

The Buddhist Monk in the *Jikkīnshō*

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RELIGION, MONKS AND RESOLUTENESS

The *Jikkīnshō* (“Stories Selected to Illustrate the Ten Maxims”) is a collection of *setsuwa* (short, anecdotal tales usually true or believed true by their narrators, and normally carrying a didactic component) compiled by an unknown hand, most probably in 1252, as its foreword states. The compiler says that the aim of his work is “to serve as an aid in forming the moral character of youth as yet untutored in the ways of the world” (Ishibashi 1942, p. 1; translations based on Geddes 1976).

Those readers familiar with other works from the same period are likely to be struck by the relative lack of emphasis on religion as such in the *Jikkīnshō*. Rather than relying on Buddhist beliefs for insight into the workings of the world, the *Jikkīnshō* compiler generally looks to Confucian principles for guidance in one’s conduct. There is little of the explanation of events as growing out of karma, so frequently encountered elsewhere in the literature of the time. Although much of what happens to one is pre-ordained by fate, and a goodly amount of stoic acceptance of one’s lot in life is required, one must be prepared to take positive action in all situations appropriately so as to advance one’s position, or at least to do no injury to one’s reputation.

That primacy should be given to such self-enlightened—not to say self-promoting—conduct may frequently strike the *Jikkīnshō*’s reader as out of keeping with the aims of a supposedly morally instructive book. The answer to the apparent contradiction between aim and approach lies in the compiler’s pragmatic definition of morality. While he tells us in his foreword that he is a Buddhist monk, the compiler obviously maintains a clear distinction at all times between the conduct appropriate to the clerical world on the one hand and the lay world on the other.

The *Jikkishō*'s Buddhism is less concerned with ethical conduct here and now than with the transcending of the mundane world of the present. Full acceptance of the Buddhist faith is seen as an act of renunciation of the concerns and involvements of daily life. In this paper I shall present a brief sketch of the role of the Buddhist monk in *Jikkishō*'s overall plan, and show how the compiler dealt with conflicts that arose between one's religious and secular duties.

The usual terms used in the *Jikkishō* to describe entrance into Buddhist orders are *tonsei* and *shukke*, both of which indicate the casting off of the mundane world in order to study Buddhist teachings. There is very little consideration of any missionary activity by the convert and no apparent concern at all for the believer as a possible political or social activist. While history clearly shows there was much interaction between the secular world and that of the clergy, as a theoretical construct the Buddhist religion would have held little appeal for the compiler of a handbook to success in the court and the shogun's administration. Ideology, and in particular Buddhist theology, thus plays an insignificant role in the *Jikkishō*'s attempts to lead young men to success.

The key to success for the *Jikkishō*'s reader lies elsewhere. The operational term in Japanese is *jinrin*, a word which has three meanings: first, the division of social relationships into categories according to a superior/inferior concept (as, for example, in prince/servant, father/son or husband/wife relationships); second, human variety, humanity in its various expressions; and third, the way in which men should conduct their activities. While a certain element of right and wrong is contained in this concept, the overriding emphasis in *jinrin* is the consideration of personal and social relationships. Usually it is these latter factors that determine whether an action is acceptable in any given situation, rather than general considerations of good and evil, as a religion or a philosophy

of ethics might demand.

In the *Jikkīnshō* resoluteness of thought and action is seen as one of the most important attributes a man can have. It is in such resolve that the Buddhist monk is often encountered as a model. It is, of course, less the religiosity of the monk than his well-considered and unfaltering commitment to his goal that occupies the interest of the *Jikkīnshō*. In these terms the monk is an ideal instrument for illustrating the manner in which to attain the more immediate aims of the *Jikkīnshō*'s intended audience. Thus a major source for examples of consistency, or lack thereof, are stories of the renunciation of the world on entering Buddhist orders, or what might be termed *tonsei mono* in Japanese. The *Jikkīnshō* views the taking of Buddhist vows as an act to be undertaken only after the most prudent and profound consideration; this action once undertaken cannot be reversed without great loss of personal credibility.

The important part played by consistent and well-considered commitment in achieving success in the secular world is reflected in a number of the chapter titles in *Jikkīnshō*, such as Chapter One, "Be of Consistent Temperament in Your Actions"; Chapter Five, "One Must Carefully Consider Everything"; Chapter Eight, "One Should Endure All Things"; and Chapter Nine, "One Should Not Bear Rancor." The belief that the young man must be unwavering in pursuit of his chosen path is underlined by the fact that "Be of Consistent Temperament in Your Actions" not only leads off the book, but contains fifty-seven tales and is the second longest chapter in the work. The only longer chapter is Ten, "One Should Seek to Develop Talent and Artistic Ability," which contains seventy-nine stories. As this may be seen to imply, the *Jikkīnshō* does in truth view the key to success in great part as resoluteness in conduct coupled with a combination of artistic sensitivity and ability.

ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Such a view probably reflects the basic character and aspirations

of the intended audience of the *Jikkinshō*, which was composed of ambitious young men of martial families familiar from experience or family tradition with the austere demands made of the warrior but not fully acquainted with the attitudes and values of the courtier, whose literary, musical and artistic accomplishments continued to define the cultured man. There is little doubt that the shogun's administrators at Rokuhara required both sets of attributes.¹ The *Jikkinshō* explicitly states that the combination of literary and martial arts is the highest form of accomplishment.

Stories 54, 55 and 56 in Chapter Ten all extol men who combine these apparently contradictory literary and martial skills to great profit. Kiyowara no Shigefuji (ca. mid-tenth century) is first cited as an example of this happy combination because, it is said, he once moved Fujiwara no Tadabumi (873–947) to tears by reciting an old Chinese poem. He is also reported to have written a Chinese couplet, “Confusing the study of literary and military arts,/Like an impersonator lacking self-identity, I am undone” (Ishibashi 1942, p. 499; Geddes 1976, p. 535). Story 55 continues this theme with praise for Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199) and his son, Sanetomo (1192–1219), as outstanding examples of military men possessing literary skills. There then follows a statement that appears to draw on a saying of Confucius: “When the government seeks to administer it requires military preparedness; where there is a military, paper work is always needed” (Ishibashi 1942, p. 503; Geddes 1976, p. 538, n. 211).

There are then a number of examples of men from both China and Japan who have combined these abilities. As the final example of the rewards to be gained by the mastery of both arts, story 56 offers the well-known anecdote, also found in *Heike monogatari*, of Yorimasa's shooting of the *nue* and his capping of a verse by

1. Sansom points to the slow degeneration of military austerity associated with the Kamakura shogunate when writing of the younger men who “were inclined to neglect military exercises for politer accomplishments” (see Sansom 1962, p. 307).

Fujiwara no Sanesada on that occasion (see Kitagawa and Tsuchida 1975, pp. 279–283).

The *Jikkīnshō* does not relate artistic ability to religion, although there are two classes of exceptions to this general statement. The first is rather minor, occurring only once, when a very eminent clergyman is remarked to have possessed no poetic capabilities whatsoever. This lack is seen as somewhat remarkable and is apparently attributed, without great prejudice, to the cleric's overly serious nature.²

The second class of exception is found in the close connection made between music and the Shinto gods. There are a number of tales of miraculous occurrences—*koto* being bestowed on skillful musicians by supernatural listeners, people being delivered from danger or the miraculous occurrence of natural phenomena such as earthquakes—when music is performed so skillfully as to move the gods. But, overall, one may say that the key characteristic of religion in the *Jikkīnshō* is its association with the taking of Buddhist orders and the accompanying unwavering commitment to cause, and not with essentially secular endeavors such as artistic accomplishments.

Commitment to Buddhism. This commitment is seen in principle as necessarily resulting in irrevocable resolution. No turning back or second thoughts are to be allowed. When someone does reconsider his entrance into religion, or acts in a manner which indicates imperfect acceptance of the demands of his new role, he generally becomes the object of ridicule, humor or scorn.

Religion in the *Jikkīnshō* usually offers no escape from the demands of the day-to-day world. Buddhism is regarded as something entered into seriously only after social obligations have

2. The compiler does remark, however, that there have been many eminent clergymen who were masters of poetry. As one example he cites the monk Henjō, one of Ki no Tsurayuki's "Six Poetic Geniuses" (Ishibashi 1942, p. 534).

been put behind one, not as an escape hatch by which one can flee duty or obligation. Thus when one's lord dies, when one has reached and recognized one's personal limits in political or artistic success, or when one is near death, one enters orders.

To do so at other times is at best to assure oneself of a battle against regret, to risk extreme censure from one's associates, and at worst to become an object of ridicule when personal resolution cannot overcome the coercion or seduction of personal desires or social pressures. This situation is, of course, not peculiar to the *Jikkishō*. One need only recall Genji's horror at Murasaki's suggestion that she take the tonsure, or the scorn of the husband in *The Gossamer Years* upon observing his lady's religious exercises to verify that the tension between the attraction of religious withdrawal and the social demands of secular life are an ongoing subject in classical Japanese literature.

There may, on the other hand, be mitigating considerations. In the *Jikkishō* the question of importance is not one of religion *per se*, but rather is a matter of well thought out preparedness and calmly considered conduct at all times. The monk, or at least the stereotype of the monk found in the *Jikkishō*, serves as a set character of whom a predictable manner of conduct is to be expected. When the monk is put into a position in which his religious commitment and normal social obligations come into conflict, his choice between religious and social duty is observed and judgement is rendered according to the compiler's understanding of an undefined but clearly operative hierarchy of values.

CONFLICTS AND THEIR RESOLUTIONS

Positive resolutions of conflict. The *Jikkishō* values the Confucian inspired principles of filial piety and loyalty above all others. The book states that "loyalty and filial piety are one and the same," and that relationships between lord and servant resemble those between parent and child (Ishibashi 1942, p. 271). This concept derives from a Chinese source, the *Xiao jing* (The classic of filial piety).

Since in its scheme of things *Jikkishō* sees social and familial relationships as givens over which the individual has little or no control, while at the same time it views entry into religion as a matter of choice, when commitment to religion comes into conflict with social custom, social demands are usually accorded priority. Since, however, one should have anticipated most possibilities before making any religious commitment, the methods by which conflicts are resolved and the attitudes and conduct of the protagonist become the focus of attention.

When social obligation or religious duty conflicts with self-interest, further, the self must be held subordinate. This priority of values tends to create situations in which religion, social mores and self-interest are put into opposition, and value judgements are made on the method used to resolve these conflicts. The manner in which one acts is also important in determining judgement. That is, no matter how extreme the situation, one is to remain calm and collected, and to anticipate all possibilities.

There are, of course, many tales in the *Jikkishō* which set up no clash of obligations, but which look only at the conduct of their protagonists. The best known of this type of story is probably the old Chinese tale known in Japanese as *Saiō ga uma*, in which an old man, Po Sou, remains completely unmoved in the face of either apparent disaster or seeming good fortune, while all around him swing from dejection to elation with each new twist of fate. The events of this tale are so exaggerated in their swings from good fortune to misfortune and back again that were it not for the serious tone of the writing and the explicitly stated moral a reader might mistake its intent and take it humorously. But of course the old man is to be seen as a paragon of conduct unperturbed by life's vicissitudes (see Ishibashi 1942, pp. 375-376).

The tales dealing with Buddhist related problems tend, in contrast, to be far less exaggerated in their treatment and usually involve a conflict between social and religious ethics which tempers the requirement of internally derived self-discipline so prominent in the purely secular tales. A good example of this type of tale is

the story of Fujiwara no Shigeyori (see Ishibashi 1942, p. 267), who, believing his master to have been killed in war, shaved his head hoping to find and claim his body on the battlefield, only to meet his leader later, alive and well. While in ordinary circumstances Shigeyori's hasty action would be open to criticism, the *Jikkīnshō* states that because he acted out of loyalty to his lord it is understandable if not fully acceptable.

Devotion to some high-minded principle of this sort often saves a character from criticism in situations where he would otherwise be censured. The reader is told in Chapter Six, Tale 14, for example, of a poor monk with an aged mother who wanted nothing but fish to eat. As she refused to take other food, the monk was driven to break his vows against the taking of life and caught fish to feed her. Since fishing was prohibited by imperial decree, the monk was brought before the retired emperor, who severely chastised him for violating not only the law of the land, but also his holy vows. On learning, however, that the monk committed the crime to fulfill the demands of filial piety, the retired emperor not only praised his conduct, but went so far as to reward him (Ishibashi 1942, pp. 275–277).

The old man of *Saiō ga uma*, having no conflict of commitment, becomes a touchstone of constancy, and his composure when confronted by either disaster or unparalleled good fortune in situations which are dominated completely by the whims of fate is a model for all. The monk who catches fish for his mother, on the other hand, does break both the law of the land and the law of the Buddha and thus lacks constancy in both legal and religious terms, but he remains true to the *Jikkīnshō*'s and society's higher principle of natural law, the practice of filial piety, and hence is also an object of praise. But as often as not, the characters involved in *Jikkīnshō* tales are neither such paragons of self-control as the old man nor so selflessly disinterested as the filial monk. Thus the reader is frequently confronted with secular and clerical tales whose protagonists are the object of criticism rather than praise.

Negative examples. The *Jikkīnshō* offers, for example, an anecdote concerning Taira no Sadabumi (?–923), who was so famous for his romantic pursuits during the Heian period that he was often compared to Ariwara no Narihira (825–880). In the *Jikkīnshō*, however, Sadabumi ends up appearing a fool because of his failure to anticipate the cleverness of the woman he is pursuing and thereby purge her from his thoughts (Ishibashi 1942, pp. 74–77). The compiler remarks that, presumably because of his lack of aplomb, Sadabumi does not really resemble Narihira all that much.

At other times the fine line between religious faith and self-delusion is demonstrated in stories which emphasize self-control. Both stories 7 and 8 of Chapter One, for example, involve monks of great merit to whom demon-like spirits reveal themselves and offer to simulate the appearance of Buddha (Ishibashi 1942, pp. 26–34). Both demons stipulate that the monks must not be deluded by the illusion, but must appreciate it only as a simulation of the Buddha. Both monks, however, prove so overcome by the verisimilitude of the scenes presented that they begin to worship these false images. Probably because their actions arise from an excess of faith, the monks themselves are not punished, but their lack of self-discipline results in punishment for the demons.

In cases of monks where self-interest is more clearly at work in their self-delusion, criticism is much more severe, and they often become the objects of laughter or scorn. Chapter Seven has a number of stories of this type, including the following: a monk who engages in Taoist austerities and announces that he has learned the secret of immortality and can fly; the chief monk of a temple who, apparently with an eye to profit, allows an old man he seems to believe is rich to stay at his temple, only to have him die there; and a lazy monk who turns out his wife and takes in a woman he thinks is well-to-do.³

In each of these tales the protagonist's failure to completely think through his actions because of his own self-interest results in

3. See Ishibashi, pp. 322–332; 358–360, and 360–363 respectively.

his humiliation. The “immortal” monk crashes to earth while attempting to demonstrate his flying skill, and in addition to suffering injury is laughed at by everyone; the abbot and his monks awake to find their temple bell stolen after the fake death of the “rich” old man; and the amorous monk discovers that he is the victim of a hoax by a dancer and her troupe fleeing their creditors. In every case the discrepancy between the conduct considered appropriate for the monk stereotype, the monk’s expectations and the actual outcome results in humor.

The Ryōshū tale. Perhaps the best known of all the tales in the *Jikkishō* is that of Ryōshū, the Buddhist monk who allows his house to burn without concern for its contents or the members of his family trapped inside.⁴ As a painter of Buddhist pictures, Ryōshū’s interest is to observe the fire so that he may better capture the effect of flames in his future paintings. This story could be said to represent *par excellence* the way in which the *Jikkishō* compiler uses the religious to exemplify his basically secular ethic.

Probably most readers’ instinctive reaction to Ryōshū’s apparent indifference to his family’s fate—and, indeed, his evident joy on observing his burning house—would be similar to the reactions of the bystanders in the story, who find his conduct so shocking that they feel he must be possessed by evil spirits. In its context, however, Ryōshū’s conduct is a model of correctness. Ryōshū is a monk. As such he has renounced all attachment to the world, and to feel regret for the loss of things of this world would serve only to impede his release from the round of karma, reincarnation and suffering which is the result of attachment to things. Conversely, for Ryōshū not to recognize the unique beneficial opportunity which this fire offers would be to hinder his ability to serve Buddha and aid others in attaining enlightenment.

4. See Ishibashi 1942, pp. 311–312. This tale as found in *Uji shūi monogatari* serves as the inspiration for Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s modern short story, *Jigokuhen* (“Hell Screen”).

As he points out to those who criticize him, the fire is a heaven-sent chance to improve his portrayal of the flames which form the halo of a major Buddhist guardian god. The realism he is capable of will very likely determine for some whether or not they accept the Buddhist doctrine, and will thereby contribute to their salvation and hence to Ryōshū's religious merit.

The major problem may be that Ryōshū answers his critics with a boast of the materialistic rewards he will receive in the future. "If one follows painting as a vocation and can paint Buddhas well, any number of houses will be forthcoming. Because you have no talent, you mourn the loss of things" (Ishibashi 1942, pp. 312). For many readers these are no doubt alienating words. The point is, however, that in the understanding of the Buddhist context the question of whether one does or does not possess things is completely irrelevant.

Thus the loss of house, family and possessions is unimportant not because these things are replaceable, but because to be attached to them and to regret their loss would be an impediment to enlightenment. On the other hand, the statement that all are replaceable, which sounds so callous to a modern reader, is a simple statement of fact without any moral weight attached. The idea that one may transcend his attachment to things without surrendering possession of the articles themselves—that is, the idea that things and the attachment to things are separate—is a commonly expressed Buddhist belief and there are other examples of it found in the *Jikkishō*. The monks Rinkai, who ate fresh fish, and Ningai, who ate fowl, are instances of men who have attained this level of enlightenment (see Ishibashi 1942, pp. 338–339).

The aim of the story of Ryōshū, however, is not really the explanation or promotion of Buddhism. In this context, the Buddhist view of the world is a given, and is not expounded upon or even explained. Rather, the moral here again is the need for equanimity—well-tempered conduct—and steadfast commitment to one's chosen path. Ryōshū is a monk. As a monk, he has ac-

cepted a certain approach to life, and should determine his role with this as his frame of reference. It is, thus, incumbent upon him to conduct himself in a way consistent with this role. In this sense, Ryōshū is admirable despite his obviously inhumane actions. Questions of humaneness are, by definition, exterior to his world.

Commitment as mistake. Under other circumstances, however, such unbending commitment to duty may be open to criticism. When the demands of membership in Buddhist orders are not a consideration, other factors may play a more vital role. In these cases, as so often in the *Jikkishō*, commonsense—that is, a sense of what is fitting to the occasion—takes precedence.⁵ In Chapter Ten, Story 25, a man the *Jikkishō* identifies as Minamoto no Tsunehira, the Director of the Office of Criminal Prosecution, is said to have suffered through his refusal to adapt to circumstances.⁶

The story goes that a fire broke out near a prison for which Tsunehira was responsible. As the fire drew nearer, his aides suggested that the prisoners should be released. Tsunehira refused, saying that the inmates had broken imperial decrees and it was not for a mere mortal to decide their fate, but rather that it was something for heaven to determine. As a result the prisoners die screaming in the fire and Tsunehira is haunted by their cries even on his own death bed. The compiler comments, “Although Tsunehira had characterized his act as a logical outcome of law, he realized that to pursue retribution with absolutely no sense of reserve was a deep sin” (Ishibashi 1942, p. 544; Geddes 1976, p. 573).

Thus in the case of the layman operating within socially determined boundaries, compassion plays a moderating role in determining to what degree resolution of commitment should be carried

5. The Preface to Chapter Two discusses at length the need to match act to situation. See Ishibashi 1942, pp. 117–118.

6. “Tsunehira” appears to be a mistake for Tsunenari, who lived in the eleventh century. See Ishibashi 1942, pp. 543–545.

through. In the case of the old man of *Saiō ga uma*, a completely unmoving and disinterested stance could be maintained because no consideration of the welfare of others was involved, and neither were there questions of personal gain, as in the examples of the flying monk or the monk involved with the dance troupe. Ryōshū transcends such mundane considerations because of his wholehearted commitment to Buddhism, which moves his case into a completely different frame of reference. Tsunehira, on the other hand, although he displays the same single-minded devotion to commitment as does Ryōshū, still belongs to the world of men, and cannot permit determination to carry out his duty to override humane questions.

Any tale in the *Jikkīnshō* usually involves a number of factors in addition to the particular principle being stressed. Generally, it is the tension between a number of elements—principles, values, attitudes or customs—and the resolution of this tension that creates whatever interest an individual tale may hold.

CONCLUSION

The *Jikkīnshō* is a text working toward the preservation and extension of society's *status quo*. It sees filial piety and its social counterparts as contributing to this cause, and therefore values them highly.

Religion—and in particular, the Buddhist faith—is not seen aiding this effort to promote socialization. In fact, entry into Buddhist orders is to be undertaken only after one has fulfilled the obligations imposed by society and the aspirations of self-expression. The fact that the actual moment of this fulfillment is not always clear and that one may find some obligations or hopes springing up after making a religious commitment, forms a point of tension illustrated by many of the tales in the *Jikkīnshō*.

The way in which characters cope with these kinds of conflict points the moral of the invariably didactic tales. Buddhist monks play a large part in stories dealing with commitment to cause because they offer a clear-cut stereotype, a kind of literary short-

hand for characterization, and also give the compiler the opportunity to investigate the various types of conflict between religious and social commitments on the one hand and personal interest on the other.

GLOSSARY

Ariwara no Narihira 左原業平	Ningai 仁海
Fujiwara no Sanesada 藤原實定	<i>nue</i> 鶯
———— no Shigeyori 茂頼	Rinkai 林懷
———— no Tadabumi 忠文	Ryōshū 良秀
<i>Heike monogatari</i> 平家物語	<i>Saiō ga uma</i> 塞翁が馬
<i>jinrin</i> 人倫	<i>setsuwa</i> 說話
Kiyowara no Shigefuji 清原滋藤	<i>shukke</i> 出家
Minamoto no Sanetomo 源實朝	Taira no Sadabumi 平貞文
———— no Tsunehira 經衡	Yorimasa 頼政
———— no Tsunenari 經成	<i>tonsei</i> 遁世
———— no Yoritomo 頼朝	

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