group, which meets twice a year, has continued without a break for over thirty years. Kyūma lectures once a day during the five-day retreats, either from the *Kesa kudoku* or from the *Hōbuku kakusho*. In addition to *Kesa no kenkyū*, books aimed at a more popular audience include *Kesa no hanashi* 袈裟の話し (1989) and *Kesa to zazen* 袈裟と坐禪 (2003) by Kyūma's son, Kyūma Eidō 久馬栄道 (1959–) under Kyūma's editorial supervision. Kyūma has also published articles on Jiun and robes. He was brought in as a consultant and his book *Kesa no kenkyū* was used by Shingon robe sewing groups who wished to commemorate Jiun's two-hundred-year memorial by making one thousand robes.²¹ Kyūma's work guides long-standing Sōtō groups and the more recent Shingon groups that have become interested in sewing the Buddhist robe.

Another important, though less conspicuous figure in the development of *fukudenkai* is Kawase Genkō 川瀬玄光 (1908–1988).²² Kawase had already determined at the age of twelve to become a nun and received ordination at the age of twenty one. Her first encounter with Sawaki was in 1931 when he lectured in Nagoya for a week on the *Hōbuku kakushō* as part of the one-hundred year memorial for Mokushitsu Ryōyō. The lectures were very popular among Nagoya temples; one account says that five-to-six-hundred clergy filled the lecture hall each day. On the last day Sawaki wrote on the blackboard, "Religion is daily life." Kawase was so struck by this statement that she became Sawaki's devoted student and continued to ponder this statement for the rest of her life. Kawase became the

21. Jiun's lifelong vow was to make one thousand robes based on his research about the robe and distribute them to other monks so that they would understand the robe made according to the Buddhist teaching. The Jiun Sonja Two-Hundred-Year-Memorial-Robe Sewing Project (慈雲尊者二百年遠忌「千衣裁縫発願」) involved Shingon temples throughout Japan. Participants gathered at their local temples to sew Buddhist robes, producing over one thousand robes in honor of Jiun. In January 2004 I sent out a two page survey to the nearly 1000 participants in the project and am currently analyzing the results.

22. Biographical information on Kawase comes from MYŌGENJI 1990.

head nun at Myōgenji 妙玄寺 where she published a small newsletter called *Henshō* 返照, which included writings by Sawaki and his followers. Kawase began sewing robes, making a name for herself in robe studies during her lifetime. She trained most of the nuns who later came to lead *fukudenkai*, such as Okamoto Kōbun 岡本光文 (1925–), who currently teaches at Ichinomiya, and Kasai Jōshin 笠井浄心 (c. 1920–1985).

Sakai Tokugen 酒井得元 (1912–1996), who edited Sawaki's collected works, established a *fukudenkai* at Kannon-in in Tokyo, which is now led by Kuruma Shōgyō. This group meets one Saturday afternoon a month for meditation, a talk by the head priest, and a two-hour sewing period. Once a year in November there is a formal ceremony of receiving the robes (*jue-sahō*) in which participants receive sixteen precepts (*jukai*) and the robes they have made during the year.

The spread of robe sewing to the West has been primarily through disciples of Sawaki Kōdō. Kasai Jōshin taught a number of disciples, including Mizuno Yaoko 水野弥穂子 (1921–), who established a sewing group in Tokyo in 1964.²³ Jōshin also taught robe sewing at San Francisco Zen Center during the 1970s and 1980s. Her instructions for making robes were recorded under her direction by students at the Zen Center. The abbot, Richard Baker, insisted on the practice of making one's own robe before receiving the precepts and the practice continues to this day at this Zen center, as well as in other North American Zen centers founded by its alumni. European Zen centers have also been active in making their own robes, due in part to the fact that Reverend Deshimaru, who is described by his disciples as having received transmission from Sawaki Kōdō, encouraged his students to sew their own robes at the Zen meditation groups he founded in France. Kyūma has made a number of trips to Germany and France to teach groups there so Sawaki Kōdō's instructions for making Buddhist robes have therefore spread among US and European Buddhist groups.²⁴ Although these Western groups are doing the practice, their awareness of the history of the origin of the robes and how they differ from guidelines of the Sōtō headquarters about clerical dress is low. With this historical background for the development of *fukudenkai* I will next describe the kinds of robes that are made.

23. Mizuno Yaoko has published annotated modern language editions of most of the ninety-five fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*. Her modern edition of the *Kesa kudoku*, (1987) with notes and commentary is a popular study text among *fukudenkai* participants.

24. The website of the Deshimaru's Zen groups contains a biography, photographs and excerpts from lectures by Sawaki translated into French (www.zen-deshimaru.com/FR/sangha/kodo/sawaki.htm). This group has established Zen practice centers throughout Europe, South America, North America, and the Caribbean. Some sites list robe sewing groups as a featured activity.

A Taxonomy of Fukudenkai Robes

The kinds of robes made at *fukudenkai* fall into five categories: the small five-panel robe worn on a strap around the neck called the *rakusu* that is worn by lay people during formal practice such as meditation and lectures and by clergy in informal situations; the seven-panel robe worn by newly ordained clergy and, in some groups, by the laity; and the nine-or-more panel robes worn by clergy who have undergone a ceremony called the transmission of the teaching (*shihō* 嗣法) and can take on more teaching responsibilities; a set of three miniaturized robes (*shosan e* 小三衣) that function as a reminder or a preserver of one's religious discipline; and finally, the rag robe (*funzōe* 糞掃衣) made from pieces of discarded cloth. These five categories of robes indicate different levels of religious responsibility and serve as a kind of graded acquisition of knowledge about making robes. The first three categories of robe correspond to the set of three robes allowed by the *vinaya* as necessities for the Buddhist monk. Some *fukudenkai* participants make the whole set of three robes in preparation for a ceremony of lay ordination (*zaike tokudo* 在家得度).

The first project that a newcomer to *fukudenkai* undertakes is the five-panel *rakusu*. Measuring approximately 35 centimeters wide by 24 centimeters high in finished dimensions, the *rakusu*, although small, is a complex sewing project that requires constant guidance from the teacher. Often undertaken at the suggestion of their meditation teacher, the laity make a *rakusu* to wear during meditation and when attending Buddhist talks or religious services. After completing a *rakusu* the participant may go on to make a seven-panel *kesa* or, in some groups, to make the miniaturized set of robes, but in many cases, participation ends with this first project.

The practice of making a set of three small robes is based on the monastic regulation that a monk should not be separated from his robes for even a night, except under a strictly defined set of rules. During the Tokugawa period some prominent Sōtō Zen clergy, such as Manzan Dōhaku 叡山道白 (1636–1714) and Menzan Zuihō, became interested in reviving the practice of carrying a miniature set of three robes on one's person at all times. Based on records that both Keizan Jōkin 瑩山紹瑾 (1268–1325) and his disciple Daichi Zenji 大智禪師 (1290–1336) had kept such a set of miniature robes, Manzan had a set made for himself in 1714, stating that the purpose in carrying this set of robes was first to remind oneself of having received the teaching of the Buddhas, and second, to preserve the monastic regulation against being separated from one's robes (KAWAGUCHI 2002, p. 187). Not all *fukudenkai* groups make this set of small robes; some teachers encourage the laity to make a set and carry it with them as a reminder of their Buddhist practice, or as a kind of talisman; others consider that making the set of three robes, which includes a nine-panel robe, should be limited to ordained clergy. The miniature set of three robes, each of which

measure 10 centimeters in width by 17 centimeters in height, are folded up together and placed in a small carrying bag.

The sewing design for *rakusu* and *kesa* developed by the Sōtō organization during the last century are remarkably different from the robes made in *fukudenkai* (See FIGURES 1a and 1b for an example of *fukudenkai rakusu*; FIGURES 2a

and 2b for an example of commercial *rakusu*). The third kind of robe is the *kesa*, which can be from seven to as many as twenty-five panels. The seven-panel robe, *uttarasō* 鬱多羅僧, and nine-or-more panel robes, *sōgyari* 僧伽梨 or *dai e* 大衣, are much larger projects and can often take a year or more to complete.²⁵ These robes are usually made from new cloth that has been cut into pieces and resewn into identical panels. For robes of seven to thirteen panels, each panel has two long pieces and one short piece; in robes of fifteen to nineteen panels each panel is made of three long pieces and one short piece; in robes made of twenty-one-to-twenty-five panels each panel is made of four long pieces and one short piece. The individual panels are constructed in such a way that the pieces at the top of the panel overlap each successive lower piece. These panels are then sewn together so that the two vertical seams of the middle panel overlap the panels flanking either side and each successive panel is overlapped from the panel closest to the center toward the outer edge of the robe. The overlapping of the horizontal



FIGURES 1a & 1b. A *fukudenkai* style hand-sewn *rakusu*. Photos by author.

25. The five-panel robe, sometimes referred to as the *anda e* 安陀衣 was a kind of undergarment in Indian Buddhism. It was worn around the waist and next to the skin, for informal occasions in the monastery. Although made of five panels, the *rakusu* does not properly correspond to the original use of the *anda e* as it is worn (like other *kesa*) over the *koromo* and kimono.



FIGURES 2a & 2b. A black *rakusu* purchased from a commercial robe store. It shows the style of sewing determined by the Sōtō shūmichō. Photos by author.

seams of each panel from top to bottom and on the long vertical seams from middle to the edges provides the characteristic wet-rice-paddy pattern (*densō* 田相). In this metaphor, the water of the teaching of the Buddha flows from the upper to the lower edge and from the center to the periphery of the robe, just as the water flows in the rice paddy. In the *Hōbuku kakusho* Mokushitsu presents the metaphor as a simile: just as the water in the rice paddy nourishes the growing plants, the shape of the robe illustrates the Buddha's teaching nourishing the aspiration of the practitioner (KAWAGUCHI 1976, p. 140).

The sewing design for *rakusu* and *kesa* developed by the Sōtō organization during the last century are remarkably different from the robes made in *fukudenkai*. The individual panels of this official garment are not of a uniform size. Often the middle panel alone or the middle and the two end panels are the largest size, with the panels flanking the center panel being middle-sized and the panels closer to the edge being the smallest. The pattern of overlapping seams as described above in the metaphor of the rice paddy is also

not consistent. This is especially apparent in the five-panel *rakusu* in which the center panel and two flanking panels nearly obscure the fourth and fifth panels. The metaphor of flowing water does not apply to the design of these robes. In addition, the Sōtō organization requires that the left strap of the *rakusu* be outfitted with a large plastic or wooden ring. A large ring used to fasten the robe around the body is a common feature of *kesa* depicted in statues and portraits during the Kamakura period, but the use of the ring in the *rakusu* is not functional, and varied from teacher to teacher throughout the Meiji period (KAWAGUCHI 2001, pp. 233–38). By insisting that this ring be affixed to the *rakusu* the Sōtō organization has ensured that the garment can be easily recognizable

even from a distance as a robe that conforms to the form prescribed by the Sōtō organization. Interestingly, the illustrations accompanying the articles on *kesa* and *rakusu* in the *Zengaku daijiten*, the authoritative encyclopedia published with the approval of the Sōtō organization, depict a typical *fukudenkai* style of construction without the ring in the *rakusu* and with evenly sized panels whose seams are sewn overlapping from the top down and from the center outward in the wet rice paddy pattern (*Zengaku daijiten* 1985, 268d and 1259a).

The last of the five types of robes is the rag robe.²⁶ It is considered by many participants to be the highest level of robe sewing achievement and is usually undertaken only after one has made a number of robes. Contemporary *fukudenkai* groups draw on a rich textual tradition in Buddhism about the religious significance of such rag robes. Making and wearing the rag robe is associated with Mahākāśyapa, the ascetic and spiritual heir of the Buddha, and appears in the early Buddhist sources as an ascetic practice.²⁷ The robes themselves were thought to concentrate the spiritual power of the practitioner. The practice of making such robes by gathering pieces of cloth that had been discarded by lay people at gravesites or along the roadside is described in the monastic regulations.²⁸ The lists of fabric suitable for such robes usually refer not to the kind of material, but rather to what has happened to the cloth, such as having been gnawed by mice or cattle, or used for menses or wrapping dead bodies. Although these descriptions suggest that the impurity of the cloth arises from the uses to which it has been put, in fact the term impure refers rather to whether or not one is in conformity with monastic regulation. Thus, in a sense, all fabric is impure until it has been made into a robe according to the regulations. The final purification of any robe takes place when the teacher marks the robe with an inkstain, usually on the back of the garment, called the *tenjo*. This mark, by “soiling” the cloth, indicates that the robe is now Buddha’s robe and is not a personal possession. Buddha has used it and stained it, so it is now pure. These layered definitions of purity and impurity in robes reach an even greater complexity in the rag robe. Contemporary *fukudenkai* teachers focus first on the selection of suitable fabrics, usually fabric obtained by raiding grandmother’s stock of old kimono and second on the merit acquired by undertaking

26. The term *funzōe* 糞掃衣 is simply a transliteration of the Sanskrit term for rag robe, *pāṃśukūla*. Since the Chinese characters used to transliterate the term, however, translate literally as, “excrement-wiping cloth robe” it has been misunderstood to be a robe made of cloth used for cleaning filth. For a discussion of the Sanskrit term *pāṃśukūla* see SILK 2004.

27. Wearing the three robes was listed among the thirteen ascetic practices. See “*zuda*” 頭陀 in NAKAMURA 2002, 592b. For the exchange of robes between Śākyamuni Buddha and Mahākāśyapa see SILK 2004.

28. Monastic regulations that define the kinds of cloth are: *Shibun ritsu* T.22, 850a; *Gobun ritsu* 五分律, T.22, 143b; *Jūjuritsu* T.23, 195a and 413b; *Konponsetsu issai ubu binaya* 根本説一切有部毘奈耶 T.23, 715c.

the sewing project. The social structure of the project is also a significant aspect of making the rag robe and will be described below in the fieldwork section.

Detailed instructions for suitable kinds of cloth, methods of measurement, cutting, and sewing the cloth for each of these categories except the miniaturized robes is given in Kyūma's *Kesa no kenkyū*, but each *fukudenkai* has developed their own practices and distributes informal sets of written instructions. The following section describes my fieldwork at the Ichinomiya *fukudenkai* with supplementary information from other groups I have attended. It is in these groups where the ideal of the robe as an expression of the Buddha's teaching is brought to life by *fukudenkai* participants.

Fukudenkai Fieldwork

My fieldwork began in September 2002 when I attended three days of a five-day *fukudenkai* in Ichinomiya, Aichi Prefecture. I have since then attended two more of their five-day *fukudenkai*. For this report the Ichinomiya group is the base, although I have included information from other groups I visited in Tokyo, Obama, Yamanashi City, and Nagoya, all of which were established by disciples of Sawaki or Hashimoto. In all of these situations, I have entered the *fukudenkai* as a full participant, following the same schedule and undertaking the same responsibilities as other participants. Very few foreigners have attended *fukudenkai*, and none for an extended period. These groups have not yet been studied by Japanese or Western academic researchers. Both being a foreigner and an academic would naturally distance me from the other participants, but this potential distancing was mitigated in my case by my training in Sōtō Zen practice forms at San Francisco Zen Center from 1970 to 1986.

My training as a Zen priest in the United States was invaluable in gaining trust from other participants because I was already familiar with the daily routine of a practice retreat. During the 1970s and early 1980s members of San Francisco Zen Center attempted to reproduce Japanese forms as faithfully as possible. In addition, I had studied robe sewing under Sakai Jōshin (1914–1984), who was invited to San Francisco Zen Center in the 1970s. Although she had a minimal English vocabulary, Jōshin was a skilled communicator, and what I learned from her was very similar to the teaching of Okamoto Kōbun, the current sewing teacher at Ichinomiya.²⁹

I was not accepted as completely as a Japanese participant, but this training helped me to establish an empathetic relationship with other participants. I also developed relationships with other participants who served in the role of local informant, and helped to confirm my understanding of conversations that had taken place. These informants continue to be valuable participants in my

29. Okamoto Kōbun studied under Sawaki Kōdō at the same time as Jōshin and considers Jōshin to be her "elder Dharma sister" (*anedeshi* 姉弟子). Both nuns studied with Kawase Genkō.

research. As I explain below, the rather complex relationships of insider/outside roles in these groups can be used to good effect in gathering information and understanding the ethos of *fukudenkai*.

Formal lectures, informal interviews with participants and teachers, overheard conversations, and general talk around the tea table are the sources for this report. Some conversations were private but most took place semi-publicly as people sewed. They look down as they sew, and with little eye contact the situation is relaxed and not confrontational. There is no prohibition against conversation during the sewing hours. Control of the linguistic floor is loose and any conversation invites comment. Usually only senior people or the teacher will actually address the speaker over a distance, while others might comment to their neighbor. This openness provided many informal opportunities for the teacher to guide people, and often everyone in the room became involved in the conversation.

The following section discusses aspects of the daily life of the *fukudenkai*, including the daily schedule and the teaching structure; the types of participants and their motivation; issues about Buddhist beliefs and practices, such as merit making and taking the precepts; the education of taste; and finally, hand sewing robes versus commercial production. The categories come directly from these conversations and would be recognized by the participants themselves as aspects of *fukudenkai*. Because the majority of my fieldwork to date has been at one site, this article is primarily a case study of that group with supplementary and comparative data from research at other sites that share many beliefs and practices. The similarity is due in part to the fact that almost all the groups grew out of the teachings, both oral and written, of Sawaki Kōdō.

Two of the teachers are Sawaki's direct disciples; others are second- or third-generation disciples. These similarities are not, however, entirely due to the influence of one teacher. Although Sawaki Kōdō's teachings are a vital part of the source materials, the members are also aware that there is a long history of making one's own robes by hand and that there has been considerable Buddhist commentary on monks' attire. *Fukudenkai* participants see themselves as the living representatives of this larger tradition that has both performative and scholarly aspects. Although I have not heard it discussed in these groups, it is quite likely that many of these categories would appear whenever people gather to sew religious garments and objects by hand, believing that these hand sewn objects will become imbued with the sacred.³⁰

A: STRUCTURE OF THE *FUKUDENKAI*

The Ichinomiya *fukudenkai* is held twice a year in May and September. Participants follow a schedule similar to a Zen meditation retreat (*sesshin* 接心), with

30. The role of cloth and garments in religious life has been the subject of a number of recent publications. See especially WEINER and SCHNEIDER 1989, ARTHUR 1999 and 2000, and KEENAN 1999 and 2000.

sewing replacing the hours of meditation. The daily schedule of the *fukudenkai* is posted prominently over the dining room entrance as follows:

- 4:45 Wake-up bell
- 5:00 Zazen
- 5:50 Morning service: chanting scriptures and the temple teaching lineage
- 6:00 Formal tea, followed by breakfast
- 7:00 Cleaning the temple
- 8:00 Informal tea
- 8:30 Sewing
- 9:00 Lecture
- 10:30 Sewing
- 12:00 Lunch
- 13:00 Sewing
- 14:30 Tea
- 15:00 Sewing, bathtime
- 18:00 Evening meal
- 21:00 Sleep

Every participant who stays overnight at the temple is required to attend morning meditation. It is a small temple with a Buddha Hall, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms on the main floor, and two rooms on the second floor that can be opened into one large room. During the *fukudenkai* the rooms in the main part of the temple have multiple uses. The men sleep in the Buddha Hall, hanging their clothes up to the left of the main altar. This room is also used for lecture, sewing, zazen, and morning service. The women sleep in the sewing room on the second floor. When the morning bell rings everyone gets up and puts their sleeping mats away in closets. Zazen begins fifteen minutes later in the Buddha Hall where the men have already set up the mats and cushions for meditation. The chanting speed is regulated so that lay people who are not familiar with the chants can follow it, unlike the usual fast chanting in temples. Communal meals are at long tables where participants kneel in two long rows facing each other. These meals are in formal Zen monastic style with chanting before the meal and at specific points during the meal. Ordained participants use their set of three monks' bowls, utensils, and cloths called *oryoki* 應量器 while lay participants receive a similar set for the duration of their stay. Although in principle the meals are silent, using only hand gestures to communicate, in fact there is a sense of camaraderie and the silence is often broken by more seasoned participants or priests showing the newcomers how to use the bowls and utensils. Young priests who have not done monastic training as well

as lay people have difficulty learning the formal style of eating, and both are corrected bluntly but kindly by seniors.

Temple cleaning after breakfast lasts for about forty minutes but this time is flexible and people often relax for a few minutes before the tea held at 8:00 AM. The tea, usually made with powdered green tea, is made individually, so people come in and out informally. The men prepare the Buddha Hall by setting out cushions and low tables for the lecture delivered by Kyūma which begins at 9:00 AM and continues for about two hours. After introductory chants, Kyūma sonorously reads out the section that will be the focus of that day's lecture. Each person is seated in zazen posture at a low table with a copy of the main text and supplementary texts that Kyūma is introducing that day. The main text used in the lectures during 2002 and 2003 was Dōgen's *Kesa kudoku*. In September 2003, Kyūma announced his intention to begin lecturing on the *Hōbuku kakusho*. Supplementary texts include shorter pieces, such as poems on the robe by the Sōtō priests Ryōkan 良寛 (1758–1833) and Daichi, short commentaries by Menzan Zuihō and Jiun Onkō, and a short inscription by the Jōdo Shinshū founder Shinran Shōnin 親鸞聖人 (1173–1262). These selections show the emphasis on the premodern Japanese Zen understanding of the religious value of the Buddhist robe. All the texts were written either in the Kamakura (1192–1333) or the Tokugawa (1603–1867) periods.

This emphasis on Japanese and especially Japanese Zen texts means that the vast material concerning the robe in *vinaya* texts and commentaries from other Buddhist traditions are ignored. Even ordained participants have little to no awareness of major Chinese Buddhist figures such as Daoxuan and Yijing whose interpretations of the robe were so important to Dōgen himself. The fact that there are no texts that precede Dōgen or postdate Mokushitsu means that participants learn about Dōgen's attitude toward the robe through his *Shōbō-genzō*, and through the poems and commentaries of Tokugawa-period Sōtō Zen Buddhists, whose goal was to illuminate Dōgen's attitude toward the robe. The texts chosen from these two periods support faith in the Buddhist robe as an aspect of Dōgen's teaching. Also, the focus on premodern texts reinforces the belief that participants are helping to preserve a Buddhist practice that was all but destroyed by the commercial and manufacturing power that accompanies modernity. Kyūma refers to twentieth-century commentaries on the *Kesa kudoku* by Sawaki Kōdō and Mizuno Yaoko, but these are not studied as texts themselves: rather, he uses them to supplement his lecture remarks. Sawaki Kōdō's role in promoting *kesa* sewing is rarely mentioned in lectures. Kyūma does not tell stories about his experience working with Sawaki, nor is Sawaki's life held up as exemplary. Lectures at *fukudenkai* are therefore almost entirely focused on Dōgen, directly or indirectly, as the interpreter of the religious significance of the Buddhist robe.

On the other hand, a great deal of practical, material-oriented teaching

about the Buddhist robe takes place in the sewing room. Okamoto Kōbun, the head nun of the temple, teaches participants how to sew the garments and choose appropriate fabric, as well as giving impromptu instruction about historical changes in the garments. The sewing room functions as a kind of laboratory that allows the textual studies of Kyūma's lecture to be tested in the material world through the production of a garment. The result of the synergy between these textual and material worlds is an attitude of respect and reverence for the Buddhist robe as embodying the teaching of the Buddha.

B: PARTICIPANTS AND MOTIVATIONS

Participants in the *Fukudenkai* include men and women, ordained and lay people. The group is self-limiting to the Sōtō Zen faithful, since participation includes sitting periods of meditation, and lectures on Sōtō texts. Motivations for attending the robe sewing retreat range from casual social interest in sewing to the intention to deepen one's connection to the Sōtō Zen lineage by sewing a garment in preparation for taking the precepts. The following three categories are based on how participants informally classified themselves: local women who have formed a Buddhist robe sewing group that meets once a week; ordained men and women; and lay believers who come from a distance and stay overnight at the temple.

Local women. Most of the local women stay at home during morning zazen, lecture, and formal meals, attending only the hours of sewing. Unlike the other groups who gather only every six months, these women meet one afternoon a week throughout the year to sew Buddhist robes together under Okamoto's guidance. Over the years these women have become very close, and during the retreats they often sit together. Although many of them are working on individual projects, often for a husband or a son, they have also worked together on group projects. In one notable example, a local woman who was beginning a project of a rag robe learned that she had cancer. She had barely enough time to assemble the materials and decide on the pattern in which they were to be assembled before she died. The local women took on the project and finished it together in her memory.

The motivation of these local participants appears to be largely social but there are aspects of their activity that one could define as altruistic and religious. Participants in the other categories who define their own motivation as more religious or studious appeared to consider the local women's commitment to Sōtō teachings to be somewhat weak. I overheard conversations between local women about their unwillingness to attend lectures, sit in meditation, or do other activities not related to sewing. Conversely, overnight participants occasionally remarked on the fact that some local participants rarely participated in these activities. The *fukudenkai* interrupts the settled pattern of

the local women's weekly robe sewing group but they clearly enjoy the week-long availability of the teacher and the stimulus that the *fukudenkai* provides. The local women are attracted to Okamoto who embodies a dedicated nun's life, but whose gentle sense of humor and inclusiveness makes these women feel welcome. Okamoto feels that it would be a good thing if the women took more of an interest in sitting zazen, but she insists that the temple has always been open to whoever wants to sew robes, regardless of their intention toward formal Zen practice.

Okamoto also pointed out to me that women who have a morally questionable personal history are often attracted to sewing robes because they feel that this will help atone for their past. The idea of robe making as a merit building activity can be misleading, however, if one thinks of it as an abstraction, a piling up of good deeds to outweigh one's past. Rather than abstract merit making, the activity of sewing robes itself has an effect on the person. Okamoto observes that the sewing helps calm people and accept their life with more equanimity, producing a psychological state which is similar to meditation. For example, in response to my survey of Shingon robe sewing groups, some participants wrote that they felt while they were sewing the robe that they had experienced selflessness (*muga* 無我) and a mind without thought (*mushin* 無心). People who sew robes consider this to be the merit of sewing robes that can be experienced immediately.

Okamoto seems somewhat bemused by the interest of the local women in sewing Buddhist robes and their professed resistance to textual study and zazen. She notes that recently there seems to be an upsurge in interest in sewing Buddhist robes by hand and speculates that the easily obtained luxuries of contemporary life have made people seek out a more modest aesthetic and an activity that allows them to experience how things are created. Studying robe making with Okamoto involves the local women in developing a sense of taste for the relatively dull colored robes, an important aspect of *fukudenkai* training. They are thus in a better position than other participants to learn about this difference in taste because as a group they spend more time with Okamoto and discuss among themselves these questions of taste. The local women also act as a support group for Okamoto. When the temple received a gift of lotus root fiber cloth in May of 2003, Okamoto discussed with them the choice of lining materials and she gave it to them as a group project to complete the robe, which they finished by the following September *fukudenkai*. Sewing these robes becomes a kind of meditation practice, even for those who do not think of themselves as particularly drawn to meditation. The activity of sewing robes thus is a combination of socializing, meditative practice, artistic skill and discrimination and generosity that is very attractive to these women.

Ordained participants. A core group of male clerics comes to at least a few days

of the two *fukudenkai* held each year. Since Kyūma's heart attack in February 2003, he has been unable to lead the early morning meditation, service, and formal meals so one of these core members has taken on these responsibilities of head monk in these formal practice situations. These clergy have also begun teaching newcomers, usually the lay women participants and generally assisting Okamoto's sewing instruction.

They come from a variety of locations: Tokyo, Kyoto, Yamagata Prefecture, and Akita Prefecture, and they became involved in sewing Buddhist robes by hand during their training as monks. One was ordained by Sakai Tokugen and made his own set of three robes for his ordination. Another clergy learned to sew robes at the training temple of Hōkyōji 法慶寺. One incident that highlighted the responsibility these ordained priests feel toward the *fukudenkai* involved a clergy who has been making robes on his own for fifteen years, having learned how to sew when he trained as a monk. He has begun attending the Ichinomiya *fukudenkai* in order to learn from Okamoto. The core group felt uneasy with his presence, however, not because his background was from a different robe sewing teacher, but in their own words, he acted as though he knew more than anyone else. His behavior was much closer to a researcher: coming for a short period of time and gathering information from Okamoto rather than sewing with the others, in short, acting like an outsider.

The criticism of this newcomer's intention was clearly stimulated by his behavior, but this kind of attitude is not a common feature of the Ichinomiya group. The two main teachers, Kyūma and Okamoto, continue to promote a very open environment for robe sewing. The core group plays an important role, however, in maintaining a consistency in the practice. As mentioned in the previous section, these seasoned clergy help the laywomen and newer priests master the formal meal practice and watch over newcomers, giving them tips about sewing, encouraging them to feel relaxed and accepted. This is particularly important to newcomers because learning how to sew the robes is challenging even for those experienced in needlework. As people sew together they help each other over the difficult parts and show each other new skills. This group of clergy appears to feel some responsibility to guard the integrity of the Ichinomiya *fukudenkai*. For this core group the *fukudenkai* is not only an occasion for receiving instruction in robe sewing, it is also an occasion for refreshing some aspects of monastic training in a relaxed environment. That is, the formal practice elements of *fukudenkai* evoke nostalgia for the monastic environment among ordained participants.

The local women and the ordained men have a lasting and consistent relationship with the Ichinomiya temple *fukudenkai*, but they are in some ways polar opposites. The local women value the sewing and social intimacy of sewing the robes over everything else, and generally do not participate in the zazen or lectures that the *fukudenkai* provides. They provide consistency and continuity to the temple as a center of robe sewing practice that attracts other

laywomen who would not otherwise show any interest in the formal aspects of Zen practice.

The ordained men, on the other hand, are concerned about maintaining the continuity and consistency of Zen practice forms in addition to seriously sewing Buddhist robes. They show much more interest in studying historical forms of robes in order to understand Dōgen's teaching. They continue this practice at the *fukudenkai*, and as part of their daily schedule at home. One clergy told me that he usually sews for a few hours each day. From conversations among the priests it was clear that although he is a particularly dedicated example, the other priests also spent a fair amount of time sewing robes at their own temples. For example, another clergy explained to me how he had washed his robes with ashes according to Dōgen's instructions in the *Kesa kudoku*, following the ritual Dōgen lays out as closely as possible. For some of these clergy, the *fukudenkai* provides an opportunity to practice zazen and monastic forms with others, but more importantly, it confirms the practice of sewing and taking care of Buddha's robe as part of Dōgen's teaching.

Lay believers. The contrast between the motivations of these two core groups provides a very rich environment for the third group of lay participants who have come to the practice of sewing robes usually through word-of-mouth or sometimes through reading *Kesa no kenkyū*. During the three five day retreats I have attended, from three to eight lay women at a time stayed overnight at the temple, usually for one or two nights, but a few for as long as the full four nights. They travelled from Kyushu, the Tokyo metropolitan area, Fukui prefecture, the Osaka and Kyoto metropolitan areas, and Shizuoka. In contrast to the local women described above, these lay women follow the entire schedule without variation, getting up early for meditation, chanting service, attending lectures, and eating formal meals. They also contribute a customary donation of ¥5000 per night.

During the three retreats at Ichinomiya I never saw a male lay participant, although other *fukudenkai* groups attract quite a number of male lay participants. All the men who stayed overnight to attend the Ichinomiya *fukudenkai* were ordained; and although occasionally a nun attended, by and large the women were all lay practitioners. Few people come the first day, but for the second through the fourth days, more participants assemble, and the proportion of ordained to lay participants (thus, male to female participants) shifts from approximately two to five to a proportion around eight to five. This proportion shift would not be noticeable to most participants because few stay the entire time, but it is especially dramatic to see how the composition of the group changes over the full five days. While the chanting is thin on the first morning, dominated by the loud voice of the single male leader, by the third morning the chanting is quite strong, supplemented by the voices of the ordained men.

This peculiar demographic becomes obvious during meal times because people sit in approximate order of rank, with the eldest ordained people at the head of the table, descending in rank down to the most inexperienced lay women at the foot of the table. Here the cook, Ekō, one of the two resident nuns, guides them through the intricacies of the meal, while constantly checking the supply of food. The lay women participants who have no experience with this style of eating learn not by formal instruction, but by observing the more experienced people, just as a newly ordained person would at a training temple. When they go astray in the formal procedure they are corrected directly and firmly, but not unkindly. Mealtimes, more than any other activity, introduce lay women to aspects of life in a training temple. Nothing prepares them for this kind of formal eating; even women who are familiar with formal meals in tea ceremony were at a loss when faced with formal Zen eating utensils and procedure. Everyone is encouraged to follow the forms as meticulously as possible; in this sense there is no difference in the way the lay women and the less experienced ordained men are treated. Perhaps the fact that the *fukudenkai* is run by the two nuns in residence contributes to this even-handed treatment of the lay women, who are expected to participate as fully as ordained participants. One woman remarked to me that the most challenging aspect of the *fukudenkai* was not the early morning meditation or the sewing or lectures, but rather the formal meals that required her to eat in a strict and unfamiliar manner.

Lay women who stay overnight and participate fully have a very different experience of the *fukudenkai* from participants who come only during the day. For these temple wives and lay practitioners it is a chance to experience aspects of Zen training in a supportive environment. Their varied motivations for attending the *fukudenkai* come out as they tell the story of how they became interested in sewing Buddhist robes. They develop bonds to the group by presenting their own Buddhist autobiography, telling about the circumstances that brought them there, often in terms of a kind of series of mysterious connections (*fushigina en* 不思議な縁). Nearly everyone has such a chain of connections and is as eager to tell their story as they are to listen to others tell theirs. For example, my own connection through Jōshin, Okamoto's elder sister in Buddhist practice, was seen as a truly mysterious connection: that a Japanese nun would travel to the United States and teach despite almost no English is practically unbelievable. My photos of Jōshin and of Americans sewing robes were much appreciated. Having heard this story people were much more willing to accept me as a viable participant.

Although this expectation that one has a story to tell about how one became attracted to robes makes the researcher's job somewhat easier, I found social rules that subtly controlled access to the stories. First, women tended to seek out others of their own age to exchange stories. Older women in their seventies, for example, rarely shared stories with women in their forties and fifties. This is

partly due to the fact that people seek out a sympathetic listener. A widow in her late seventies who is sewing the set of three robes in preparation for lay ordination may feel that a married woman in her forties making a robe for her newly ordained son will not be an understanding listener. This hesitation shows that in spite of the bonding involved in sleeping in the same room and following the same schedule, the norms of ordinary Japanese life continue to control people's behavior. Second, local women rarely exchanged stories with those staying overnight. In fact, interaction between these two types of participant was rather low. At first this was hard to discern because as a foreigner I was so exotic that everyone wanted to interact with me. Gradually, however, I have come to see how the local women tend to band together and not reach out to the visitors. Based on overheard conversations, local women apparently feel somewhat challenged by the visitors who are following the full schedule of Zen practice.

The motivation for some of the lay women to join the *fukudenkai* often comes directly from a Sōtō Zen priest, usually the leader of their meditation group who might encourage them to sew a robe in preparation for receiving the precepts. A somewhat less direct, but related motivation is aesthetic. One woman told me that her Zen teacher had brought their meditation group to an exhibition of handmade robes. She was so moved by the sight of the robes that she wanted to begin making them herself and her teacher had recommended the Ichinomiya group. Another woman explained to me that she is employed by a embroiderer of commercially manufactured Sōtō robes. Her Zen teacher, however, often wore handmade robes and noticing the difference, she asked him where she could learn this style of robe making. She told me that she was quite concerned that her employer not find out about her interest in making these robes, because, as she put it, he would see her action as disloyal and become angry, perhaps even fire her. Yet she felt drawn to making these robes because their muted colors and hand sewing seemed to be more authentically Buddha's robe. These stories both point to the intersection between religious practice and aesthetic sensitivity that *fukudenkai* robe sewing addresses.

I have included temple wives in the category of lay participants, although in many cases they take somewhat more responsibility for religious matters than most other lay people.³¹ Many of the temple wives attend *fukudenkai* to sew robes for their own husbands and sons, often for the ceremony of formally becoming an abbot of the temple which usually takes place after the priest has been in charge of the temple for many years. These robes become part of the property of the temple. One woman I spoke with told me that her son was attending a training temple that did not teach robe sewing and she wanted him

31. For a history of the status of temple wives from Meiji through modern times see JAFFE 2001. For information about organizations for temple wives and their status in the contemporary Sōtō organization, see KUMAMOTO 2002.

to have an authentic *fukudenkai* robe. A temple wife in Obama has organized the congregation's women to make a rag robe to celebrate the opening of their newly rebuilt temple. Their sewing teacher explained to me that it was fairly common for temple wives in that area to make a rag robe for such important occasions. Although high ranking clergy from Eihei-ji are invited to the opening ceremony for the temple, because the ceremony takes place at the local temple, the rules against wearing any robes but those prescribed by the Sōtō organization are ignored. These examples show that the temple wives' interest in sewing *fukudenkai* robes not only influences the way their husbands and sons understand the robe but also can function as a device to bring together the temple membership for group practice.

The rag robe is one such medium for gathering people together to work on a single project together, usually as a gift from the lay members of the temple to the head priest. The leader of the project chooses the fabrics and plans out the design of the piecework. Each panel, made up of three or four sections, is worked on individually by volunteers. The leader solicits the participants, invites a teacher to come instruct them, and orchestrates the assembly of the completed panels into a robe. Each of the three or four sections that make up a panel requires a great deal of sewing to first sew the patches onto the background cloth, and then cover the whole piece in dense lines of straight stitching (*sashiko* 刺子) that reinforce the fragile fabrics as well as provide an additional design motif. One *fukudenkai* teacher tells participants that making such a rag robe produces great merit because each stitch represents three bows to the Buddha. Since even one section of a panel requires many stitches, the merit resulting from this activity is correspondingly greater than other kinds of robe sewing.

Working on a large project such as this brings the members of the temple community closer to the temple and closer to each other. One group of participants explained their feeling about making the robe as a way to make a connection to the teaching of the Buddha. Each of the three women, one of whom was the temple wife, had made a set of three robes for themselves and received a Buddhist name. The rag robe project, organized by the temple wife, had brought together about ten participants from the temple membership. Although not all of the participants had made the commitment that these women had, these two laywomen provided a model of sewing robes for oneself and receiving them in a ceremony with a Buddhist name.

C: BUDDHIST BELIEFS IN THE PRACTICE OF FUKUDENKAI GROUPS

Sewing robes as a form of merit making. Some *fukudenkai* leaders are quite explicit about the notion that the activity of sewing robes produces merit. One leader explains the merit of the Buddhist robe by using two models. The first

model divides the merit of the robe into three stages. First, one sees the robe made according to the instructions of the Buddha and is moved by the sight. Then one hears about how one can make such robes, and develops the intention to do it. Finally, one sews the robe according to the Buddha's teaching and thereby produces the garment of merit. The second model is that the person sewing the robe thinks of each stitch taken as three bows to the Buddha. Thus, garments that take more stitches such as the rag robe produce more merit than other robes.

One teacher characterized sewing robes as a staged process toward following the Buddhist path. He explained that when a person begins sewing robes, they are often distracted, but gradually the action of sewing teaches them the "manner" of a Buddhist practitioner. Their behavior becomes calmer, their actions more graceful. Even if they show no interest in zazen meditation or in study or taking the precepts, sewing robes allows them to approach Buddhist practice at their own pace. He notes several stages in sewing robes: first the approach through hearing about the robe sewing group and deciding to do it. Second, learning the skill, and dropping one's preconceptions about sewing in order to learn this particular technique. As the project continues, the skill is refined, but one experiences various setbacks and difficulties while making it. Finally, the robe is finished and one feels relieved and full of satisfaction at completing the robe, no matter how inept. If one stops there, however, it is only part of the meaning of sewing robes. One thinks of the robe as a possession, something one has made and takes pride in. The next step, of receiving the robe in the precepts ceremony (discussed below) is what makes the robe Buddha's robe, and is essential to understanding the real meaning of the robe.

This staged characterization of the practice of Buddhist robe sewing should be tempered by looking more closely at how the local women, most of whom have no intention of receiving the precepts, view their activity. Meeting once a week over the course of a year they make a number of robes, not all of which are for their own family temples. One of the women who used to sew kimono for a living told me that part of the appeal of robe sewing was that one could give it away. She had tried the practice of copying Buddha figures, but after a while she felt weighed down by the growing pile of her artistic efforts. With robe sewing, however, there was always someone who would be happy to receive a hand sewn robe. The joy of producing and giving away the robes appears to be quite strong among the local women and there is some sense that the production and giving away of robes becomes an endless activity in itself. One participant commented that every robe she made led her to the next robe and that if she sewed for the rest of her life she would never exhaust her intention in sewing the robe.

Lay ordination and fukudenkai groups. The ceremony of receiving the robe (*ju saho* 受衣作法) is practiced in varying degrees among *fukudenkai* groups. For

example, at an Ichinomiya *fukudenkai* that I attended, one of the participants, a widow, received the precepts, her three robes and a Buddhist name, but the ceremony took place on the last day when most participants had already left, and it was not generally known that the ceremony was to be held that day. In contrast to this low-key approach, one *fukudenkai* group in Tokyo makes their yearly ceremony of receiving the robe the culminating event of a year of sewing meetings. During this two hour ceremony, participants receive the sixteen precepts, a Buddhist name, and the Buddhist robe they have made. The sixteen precepts of this Sōtō ceremony comprise the three refuges or expressions of faith in the Buddha, the Buddhist community and the Buddhist teaching; the three pure precepts to do no evil, to do good and to benefit all beings; and finally ten serious prohibitive precepts against lying, stealing, and so on. Sōtō teachers view these sixteen precepts as the direct transmission of wisdom from Śākyamuni Buddha to Mahākāśyapa that have been passed down through twenty eight Indian and twenty three Chinese masters to Dogen's teacher, Ru Jing 如淨 (1163–1228). Dōgen introduced this set of sixteen precepts to Japan and the ceremony for receiving these precepts was recorded in the *Bussō shōden bosatsu kai sahō* 仏祖正伝菩薩戒作法 (*Zengaku daijiten* 1985, 1089a). The provenience and implementation of the sixteen precepts in Sōtō Zen is a topic of recent scholarly discussion (BODIFORD 1993, 164–73; FAURE 1996, 55–57; RIGGS 2002, 177–90). Kuruma, using Sawaki Kōdō and Sakai Tokugen's notes about the ceremony, emphasizes that for real faith to develop in the Buddhist robe, sewing the robe by hand should be part of a whole practice of sitting meditation and receiving the precepts. Through this ceremony the robe one has made is transformed from a personal accomplishment and possession into the Buddha's robe. Most participants receive the *rakusu* they have sewn during the year, but senior lay participants can also make and receive a seven- and a nine-panel robe or a set of three miniature robes. I asked the head priest what the difference was between lay and priest if lay people can receive the same robes and precepts as ordained clergy. His answer was that in Dōgen's thought, lay and clerical ordination uses the same precepts and that Dōgen's thought supported the practice of laity wearing the Buddhist robe, citing the fascicles *Jukai* 授戒 [Receiving the precepts] and *Shukke tokudo* 出家得度 [Merit of ordination] from Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*.

This *fukudenkai* meets once a month to sit in meditation and listen to a lecture on the robe. The proportion of lay male participants is higher than in other groups, often exceeding 50 percent. One of the senior participants of this group speculated that the men are attracted to the meditation and the lectures, but the annual ceremony of receiving the precepts and the robe may also be a factor. It is a confirmation of the recipient's commitment to Buddhist practice, and reaffirms the commitment of the observers as they repeat the vows as a supportive chorus even if they are not receiving robes. The ceremony reinforces a sense of community among the members, but they understand the underlying

meaning of these activities as making a personal bond to the Buddha's teaching through the ancient practice of sewing Buddhist robes.

The practice of receiving the precepts and robe in a public ceremony is one difference between this group and the Ichinomiya group, but there are others that seem to come from this key difference. The Tokyo group puts more emphasis on serious study and practice, in the context of which some sewing gets done each month and participants slowly complete their projects. The participants get to know each other well from the frequent meditation retreats held each year with participants mainly coming from Tokyo and its suburbs. In contrast, the Ichinomiya group does not expect that a participant is making a commitment to receiving the robe and precepts at that temple. The Ichinomiya *fukudenkai* meets only twice a year for extended periods of time, which allows people from all over Japan to gather together to learn how to sew robes. Here they can learn advanced levels of robe sewing and develop close practice relationships to each other through living and meditating together. Kyūma's enthusiasm for the robe and his sense that there is still much to do in robe research is inspiring. In spite of these differences on the subject of precepts and robe sewing, however, all *fukudenkai* groups that I visited felt that an important mission of hand sewing robes was to re-educate the senses and the intellect to reject the gaudy expensive commercial robes of contemporary Japanese Buddhism to return to what they consider to be the proper Buddhist robes.

D: EDUCATION OF TASTE

In the introduction to this article I suggested that for many contemporary Japanese, the Buddhist robe, particularly the rectangular *kesa* worn draped over the left shoulder, has come to be viewed as a kind of Buddhist decorative cloth worn by priests. This view is supported by the fact that only the *kesa* remains from what was once a full set of three rectangular robes that were draped in layers on the body. The five-panel robe worn next to the skin and the seven-panel robe worn at intra-monastic ceremonies described in the *vinaya* have essentially been replaced by the *koromo* and kimono, garments developed from Chinese and Japanese secular robes. The same *vinaya* sources describe the nine-panel robe, known as the "great robe" as a garment worn when preaching to the laity, or when on begging rounds, the implication being that contact with the laity requires a certain amount of dressing up on the part of the monks. From a structural point of view, the use of kimono and *koromo* in functional roles originally occupied by the five- and seven-panel robes has forced all forms of the rectangular robe into the role originally occupied only by the nine-panel great robe. Because this rectangular robe is all that remains of the original three robes, it is difficult to see the robe as anything but a symbolic remnant. Since the robe has already made the fundamental shift from functional garment to symbolic remnant, it is a small step to

make this symbolic remnant as gorgeous as possible to reflect the glory of the Buddha. In fact, stories from Pali Buddhist texts suggest that the tendency to acquire beautiful robes and the desire of the laity to donate such robes was just as much an aspect of the early monastic communities as the rag robe.³²

The ethos of the *fukudenkai* to provide simple robes made by hand from discarded or plain cloth in muted colors is thus based on an ideal of early Buddhist frugality and simplicity, which may always have been more of an ideal depicted scriptures and in *vinaya* texts rather than a reality consistently practiced by Buddhist monks (SCHOPEN 1997, p. 2). In addition, because of the structural shifts in the garments peculiar to East Asian Buddhism, the rectangular robe has been forced into a symbolic role that has made it even more appealing as a canvas on which to hang more symbols such as the wheel of the teaching, imperial crests, and mythical beasts such as the phoenix. The *fukudenkai* thus confronts and resists two established tendencies in Buddhist history, one towards finery and gorgeous apparel, and the other more difficult problem of the symbolization, and therefore marginalization of the rectangular Buddhist robe in East Asian Buddhism. It is in this context that Sawaki's teaching of "Just put on the robe and sit meditation, that's all," acquires a deeper significance. Sawaki's goal is to return the robe to its functional role as the garment of one who employs body and mind in seeking the Buddha's teaching. As one teacher remarked to me when we were discussing lay people who sew robes but do not sit in meditation or study, "For us, the *kesa* is always a part of meditation, but for others, it is a matter of faith and the idea that one earns merit by sewing the robe develops their faith."

Training participants to understand color and a sense of design that conforms to this ideal of the robe thus becomes an important part of the *fukudenkai* teaching. The appearance of the robe and one's response to it requires special vocabulary: first, technical color terms from *vinaya* texts translated into a specialized Japanese Buddhist vocabulary; second, contemporary Japanese terminology for color and overall appearance of the robes that derive from contemporary speech and Japanese aesthetics.

Kyūma and Okamoto regularly introduce color vocabulary from Buddhist monastic regulations into their discussion. The term *kesa* is a transliteration for the Sanskrit term, *kaṣāya*, which refers to the dyed color that Buddhist monks commonly used (NAKAMURA 1981, 298b–c). Origin stories about the robe from the monastic regulations discuss the problem of having to distinguish the clothing of disciples of the Buddha from that of other social groups (*Shi song lü* T.23, 194c). Since the laity commonly wore white robes, these were against the

32. The most famous of these stories concerns a set of robes made for the Buddha by his aunt, Mahāprajāpatī, from golden threads or embroidery. The Buddha refused the robes for himself and insisted that she give the robes to the community of monks instead. SILK (2004) cites *Chuyao-jing* 出曜經 T 4, 691b, 14–16.

monastic regulation, but also the color of the robe had to be an intermediate color (*ejiki* 穽色), not a primary color (NAKAMURA 1981, 107c). A further stipulation was that the color should be one that did not attract attention. There are also specific color terms in the *vinaya* for a range of colors such as brownish mulberry colors or dark blue or pine colors. Although we cannot know exactly what colors the Buddha's disciples dyed their robes, these stipulations function fairly well as a set of guidelines that can be applied in any culture. The color should be neither white, nor a clear primary color, rather a mixed somewhat muddy color, and it should not excite envy and greed.

An important teaching in the *fukudenkai* is how to apply these *vinaya* color terms to contemporary cloth. At this point the teacher often shifts to terminology derived from Japanese aesthetics. One such pair of aesthetic terms are *hade* 派手 and *jimi* 地味, which contrast brightly colored and festive colors on the one hand with muted and subtle colors on the other. For example, when I showed Okamoto photos of robes made by a student who had worked under another teacher, she commented that in general, these colors were not correct, that they were too bright (*hade sugiru*).

The education of color sense is not limited to *fukudenkai* participants. The temple congregation of the clergy who receives or makes the robes also must become accustomed to these fabrics and colors. If these robes are to have any practical use outside of the confines of *fukudenkai*, the congregation must accept them as well. The muted colors, and plain cotton, linen, or silk fabrics are in stark opposition to contemporary Buddhist priest's robes. Since the Kamakura period there has been a tendency in all Buddhist sects toward bright-colored *kesa* and *koromo*. In the Kamakura period Japanese mastered the technique of making cloth with gold threads interwoven (*kinran* 金襴) and brocade. For the first time these fabrics became available domestically, rather than being limited to imports, and were swiftly incorporated into Buddhist priest's robes (MATSUMURA 2000, pp. 20–22). Congregations have come to expect such robes at funeral ceremonies and consider it an expression of respect toward the dead that the priest wears such an obviously expensive and decorative robe. Priests who had sewn their own robes often expressed their disappointment that the congregation did not support them in wearing these garments at ceremonial occasions. Some had begun to train their congregation to appreciate the subtle colors, and one way to introduce hand sewn *fukudenkai* robes to the ceremonial life of the temple is by initiating a rag robe project. A rag robe made by the congregation that requires so much effort and fine stitching and expresses their feeling and support for the head priest can overcome the barrier.

Participants at *fukudenkai* must also learn how to pay respect to the robe in the proper way. This includes not letting the cloth touch the floor or tatami, not piling other objects on top of the work in progress, not drinking liquids at the sewing table, offering incense before beginning to sew, and many other small

details of behavior that place the robe, even the unfinished robe, in a position of respect. This expectation that participants treat the robe with respect and reverence extends to the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the robe. There is often a kind of collective gasp when finely made robes are displayed, and inevitably someone will say *suteki*, which translates roughly as “how lovely!” or “how divine!” Such a response is invariably met with a quick retort from the teacher “do not say *suteki*.” When pressed on what would be the proper response, one teacher said, “not saying anything is best,” but it was clear that other responses were appropriate, for example, “impressive” (*sugoi*) or “magnificent” (*rippa*) did not elicit a rebuke. One woman in her eighties, however, appeared to offer the ideal response. Kneeling in front of the robe that was being held in front of her, she murmured, “how fine” (*subarashii*) and admired the work that went into making the robe. Then she placed her palms together and made a bow to the robe. Her manner was quiet and thoughtful, showing no hint of greed, and she did not say *suteki* or admire the robe as an object of beauty, but rather as an object of the Buddha. Thus, teachers at the *fukudenkai* try to restrain participant’s aesthetic appreciation of the handmade robe to conform to the rule that the robe should not excite the senses and evoke greed and envy.

Turning the expectations of participants that Buddhist clerical dress are necessarily fine and beautiful toward an appreciation of the quiet colors of the *fukudenkai* robes requires constant attention. Both the teachers and the students are negotiating a little trodden path between seeing the robe as a work of art and seeing it as a garment that represents the teaching of the Buddha. Because in fact these robes involve skill and attention to detail and harmony of colors, they are aesthetically pleasing. But the teacher has to highlight the danger of allowing the aesthetic aspects of the process to overshadow the religious significance and use of the garment, and the student must learn to perceive when he or she has crossed the line. Since the perception of color and appropriateness is quite subjective and by no means standardized, most *fukudenkai* gatherings include a fair amount of discussion on this point.

E: SEWING ROBES BY HAND VERSUS PURCHASED, COMMERCIAL ROBES

A common reaction toward handmade robes is the surprised remark, “I thought *kesa* were something you buy.” The idea that a robe could be made by a nonprofessional and that this would be done as a component of religious practice is startling to many people. In part this perception is based on the belief that Buddhist robes must be made of fine brocades with elaborate embroidery, accomplishments that are out of the reach of the ordinary person. The remark also shows a general attitude towards commercial versus handmade clothing that highlights how contemporary Japanese culture is wedded to commercial production and mass consumption. My own hypothesis, confirmed by interviews, is

that the elderly and middle aged women who are particularly attracted to *fukudenkai* and robe sewing represent, respectively, the last generation and a transition generation between those who make all their own clothing and those who have bought commercial clothing all their lives. Women in their late seventies and older remember when kimono were all made by hand; women in their forties and fifties have some experience sewing kimono and Western-style clothing. Sewing is still taught in many schools, but for the younger generation sewing is no longer a necessary life skill.

My fieldwork has shown that experienced seamstresses are just as likely to have difficulty making Buddhist robes as people with little expertise in sewing. From the comments of teachers and participants alike, sewing Buddhist robes is challenging and frustrating for these experienced people accustomed to a different style of needlework. One of the leaders in the Shingon robe sewing groups found that people often had trouble on two counts: first, the required back stitch (*kyakushi* 却刺) is used neither in kimono sewing nor in other kinds of household sewing, which uses a straight forward in and out stitch. She observed that these people felt suddenly awkward and unskilled, unable to control their hands in what they believed to be a familiar activity. Second, she noted that the quality of the stitches in kimono making is unimportant as all stitching is hidden within the garment, but in Buddhist robes nearly every stitch is on display: the evenness of the distance between the stitches and the fineness of the stitch is immediately visible. In many groups I attended participants thought that the quality of the stitches reflects whether the person was concentrated on the work or not. For new *fukudenkai* participants this is particularly dismaying because the small five-panel robe called the *rakusu*, usually one's first project, is hung over the chest by straps around the neck, and the stitches are quite visible. Many people express embarrassment about the appearance of their *rakusu*.

This is often the context in which the phrase, "sew stitch by stitch with heart" (*hito hari hito hari kokoro o komete* 一針一針心を込めて) is used, often by a teacher or older participant to reassure the newcomer. It is a well-known phrase among participants, and it appears to provide some impetus to the belief that making robes by hand can be considered an offering to one's deceased parents because of the merit gained through this activity. But Buddhist literature about the robe does not support the notion that sewing robes creates particular merit. The focus in the *vinaya* is rather on whether the robe is pure, that is, in accord with monastic regulations, which includes choosing an appropriately knowledgeable leader to direct and complete the work within set periods of time. The leader must declare his intention at each stage of dyeing, cutting, and sewing the cloth. At no point is there any mention of sewing as a religious practice that accrues merit.³³

33. The *kaṭhina vastu* describes the rules for the period after the three month rainy season retreat during which new robes are made and distributed to monks. See CHANG (1957, pp. 19–34).

Discussions about the merit of the Buddhist robes in most scriptural sources are largely based on the robe's status as a Buddha relic.³⁴ Yet teachers at *fukudenkai* often mention the merit of making robes using encouragements such as "sew each stitch with heart" or "each stitch is equal to three bows to Buddha" or its corollary, "because rag robes have so many stitches they have great merit." Similarly, some groups in the United States silently chant "I take refuge in the Buddha" (*namu kie butsu* 南無帰依仏) with each stitch, but I have not yet been able to trace this practice to any current Japanese teachers or groups. This last point is noteworthy because it attests to the desire to provide a religious context for sewing the robes even if there is no direct scriptural support for it.

The expression "stitch by stitch, sew with heart" does not appear in the main texts used by *fukudenkai* groups such as commentaries on the *Shōbōgenzō* by Sawaki Kōdō, and the afterword by Sakai Tokugen, KYŪMA Echū's two books (1967, 1989) on the *kesa*, or Mizuno Yaoko's study of *Kesa kudoku*. TANAKA Tada's (1990, vol. 11) biography of Sawaki Kōdō, however, uses this expression in describing Sawaki's efforts to promote what he calls the robes according to the Buddha's teaching, *nyohōe* 如法衣. In this paper I have avoided using this term because it has come to imply that robes made according to the instructions laid out by Mokushitsu and interpreted by Sawaki are more authentic than the design of robes established by the Sōtō organization and manufactured at commercial robe makers. I have instead used the descriptive term *fukudenkai* robes. Tanaka comments:

Knowledge of the robe according to the teaching (*nyohōe*) gradually spread, and when it eventually had spread to nuns all around the nation, (professional) robe makers were the first to oppose it. This is because to make a robe according to the teaching, one fills each stitch with faith in the (Buddha's) teaching, and it must be sewn with what is commonly known as the backstitch and one must not let one's hand stray from this stitch in even a single part of the robe. Professional robe makers who do not have faith are not capable of such painstaking labor-intensive work. So even if monks and nuns ordered a robe to be made according to the teaching, the workshops could not respond to such a request.

(TANAKA 1990, vol. II, p. 62a)

Interestingly, Tanaka does not claim here that people sew the robe for merit, rather, that the authenticity of the robe requires both the faith of the person making the robe, and conformity with the rule to use the *kyakushi* stitch. He supports Sawaki's comments that a robe made without faith is not a real Buddhist robe. In another passage, Tanaka observes that other monks criticized Sawaki's promotion of the *nyohōe* because they took the matter of monks' clothing lightly. They opposed the idea that each stitch should be imbued with a

34. See, for example, SHINOHARA 2000, FAURE 1995 and 1996, KIESCHNIK 1999.

religious spirit (*hito hito hari seikon o komete* 一針一針精魂を込めて) and would not accept the importance of using the backstitch. Tanaka quotes Sawaki's response, "Everyone who is unwilling to put his body on the line when it comes to the true matters of the Buddha dharma and cannot follow the thread of events no doubt considers the robe according to the teaching to be troublesome," and "Where there is no true *kesa* made according to the teaching, there is no Buddha teaching. Where there is no Buddha teaching there is no true robe" (TANAKA 1990, vol II, p. 63).

In these passages Tanaka combines the core phrase "stitch by stitch" with phrases indicating a religious attitude, such as "with faith" or "with spirituality," but I did not hear this in the *fukudenkai* I attended. Only the expression *kokoro o komete* was used, and this is a common Japanese expression that covers a wide range of uses. It particularly refers to handmade things, usually made by a friend or relative, and is often used to refer to food gifts. Workers at a local convenience store chain named "Heart in" confirmed that this name is a translation of the expression, *kokoro o komete* and is meant to convey a welcoming warmth to the customers. Thus it is a common expression in Japanese, not a specifically Buddhist expression. This may explain why, in spite of having heard many people use the expression, "stitch by stitch, sew with heart," I was unable to find any examples in the writings of Sawaki Kōdō and his disciples. Okamoto explained that when Japanese people hear this expression it inspires them to put effort into their work, and she sees that it encourages faith in the robe. The phrase provides an alternative to the stricter ethos of Sawaki Kōdō's message, "Wear the robe and sit zazen, that is all." Sawaki Kōdō's position is that one should honor the robe as the body of Buddha and as the mind and heart of the Buddha and that the best way to honor the robe is put it on and sit zazen. The activity of hand sewing in itself does not make the robe a holy object. A proper robe is to be made with faith, using the *kyakushi* stitch.

With this background we can consider what differences there are between hand sewn robes and commercially produced robes. I visited Kaginaga Hōeten, a commercial robe workshop that makes Buddhist robes for Jōdo Shinshū clergy. For over four hundred years this commercial robe maker has had a close relationship to the Jōdo Shinshū Nishi Honganji temple in Kyoto. In 1927 the head of the business, Kaen Eichō, published *Hōeshi*, a history of Buddhist robes, in which he makes numerous references to *vinaya* texts. Sawaki Kōdō refers favorably to this book in his commentary on the *Kesa kudoku*, although he comments that the book is more properly classified as a history of Buddhist costume (SAWAKI 1964, p. 38).

The workshop I visited in Uji city in an agricultural area near the mountains is a single story building that looks more like a residence than a factory. The robe workshop itself is about fifteen-by-thirty feet long and contains rolls of brocade and other cloth, a large open worktable, an ironing area, two industrial

sewing machines and worktables about three-by-five feet for each of the two tailors, aged about twenty-six to thirty-five, who sit cross legged at the tables as they sew. The manager does not have his own desk or table, but is constantly in motion, preparing cloth and planning out the work.

A major difference between commercial and *fukudenkai* sewing is that in a commercial workshop the robes are partly made by machine. This workshop has used machines since the Meiji period and the machines are operated by old-fashioned foot pedal that, they said, give better control over the fabric and the eye-foot-hand coordination. In spite of these two old-fashioned sewing machines, however, more than half of each robe is made by hand. As in *fukudenkai* robes, each seam is sewn twice: first to join the two pieces of fabric by machine and next to bind down the raw edge of the seam by hand in a construction that is similar to the flat fell seam found in Western jeans. Both tailors are men because, the manager explained, the brocade is so stiff and thick that only a man has hands strong enough to push a needle through the cloth. Most of their work time is spent sitting at their low worktables, stitching by hand, and ironing each seam as it is completed. Women are sometimes employed on a part-time basis to do some of the lighter work, which they do as piecework at home. The tailors use traditional Japanese measuring sticks, not the centimeter sticks used in most contemporary sewing. Instead of chalk markers they use a traditional marking implement called the *hera* 篋, which scores the cloth rather than leaving a chalk mark. As in traditional kimono sewing, the men often use their fingers to fold and compress the cloth during construction rather than the iron.

The brocade used in making these robes is highly decorated with gold threads and elaborate designs. Two kinds of *kesa* are made with brocade. One is made of an overall design of brocade cloth, the other uses a “picture” format, usually a phoenix bird, framed by the seams in the robe. Illustrations are woven into the brocade and must be carefully incorporated into the construction of the robe to give the appearance of an uninterrupted line of design between the individual vertical panels of the robe. The weavers offset the design of the illustration so that it when it is folded the proportions of the bird will be correct. Thus there is a very close working relationship between the weavers and the robe makers. The manager explained that it takes many years before a worker can be entrusted with choosing the manner of framing such brocade illustrations. He proudly pointed out that the older of the two workers was just completing his first attempt at planning and executing a robe from beginning to end.

The workshop visit demonstrated that robes made in commercial robe workshops are far from what one usually thinks of as a factory production line. The robes are treated with great respect and never allowed to touch the floor even though it is quite clean. The five-panel robes are made from right to left, each panel referred to by a particular name, including the center panel that is referred to as the *shaka* or Śākyamuni panel. Although there was no sense of

rush or pressure in the room, the manager pointed out that they have calculated the amount of time it takes to make each garment down to the minute and they keep to that schedule in order to maintain planned labor costs. In addition to making new robes, they repair old robes and fulfill other requests, notably, requests to have robes made out of old cloth that outlived its purpose but is still viable, such as the treasured *obi* of a grandmother. Each of these projects must be carefully priced according to the labor involved. When asked whether he had heard of *fukudenkai* or of people making robes in groups as a religious practice, the manager replied that he had not heard about it, but that as a professional he had to be concerned about producing a standardized product within a certain amount of time.

An alternative to the *fukudenkai* approach is that taken by a member of the Shingon clergy who is concerned about continuing Jiun's prescription for Buddhist robes. Instead of making the robes himself, he has taught his local commercial robe maker about Jiun's rules and orders such robes from them. He participates by getting the right fabric, the natural dyes, the dyer, and the robe maker willing to do this work. This means that he is completely engaged with the problems of how to realize the ideal of Jiun's robes in the modern age of commercial robe manufacture. When asked if the robe maker seems to have any religious feeling or faith connected to these kinds of robes, the member of the clergy replied that the robe maker had told him that compared to the usual robes they make, these robes give them the sense of doing something that is truly connected to the practice of Buddhism. Although having the robes made by hand means that they cost somewhat more than ordinary commercial robes, he considers it a worthy contribution to further the understanding of robes by producing modern replicas according to Jiun's teachings.

Conclusion

The practice of sewing robes by hand in *fukudenkai* derives its authority from pre-modern Sōtō Zen texts of the Kamakura and Tokugawa periods that are studied in *fukudenkai* as one aspect of an integrated practice of sewing robes, sitting meditation, and doing other elements of formal Sōtō Zen practice. Although the *fukudenkai* claim these texts as their basis, there is a substantial gap between the clerical audience to whom these texts were addressed and contemporary *fukudenkai* participants. Dōgen's essays and scholarship on the robe in the Tokugawa period presume acquaintance with Buddhist thought and scriptural sources. The Sōtō clerics who studied the robe in the Tokugawa period supplemented their study of Dōgen's essays on the robe in the *Shōbōgenzō* with citations from scriptural and *vinaya* sources, thus deepening and broadening the connection between Dōgen's thought on the robe and the earlier Buddhist tradition. Even the relatively readable *Hōbuku kakusho* is difficult for contemporary Japanese lay people and Jiun's works

on the robe have not yet been rendered into modern, annotated editions, so they are virtually inaccessible to the modern reader. The scholastic side of *fukudenkai* therefore relies almost solely on Kyūma's *Kesa no kenkyū*, and Mizuno's annotated text of *Kesa kudoku*.

Sawaki Kōdō and Hashimoto Ekō, both born in the 1880s, are primarily responsible for making these premodern texts available and for interpreting their message to meet the religious needs of contemporary audiences. Their serialized articles in popular Buddhist magazines such as *Dōgen* and *Daihōrin* gradually introduced twentieth-century audiences to the importance of the Buddhist robe in Dōgen's thought. The development and spread of *fukudenkai*, however, was the work of their disciples. As Sawaki travelled throughout Japan he gathered a following of lay students who seriously practiced meditation and studied with him when they could. The enthusiasm of these lay students for Sawaki's message about the Buddhist robe motivated Sawaki's ordained students to institute the *fukudenkai*. The oldest of these groups that are still active date back to the last year of Sawaki's life, and were in fact established by his disciples, not by Sawaki himself, and some aspects of contemporary *fukudenkai* are somewhat at odds with Sawaki's approach. Sawaki always emphasized the Sōtō Zen practice of wearing the robe and sitting meditation, and the contemporary *fukudenkai* emphasis on sewing robes as a means of producing merit is not apparent in his written works.

The formation of such lay and clerical groups developed in the context of modern conditions and concerns. The *fukudenkai* hand sewn robes present an appealing alternative to commercially bought robes. Contemporary Sōtō Zen clergy must purchase expensive robes in a system that is costly and provides little chance of contact with the robe maker. The Sōtō Zen organization established firm guidelines for the robe in order to resolve conflicts between various Sōtō factions. Well aware of how divisive an issue the style of robes can be, this governing organization has insisted that when clergy attend formal functions, especially at the two head temples of Sōjiji and Eiheiiji, that they wear robes purchased at approved commercial robe workshops that meet these guidelines. But the requirement that a Sōtō monk must buy expensive and elegant, sometimes gaudy robes appears to be somewhat inconsistent with Dōgen's portrayal of the robe as ideally made of rags like the Buddha wore. *Fukudenkai* participants feel strongly that the robes of contemporary Japanese Buddhism violate the prescription that they should be of muted color and not excite greed or envy. In contrast to commercially available robes, *fukudenkai* participants choose simple and plain fabrics and work under the direction of a teacher to produce a handmade robe. The person making the robe knows the origin of the cloth, and has a practical understanding of the design and execution of the robe. In almost all cases the robe maker has a close relationship to the recipient. *Fukudenkai* participants often remark negatively on the contemporary robe purchasing sys-

tem, and they are aware of their role in providing an alternative. Participants welcome the chance to have a direct experience of making robes within a context of faith in the Buddhist teaching and serious religious practice.

The *fukudenkai* is simply not a school for teaching people how to sew robes. All the groups I attended had an expectation of respect for the Buddhist robe as an expression of the Buddha's teaching. In some groups sewing one's own robe and taking the precepts is an integral part of the process and a primary motivation for sewing the robe. Being part of a group in which some people are serious about these matters is part of the appeal, whether or not everyone takes the opportunity to meditate or study. *Fukudenkai* leaders confirmed that sewing robes provided access to Buddhist practice for people who feel intimidated by meditation or study.

Participants in the *fukudenkai* consider that their handmade robes are superior to commercially made robes because they were made by hand in a context of Buddhist practice, but commercial robe makers are not large impersonal factories, and behavior in these workshops is not so different from *fukudenkai* groups. The workers treat the robes with respect, parts of the robes are referred to by Buddhist names, and much of the robes are sewn by hand. They also have a close relationship to the weavers who provide the brocade and embroidered fabric. The workers felt their responsibility as part of a tradition of sewing Buddhist robes. Yet, they made it clear that holding to the schedule of production was paramount.

A middle position is taken by the Shingon monk who trains his robe maker to produce robes according to Jiun's guidelines. He spends a great deal of effort and time in training these professionals and in searching for the right fabrics and dyes. He does not especially value the making of the robes as a religious practice, rather, what matters to him is that the robes conform to Jiun's rules, a task best left to professionals under the guidance of a knowledgeable ordained person. His approach is much closer to the description in *vinaya* sources that stipulate that a trained monk should be chosen to organize the making of the robes rather than leaving this important task to ordinary monks. Sewing the robes is not seen as producing merit, rather, the focus is on whether the leader followed the correct procedures, and whether the product conforms to the correct design and color.

The ideal image of a Buddhist monk wandering through town and village and gathering bits of cloth to dye and sew into simple robes continues to hold a fascination for many people, but in this paper I have argued that the practice of making Buddhist robes in contemporary Japanese Buddhism offers a fascinatingly complex and rich field of enquiry.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF TEXTS

Title	English Translation	Date	Author
<i>Den'e</i> 伝衣	Transmission of the Robe	1240	Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253)
<i>Kesa kudoku</i> 袈裟功德	Merit of the Robe	1240	Dōgen
<i>Butsumon ebuku shōgihen hyōshaku</i> 佛門衣服正儀偏評釈	Critique of “Correct Explanation of Buddhist Apparel”	1750	Jiun Onkō 慈雲飲光 (1718–1804)
<i>Hōbuku zugi</i> 法服図儀	Illustrated Explanations of Monastic Attire	1751	Jiun
<i>Shōtoku Taishi kesa kenshōki</i> 聖德太子袈裟 驗證記	Record of the Investigation of Shōtoku Taishi’s Robe	1756	Jiun
<i>Hōbuku kasan gi</i> 法服歌讚議	Verses in Praise of the Buddhist Robe	?	Jiun
<i>Konpon setsu issai ubu esō ryakuyō</i> 根本說一切 有部衣相略要	Brief explanation of the form of the robe in the <i>Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya</i>	1758	Jiun
<i>Shakushi hōe kun</i> 釋氏法衣訓	Regulation of Śakyamuni’s Robe of the Teaching	1768	Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683–1769)
<i>Hōbuku kakushō</i> 法服格正	The Correct Standard for Buddhist Clothing	1821 (1896)	Mokushitsu Ryōyō 黙室良要 (1775–1823)
<i>Fukuden taisui</i> 福田滯邃	Deep Meaning of the Field of Merit (Robe)	1825	Sōkō Raizen 祖光來禪 (1795–?)

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