

# Official monks and reclusive monks: focusing on the salvation of women<sup>1</sup>

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## *Beyond the exoteric-esoteric model*

Kamakura New Buddhism is a variant form which developed out of Mahayana Buddhism. The schools referred to by this term were created in the Kamakura period (1180–1333) and became dominant as early as the late Kamakura period; and even today, they continue to exert a strong influence on various aspects of the social and religious life of the Japanese. Although nowadays in Japan atheism and religious indifference are commonplace, most Japanese people, when asked about their religious affiliation, would reply that they are Buddhist. In this case, the word ‘Buddhist’ actually means an adherent of one of the schools of Kamakura New Buddhism. Furthermore, temples founded on the ideas of Kamakura New Buddhism are to this day very much involved in the social and religious life of the Japanese. Knowledge of Kamakura New Buddhism remains one of the best sources for understanding modern Japanese people and culture.

Owing to its great importance, many scholars have attempted to elucidate the essential aspects of Kamakura New Buddhism. Major contributions have been made by Ienaga Sabūro (1913–), Inoue Mitsusada (1916–83) and Kuroda Toshio (1926–93). It is through their diligent efforts that today we have an understanding of certain important aspects of Kamakura New Buddhism.

The main theories proposed by these scholars can be categorized into two groups. The first was that advanced by the historians Ienaga Sabūro<sup>2</sup> and Inoue Mitsusada.<sup>3</sup> I call it Theory A. It examined the ideas of the founders, highlighting on the one hand the standpoint of *jiriki* 自力, attaining enlightenment through the power of one’s own practice, which is stressed by denominations such as the Zen school; and on the other hand the teaching of *tariki* 他力, by which one entrusts oneself to the redeeming power of Amida Buddha. In either case, a school is defined as Kamakura New Buddhism based on the concepts of *senchaku* 選択 (selective [practice]), *senju* (sole practice), and *igyō* 易行 (easy practice; concentration on one aspect or buddha; anti-precepts), and on the goal of salvation of the populace. For example, Hōnen (1133–1212), Shinran (1173–1262) and Ippen (1239–89) exclusively chose the ‘easy practice’ of the *nenbutsu* (chanting *Namu Amidabutsu* 南無阿弥陀仏); Nichiren (1222–82) chose the *shōdai* 唱題, the recitation of the title of the *Lotus Sutra*; Zen priests selected the practice of *zazen* 座禪, and among them Dōgen (1200–53) emphasized *shikan taza* 只管打座 (the ‘just sitting meditation’ of the Sōtō Zen school). In contrast to the priests of the Old Buddhism who conducted the salvation of the emperor and nobility and prayed for the protection of the nation (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家), the priests of the Kamakura New Buddhism concentrated on the salvation of the general populace. Theory A won broad support from academics before Kuroda Toshio presented ‘Theory B’, widely known as the *kenmitsu taisei* 顯密体制 theory or the

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a revised version of two guest lectures delivered at the workshop ‘Religious practice in Medieval Japan’ held at SOAS on 21–22 September 2000. For the questions and answers during the workshop, please see the *CSJR Newsletter* of September 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ienaga Saburō, *Chusei Bukkyō sīsosi kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hozōkan, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> Inoue Mitsusada, *Nihon kodai no kokka to Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1971).

'exoteric-esoteric system'. Since Theory A no longer carries the influence it had in the 1980s, I will mainly focus here on Theory B.

Kuroda Toshio discussed temple and shrine authority in medieval Japan in terms of the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy.<sup>4</sup> He pointed out that the loose affiliation of temple and shrine power combined with esoteric Buddhism was considered by the government as orthodox. It was this orthodox combination of temple and shrine authority that Kuroda termed *kenmitsu taisei*, the exoteric-esoteric system of Buddhism that represented the Buddhist establishment. According to Kuroda, the central concept of esoteric Buddhism was the idea of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覚). At the same time, the government condemned and suppressed as heretical priests such as Hōnen, Shinran, and Nichiren who denied the value of *kenmitsu taisei* Buddhism. Kuroda called the Buddhism of these suppressed priests Kamakura New Buddhism. In the medieval period, *kenmitsu taisei* Buddhism was dominant, and this Kuroda called Kamakura Old Buddhism. Thus, according to Kuroda, the typical and dominant Buddhism in medieval Japan was not Kamakura New Buddhism at all, but Kamakura Old Buddhism.

The importance of Kuroda's theory can be summarized in four points. First, he proposed the idea of orthodoxy and heresy in place of the commonly accepted terms Kamakura New Buddhism and Kamakura Old Buddhism. Second, he pointed out the importance of esoteric Buddhism as the institutional core in the transformation of medieval Japanese Buddhism and focused on original enlightenment thought (*hongaku shisō* 本覚思想) as the typical form of esoteric Buddhism. Third, he considered that attention should be paid to the importance of Kamakura Old Buddhism in this transformation. He made it clear that Kamakura Old Buddhism played a more dominant role than Kamakura New Buddhism during the medieval period. This was a fairly new idea at the time, since most scholars believed that Kamakura New Buddhism was the typical and dominant form of Buddhism in medieval Japan. Kuroda's model was so attractive to the new generation of scholars that many turned to a study of Kamakura Old Buddhism. Finally, Kuroda attempted to understand the overall picture of religious activity in medieval Japan. Initially, the followers of Theory A tended to focus only on individual sects or schools, especially the Jōdo or Pure Land sects. This inevitably led them to overlook the large picture of medieval religion. Instead of simply taking the Jōdo sects as typical of Kamakura New Buddhism, Kuroda proposed a total vision of the religious situation in medieval Japan.

While we have benefited greatly from Kuroda's distinguished insights, his theory is not without its problems. My strongest opposition to his understanding of Japanese medieval religion concerns his apparent confusion of the religious dimensions with socio-political dimensions. This confusion can be seen in his use of the terms orthodoxy and heresy. According to his model, these terms should be used in a religious context. Yet, confusingly, he also applies them in the socio-political context. He defines Kamakura New Buddhism as the Buddhism of those orders associated with suppressed priests. What made Kamakura New Buddhism 'new' was its suppression at the hands of the political authorities of the time. His conclusion was that Kamakura New Buddhism must, therefore, have been heretical. The fact that it was suppressed, according to Kuroda, was a consequence of its being new.

<sup>4</sup> Kuroda Toshio, *Kuroda Toshio chosakushu*, vol. 2 *Kenmitsu taisei ron* (Kyoto: Hozōkan, 1994), 310–11. See also James Dobbins (ed.), *The legacy of Kuroda Toshio*, Special issue of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 23/3–4, 1996, and Matsuo Kenji, 'What is Kamakura New Buddhism?' *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 24/1–2, 1997.

However, the government does not always suppress new thought as heresy. Nor is old thought always supported as orthodoxy. Indeed, as I argue below, the political authorities of medieval Japan on some occasions actively supported those groups which were developing new thought. Secondly, Kuroda over-emphasizes original enlightenment thought as the typical characteristic of esoteric Buddhism. This is misleading because, as has been persuasively shown by Professor Sueki Fumihiko, *hongaku shisō* is not fundamentally esoteric.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, he argues that esoteric Buddhism was the core of the system that combined temple and shrine authority. However, this too is misleading. Esoteric Buddhism did not function sufficiently to serve as a unifying core. Kuroda maintains, on the one hand, that throughout the medieval period, the power of esoteric Buddhism increased, while on the other he admits that the power of the exoteric-esoteric system began to decline.<sup>6</sup> This kind of reasoning is self-contradictory.

#### The *kansō* and *tonseisō* model

What model might explain more convincingly the problems Kuroda bequeathed to us without losing his all-encompassing vision of the medieval religious situation? One helpful hint may lie in the fact that most of the founders of Kamakura New Buddhism had entered the world of the official priesthood, before removing themselves and establishing their own orders. Moreover, historical documents unanimously record that they were referred to by others as *tonseisō* (reclusive monks).<sup>7</sup>

Why did the founders of Kamakura New Buddhism seek to escape from the world of the official priesthood, and what was the world from which they fled? This question invites us to investigate the actual situation of the official priesthood and the fundamental reason for the retreat of these founders. Historical records tell us that while official monks had many privileges, they also had many restrictions. Of course, the founders of the orders of Kamakura New Buddhism may each have had their own personal reasons for leaving the world of official monks, but I believe that the underlying reason was the restrictions imposed upon them as official monks. Based on this fact, I would like to propose an alternative perspective on the transformation of Japanese medieval religion. In short, I propose that there was a dramatic shift within medieval Japanese religion from *kansō* as protagonist to *tonseisō* as protagonist. Additionally, I argue that the *tonseisō* were responsible for producing and propelling Kamakura New Buddhism. Finally, I argue that it was through this shift that a religion for the individual became firmly established for the first time in Japanese history.

#### The *kansō*

The *kansō*—official monks and nuns—were effectively bureaucrats of the imperial court. Their regular task was to pray for the welfare of the emperor and the nation. From the eighth century until the sixteenth century, the Japanese emperor in principle monopolized the prerogative to permit aspirant priests to enter the priesthood. The emperor invested them with the privilege to pray for his welfare. The official priests were obligated to take a sanctioned initiation (*tokudo* 得度 or *shukke* 出家) and ordination (*jukai* 授戒). The term

<sup>5</sup> Sueki Fumihiko, *Kamakura Bukkyō keiseiron* (Kyoto: Hozōkan, 1998), 43–4.

<sup>6</sup> Kuroda Toshio, *Nihon cyūhusei no kokka to syūkyō* (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 1985), 540–43.

<sup>7</sup> See Matsuo Kenji, *Shinpan Kamakura shinbukkyō no seiritsu* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1998), ch. iii.

*tokudo* means entrance into the Buddhist priesthood. During the *tokudo* ceremony, priests' heads were shaved, they exchanged their mundane clothes for the garb of the Buddhist priest, and they swore to observe the ten Buddhist precepts. After initiation, they were given the rank of novice or *shami* 沙弥 and obtained a certificate known as *doen* 度縁 from the imperial court.

The *jukai* ordination was the rite of admission as a fully-fledged Buddhist priest (*biku* 比丘). The ordinations took place on ordination platforms known as *kaidan* 戒壇. In the latter half of the eighth century, these platforms were constructed at Todaiji in Yamato province, at Kanzeonji in Chikuzen and at Yakushiji in Shimotsuke. At the Todaiji platform, novices swore to observe the 250 Buddhist precepts based on the Vinaya in Four Divisions (that is the *Dharmaguputaka Vinaya*; Japanese, *Shibun-ritsu*) in front of ten masters known as *kaishi*.<sup>8</sup>

In Kanzeonji and Yakushiji, the novices made their vows in front of five priests. In the ninth century, a platform was constructed at Enryakuji in Ōmi province. Here, novices swore to observe 58 Buddhist precepts based on the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (Japanese *Bonmōkyō*). Although the Yakushiji ordination platform was closed at the beginning of the eleventh century, the ordination ceremony at the other three temples continued to be performed throughout the medieval period. In principle, all *kansō* had to undergo the *jukai* ordination ceremony. At twenty years old, novices assembled at the platform and swore to observe Buddhist precepts, either 58 or 250. It is worth noting that nuns were completely excluded from the ordination platforms in all four of the temples.

After the *jukai* ceremony, the *kansō* obtained their court offices and ranks. They were provided with food, clothing and other basic necessities. In return, they prayed for the welfare of the emperor and the nation. There were many restrictions, however, concerning their involvement with the salvation of women and lepers, their engagement in conducting funerals, and in raising religious funds. Because the emperor and the bureaucrats at his court had to keep themselves pure in order to conduct government business, such business was performed as a religious event. The *kansō* also had to keep their distance from impurity; women, lepers, funerals and fund raising were all considered impure.

The typical uniform of the *kansō* was a white surplice, symbolizing the priest's disconnection from impurity. *Kansō* lived in official temples known as *kanji* or clan temples known as *ujidera*, originally established in order to pray for the welfare of a given clan. The heads of these temples were called *bettō*, *zasu* or *chōja*.

#### The *tonseisō*

*Tonsei* means literally 'retreat from the world', and, therefore, entering the priesthood. In the medieval period, the term came to acquire a paradoxical new meaning: abandonment of the official priesthood. The leading priests during the Kamakura period, including Hōnen, Shinran, Eisai, Nichiren, Dōgen, Myōe (1173–1232) and Eizon (1201–90), may all be categorized as *tonseisō* in this sense. All were once *kansō* at Enryakuji, Todaiji, or Daigoji, and later became *tonseisō* in the sense that they developed their own distinct religious orders and became founders of new sects. To enter these orders and become adherents of these new lineages was also referred to as *tonsei*.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, ch. ii.

The founders of the *tonseisō* orders involved themselves in the salvation of a large number of people afflicted with physical and mental illness. They also prayed for their followers' personal requests and desires. In the initial stage of Kamakura New Buddhism, many of the adherents were residents of cities such as Heiankyo, Nara and Kamakura. Their orders even absorbed secular followers. This is one of the most important differences between *kansō* and *tonseisō*. Because the imperial court provided the livelihood and status of the *kansō*, *kansō* did not need to attract secular believers—but these were exactly the kind of people *tonseisō* needed to access. To the extent that *tonseisō* were no longer official monks and were freed from the restrictions that constrained their behaviour, they could perform actions otherwise regarded as defiling.

*Tonseisō* are also characterized by their strong faith in their own founder. This is exemplified by their composition of illustrated biographical scrolls of the founder. Those of Hōnen Shōnin, Shinran Shōnin and Ippen Hijiiri are typical examples. These scrolls were known as *soshi-eden* and were used as a type of propaganda to attract new followers. Before the *tonseisō* orders were established, many biographies of great Buddhist monks had of course been written. However, these were written because their subjects were men of great sanctity and virtue. By contrast, *tonseisō* adherents enthusiastically produced biographies of their founders as soon as the order was established.

The typical dress of the *tonseisō* was a black surplice, a symbol of impurity and of other susceptibility to sin. *Tonseisō* created their own *tokudo* and *jukai* ordination ceremonies. Shinran, though, was an exception: he did not make any provision for *jukai* ordination because he denied the Buddhist precepts. The remarkable point about *tonseisō* ordination is that women were permitted access. Eizon, for example, held *jukai* ordination for women at the Hokkeji temple in Yamato province for the first time in 1249.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, the temples of *tonseisō* were constructed in cities, and the heads of these temples were often called *chōrō*, which further distinguishes *tonseisō* from *kansō*.

Another point distinguishing the two concerns the object of their efforts. The Buddhism of the *kansō* can be characterized as a community religion (religion for the community) and that of *tonseisō* as a personal religion (religion for the individual). The regular task of *kansō* was, as we have seen, to pray for the welfare of the emperor and state, but they prayed for the emperor as the symbol of their community rather than as an individual person. This may explain why emperors and retired emperors constructed more than a few *tonseisō* temples for their own personal salvation. *Tonseisō*, on the other hand, clearly had the regular task of praying for the fulfilment of the personal desires of adherents and they involved themselves with the salvation of individual persons. For example, in 1278, the wife of a son of the priest of Kibitsunomiya shrine met Ippen, the founder of the *Ji* sect, and was so moved by her encounter with him that she swiftly converted to the *Ji* sect without obtaining her husband's permission. When her husband returned home and learnt about her conversion, he became so angry that he tried to kill Ippen.<sup>10</sup>

The important point here is that the wife converted out of personal desire. This case illuminates the individualistic character typical of the *tonseisō*'s religious activity. Generally, *tonseisō* Buddhism aimed at the salvation of all people regardless of gender, age, birthplace, social status, race, and even nationality. Thus, I would argue that the *tonseisō* Buddhism can be

<sup>9</sup> Matsuo Kenji, *Kanjin to hakai no chuseishi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1995), ch. v.

<sup>10</sup> See *Nihon emaki taisei (bekkan): Ippen Shonin eden*, 92–100.



characterized as a universal religion.<sup>11</sup> As I have discussed above, the *tonseisō* had many new ideas and modes of activity, as a result of which they were able to develop and maintain their own orders throughout the Kamakura period. It is their remarkable activity that defines Kamakura New Buddhism.

#### Shinran as a *Tonseisō*

All researchers have recognized Shinran as a typical founder of Kamakura New Buddhism, but Shinran's life also discloses the real nature of *tonseisō* Buddhism. Shinran was the founder of the Shin sect of the Pure Land school, or Jōdo Shinshu. He was born in 1173, the son of Arinori Hino a middle-ranking aristocrat. In 1181, when he was nine years old, he entered the Shōren'in temple, a branch of the Enryakuji. In other words, his education was typical of *kansō* everywhere. In 1201, at 29 years of age, he lost his status as a *kansō* at Enryakuji when he joined Hōnen's order as a *tonseisō*. Shinran donned his black surplice and fully involved himself with the salvation of the citizens in Heiankyo. In 1207, he was implicated by the government in the promotion of the exclusive recitation of Amida's name and exiled to Echigo (present day Niigata Prefecture). After his pardon in 1214 he moved to Hitachi (Ibaraki Prefecture). In 1231 he returned to Heiankyo. His followers were not as numerous as those of his master, but he became the founder of the Shin sect. There are few documents which record his life, and it is difficult to be certain about the details. Nevertheless, he wrote a number of books which disclose his thought. Shinran's thought is frequently represented by his famous saying that an evil person is the chief object of Amida's compassion (*akunin shōki* 悪人正機). Shinran did not believe salvation could be won through the efforts of individuals by, for example, observing the precepts or making donations to temples. Rather, according to Shinran's doctrine, Amida's salvation can reach all people simply through their chanting *Namu Amidabutsu*, 'hail Amida Buddha'. Notably, as with other founders of *tonseisō* Buddhist lineages, he was also concerned with the salvation of all people regardless of rank or distinction.<sup>12</sup> Shinran's doctrine can perhaps therefore be characterized as 'personal religion'.

#### *On the salvation of women*

The salvation of women constitutes a salient difference between the activities of the *tonseisō* and the *kansō*. Whereas the *kansō*, as an organization, did not deal with the salvation of women, the *tonseisō* did. To clarify why such a difference emerged, first I examine the *kansō*'s attitude towards female salvation, and then turn to the *tonseisō*, especially to Eizon's order, which has all too often been overlooked.

In order to appreciate the typical *kansō* view of women, the following story is extremely pertinent. It is an account from the biography of Kūkai, *Daishi gogyōjō shūki* compiled in 1089 by Kyōhan (1031–1104), the thirty-second abbot (*chōja*) of the Tōji temple.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Universal religions, like Christianity and Buddhism, are also called world religions because they have spread to a large number of people throughout the world. The reason why world religions have been able to spread beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, race, and nationality is that they have focused on the individual as the subject of salvation regardless of ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, or social class. Therefore, the Buddhism of *tonseisō*, which takes the individual as the object of salvation, can also be called a universal religion.

<sup>12</sup> Ishida Keiwa, *Shinran Tannisho wo yōmu* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> See *Tōji chōja bunin*, in *Zoku gunsho ruiju*, vol. 4-2 (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruiju Kanseikai, 1927), 541.

According to Kyōhan, Kūkai had established a rule that as ‘women are the root of all evil, and wipe out all good dharmas ... they should not be allowed into the priestly quarters’.<sup>14</sup> Whether or not he actually said this is a moot point, but even as myth it is noteworthy. The *Daishi gogyōjō shūki* was not written to arraign Kūkai as a discriminative person whose ideology amounted to contempt for women. The account is rather mentioned as exemplary.<sup>15</sup> It is indeed evidence that Kyōhan, the Shingon school *kansō* who composed the text, believed women to be the root of all evil and tried to have them banned from the priests’ quarters.

It is obvious that the prescription was designed to help priests adhere to their precepts, but the rationale offered here is important: ‘women are the root of all evil, and wipe out all good dharmas’. If it was only meant to stress the observance of precepts, it would surely have sufficed to say that when women came close to the priestly quarters, there was a danger that priests would feel carnal desires and so be tempted to transgress the precepts.

*Kansō* temples like Mt. Hiei, Mt. Kōya, Tōdaiji and Daigoji were well known for their exclusion of women, and the rationale they offered for this exclusion can be learnt through Hōnen’s *Commentary on the larger Sakhavayī Sūtra* (*Muryōjūkyō shaku*).

It is said that at the venerable and highest holy places in this land of Japan and at times when miracles occur, all [women] were despised without exception. To begin with [Enryakuji on] Mt. Hiei, it was founded by Dengyō daishi [Saichō], through the wish of the emperor Kanmu. The great teacher personally ‘enclosed the area,’ binding the valleys and limiting the peaks, not admitting the appearance of a woman. He set up the summit of the ‘One Vehicle,’ and never did the clouds of the Five Hindrances soar over it; he deepened the valleys of the one teaching, and never did the waters of the Three Submissions flow [there]. The sacred image of *Bhaisajya-guru* resounded in [women’s] ears, but was not seen by their eyes. They saw the sacred place enclosed by the great teacher from afar, but never faced it up close. Mt. Kōya is the peak enclosed by Kōbō daishi [Kūkai], and is the ground for the prosperity of the supreme vehicle of Shingon. Though one says that the moon of the ‘Three Secrets’ shines widely, it does not illuminate the gloom of the incapability of women, and though it is said that the ‘water of wisdom in the five pitchers’ flows equally, it is not poured on the dirt and defilement of women. At these places, they still have their impediments, how much even more in the Pure Land beyond Three Realms.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, this quotation states, citing the examples of the Enryakuji temple on Mt. Hiei and Kongōbuji on Mt. Kōya, that women are not permitted to visit the exalted holy places of the land of Japan, or to pay homage to its temples of miraculous virtue, much less are they expected to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. It appears that the monks of such temples thought of women, hampered as they are by the Five Hindrances and Three Submissions, as defiled beings lacking the ability to attain buddhahood. The Five Hindrances refer to the belief that, according to the ideals of Buddhism in the earliest period in India, women cannot attain the five states of King of the Brahma Heaven (Bonten), Indra (Taishakuten), king of devils (Maō), Wheel-turning king (Tenrinō), and Buddha. The point that they cannot become a buddha was of particular

<sup>14</sup> *Kōbōdaishiden zenshu* 1 (Tokyo: Pikata, 1997), 165.

<sup>15</sup> See *Gunsho kaidai*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruiju Kanseikai, 1981), 200–01.

<sup>16</sup> See *Nihon shiso taikēi*, vol. 10, *Hōnen Ippen* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1971), 55.

importance, and formed the background for the *tennyo jōbutsu* theory, which holds that women must first become male before they can attain buddhahood. The Three Submissions are that women should obey their fathers before marriage, their husbands during marriage, and their sons after their husbands have died. Thus, they were excluded from buddhahood because they were denied any form of autonomy. The phrase ‘lacking ability’ indicates a belief that women were deficient in the capacity to attain buddhahood.

Furthermore, as the text refers to the ‘dirt and defilement of women’, it clearly casts women as impure beings. This was on account of menses and parturition. Not only in the Buddhist community, but also in Shintō rituals and at the imperial court, menstruating women or those recovering from childbirth were restricted from entrance or participation because of their defiled state. In short, there is ample evidence that the *kansō* regarded women as hampered by the Five Hindrances and the Three Submissions and as defiled beings with inferior religious capabilities compared to those of men.

#### *Kansō* and the salvation of women

Despite this view of women, it is not the case that the *kansō* made no comment on the rebirth of women in the Pure Land or their attainment of enlightenment. In works like the *Shijuhachiganshaku* by Chikō (709–?), the *Kubon ōjōgi* by Ryōgen (912–985), and the *Jōdo gonshoku shō* and the *Anyōshō*, both compiled around the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth centuries, theories about the rebirth of women in the Pure Land and about their attainment of buddhahood based on the theory of the Five Hindrances and the Three Submissions are vigorously disputed. By the final years of the Heian period, however, the idea of women’s impurity had become part of the common belief structure.<sup>17</sup>

Although theories about rebirth in the Pure Land and the enlightenment of women were common knowledge in the world of the *kansō*, the question of whether *kansō* as a group in fact took up the salvation of women is yet another problem. An examination of how the *kansō* organization dealt with women, based on their conception of women and women’s salvation, will reveal *kansō* attitudes.

Because the salvation of women in medieval Buddhism is a key issue, it can be expected that there were those *kansō* who worked for women’s salvation on an individual level, but not necessarily as a group. Moreover, attention should be paid to the stance of the *kansō vis-à-vis* all women and not only towards high born women such as empresses and the wives of aristocrats. Let us see first how select *kansō* dealt with female applicants to Buddhist ordination.

#### Official nuns and their exclusion from state ordination

The first professional practitioners of Buddhism in Japan were women like *Zenshin-ni* (善信尼). It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that women were not discriminated against in Japanese Buddhism from the very start.<sup>18</sup> However, since the establishment of official priests and official nuns (women priests) in the early eighth century, the status of official nuns began to decline progressively. From the middle of the eighth century, nuns were excluded from religious

<sup>17</sup> See Taira Masayuki, *Nihon chusei no shakai to Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1992), ch. iv.

<sup>18</sup> Hayami Tasuku, *Nihon Bukkyōshi: Kodai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1986), 42.



services for the state; and from the beginning of the ninth century, even their ordination itself came to be placed under restrictions.<sup>19</sup>

The *kansō* became qualified priests by passing through the twofold rite of passage we have already encountered, namely: entrance into the priesthood (*shukke*, or *tokudo*); followed by full ordination (*jukai*). After the establishment by Ganjin (Tianzhen, 688–763) of a national ordination system in the eighth century, it was necessary to undergo the *jukai* ceremony at one of the four precept-platforms to become a fully-fledged *kansō*. According to the *Engishiki*, there were some prescriptions about the ordination of nuns or women priests at the state precept-platforms, but because temples like Enryakuji and Tōdaiji were closed to women, official nuns were excluded from the national *jukai* at such state platforms.<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, it is not that there were no high ranking individuals demanding the foundation of a precept-platform for the ordination of nuns. For example, the tenth-century *Jikaku daishiden*, a biography of Ennin (794–864), tells us that Junna Taikō (810–879), an empress dowager who took the tonsure in 842, requested the court to establish a precept-platform for nuns. However, no such facility was actually provided at the time.<sup>21</sup>

The daughter of Fujiwara Michinaga, Shōshi (Jōtōmon'in, 988–1074), tried to found a precept-platform for nuns at Hōjōji in Kyoto. Shōshi had become a nun in the first month of Manju 3 (1026) at the age of thirty-nine and wished to receive her ordination at a precept-platform for the dedicated use of women. A platform was built at Hōjōji the next year, but it is not clear whether ordinations were performed at this platform for nuns other than Shōshi. In any event, the platform was destroyed by fire in 1058. The *Eiga monogatari* (completed in the eleventh century) writes of the foundation of this precept-platform that 'all the nuns of the world rejoiced at it'.<sup>22</sup> Even if this phrase is no more than a rhetorical embellishment, it is clear that there were women like Shōshi who sought ordination the better to follow the Buddhist teachings. Though there is a lack of conclusive evidence about this matter, it would seem that the precept-platform for nuns at Hōjōji was transitory and meant only for Shōshi.

Official nuns were thus excluded from official precept-platforms and, since they were not therefore allowed to participate in ordinations, there were no fully-ordained nuns in Japan.

#### Exclusion from the Dharma anointment

The Buddhism which the *kansō* learnt fell increasingly under the influence of the esoteric variety from the ninth century onwards. In the world of esoteric Buddhism, the Dharma anointment (*denbō kanjō*) is granted to those who have mastered its deepest meanings. Dharma anointment refers to the ceremony for ascending to the level of a buddha, and in which water symbolizing the five-fold wisdom of the Buddha (*gochi*) is sprinkled on the head of the disciple. The rite is performed in particular to confer the secret teachings of Mahavairocana (Japanese Dainichi) on those who would become teachers, a position which guaranteed the attainment of buddhahood. The anointment came to be performed upon the accession of successive emperors (*sokuī kanjō*)

<sup>19</sup> Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, 'Ritsuryosei tenkaiki ni okeru ama to amadera', *Mīnshushi kenkyū*, 23 (1982).

<sup>20</sup> Ishida Mizumaro, *Nihon bukkyō shisō kenkyū*, vol. 2 (Kyoto: Hozōkan, 1986), 209–10.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 203.

<sup>22</sup> *Eiga monogatari*, vol. 27, in *Nihon koten bungaku taikēi*, vol. 76 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978).

and it became a formality devoid of religious meaning. Those who underwent this ceremony were awarded a certificate known as *injin*.

A great number of these *injin* certificates are still extant today. However, no such certificates awarded to official nuns have come down to us, perhaps suggesting that the anointment was not conferred on nuns. The issue is closely related to the salvation of women, and especially to their attainment of buddhahood, and it hints very much that the *kansō* did not open the way to enlightenment for female ordinands. In sum, the *kansō* excluded official nuns from both the state ordination and from Dharma anointment, but in the case of the *tonseisō* a different story unfolded, as exemplified by Eizon.

#### Eizon's biography

According to earlier theories about Kamakura New Buddhism, Eizon's contribution was to reform Kamakura Old Buddhism. My model suggests, however, that Eizon and his adherents are better understood as belonging to Kamakura New Buddhism because they were *tonseisō* whose concern was the salvation of individuals.

Eizon was born in Yamato in 1201, the son of a monk of the Kōfukuji. In 1217 he began his priesthood at Daigoji and took *jukai* ordination at the Tōdaiji platform, becoming a Daigoji *kansō*. In 1234, he transferred as *kansō* to the Saidaiji temple and in 1235 he began to study the commentary on the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (Shibun-ritsu gyōji-shō)* by the Tang dynasty priest Daoxuan. He studied with Ensei (1180–1241), Ugon (1186–1275), Kakujō (1194–1249), and others. As he reflected on what he had hitherto studied, he came to the realization that much of it deviated from the true teaching of the Buddha. He was also convinced that 'A priest who does not observe the Buddhist precepts ought not to call himself a Buddhist'<sup>23</sup> He began the restorative movement of Buddhist precepts (*kairitsu fukkō undō* 戒律復興運動) with three priests, Ensei, Ugon and especially Kakujō. They denied the legitimacy of ordination at Tōdaiji on the grounds that the masters (*kaishi*) who administered the precepts did not observe Buddhist precepts themselves; they were unworthy of the title *kaishi*.

Therefore, in the ninth month of 1236, Eizon, Kakujō, Ensei, and Ugon instigated *jisei-jukai* or self-ordination. As part of self-ordination, it was possible to become a monk by seeking not only enlightenment for oneself but also by saving others. The technique was to make a vow to observe rigidly the precepts before an image of the bodisattva in a ceremonial manner. Eizon underwent self-ordination in the ninth month of 1236 and then took up residence as a *tonseisō* in Saidaiji. As a consequence, Saidaiji, a national temple, became an abode for *kansō* and *tonseisō*, although they occupied separate quarters. Gradually the *tonseisō* under Eizon's leadership rose to a position of influence at Saidaiji. Eizon's order is usually called the Ritsu sect and he and his disciples devoted themselves to observing Buddhist precepts and redeeming all people.

Among the *tonseisō* there are a few outstanding figures like Hōnen and Shinran who, legend has it, saved prostitutes though they were the impurest of women, and lepers, also regarded as defiled. In fact, however, neither Hōnen nor Shinran did anything of the sort.<sup>24</sup> The existence of such legends certainly

<sup>23</sup> Eizon, *Kongō buttshi Eizon kanjin gakushōki*, in *Saidaiji Eizon denki shūsei* (Kyoto: Hozōkan, 1977), 7.

<sup>24</sup> See Imabori Taitso, *Jingi Shinkō no tenkai to Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1990), ch. iii, and Kuroda Hideo, 'Mibunsei kenkyū to kaigashiryō bunseki no hōhō', *Buraku mondai Kenkyū*, vol. 87 (1986).

indicates that there were *tonseisō* who idealized the salvation of women and lepers with no concern for their impurity. By establishing such legends they let it be known that they would take part in saving women and lepers. Since *tonseisō* took as their ideal the salvation of those considered to be the most defiled and reviled people there is little need to add that they also worked to save other people. In short, *tonseisō* set out to save everyone.

#### The salvation of women in Eizon's order

Eizon's order also played a major role in promoting the salvation of women during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. According to a list of Eizon's works written by Kyōe in 1290 (*Shien shōnin donin gyōhō kechige ki*), Eizon administered ordination to a total of 97,710 people. Of these, 1,694 were monks and nuns, and the rest lay people, both men and women. Of these 1,694, 660 were nuns, making the proportion of women about 39 per cent. A list of Eizon's direct disciples written by Kyōe in 1280 (*Jubosatsukai kyōmyō*) records that by 1280 Eizon had 1,543 direct disciples, 631 (41 per cent) of whom were women. Thus, there is little doubt that Eizon and his order counted the most women believers and nuns among any order at that time. According to the annals of Hokkeji written by Enkyō in 1304 (*Hokkemetsuzaiji engi*), Eizon and his order constructed over twenty convents, including Hokkeji and Chugūji in Nara, Kōdaiji and Tōrinji in Kyoto, and Chisokuji and Kaiganniji in Kamakura. The most famous nun of Eizon's Ritsu sect was Shinnyoni (1211–?). She succeeded in reconstructing the Chugūji through her religious fund raising and repaired a remarkable national treasure, the *Tenjukokushūchō*, an embroidered picture of Shōtoku Taishi in the Pure Land.<sup>25</sup>

A distinguishing feature of the activities of Eizon and his order was the granting of permission to nuns for both ordination and Dharma anointment. Eizon's order constructed the Hokkeji precept-platform and permitted nuns to receive ordination even at Saidaiji which was otherwise an exclusively male temple. For the nuns' ordination, Eizon and his adherents consulted the *Dharmagupta Vinaya*, which revealed that it was necessary to receive the precepts in two stages in order to become fully ordained: the first stage took place at the precept platform for nuns, and the second at the platform of a temple for male priests. To accomplish this, the nuns of Eizon's order underwent their ordination at Hokkeji and then proceeded to the Saidaiji, Tōshōdaiji, or Kairyūōji precept-platform.

The evidence for women's dharma anointment in Eizon's order presents important data for reconsidering women's ordination and salvation in the medieval period. In the past, scholars have thought that there were no fully ordained and trained nuns who received Dharma anointment, since official nuns disappeared in the ninth century.<sup>26</sup> While not numerous, there are extant some certificates of Dharma anointment of nuns affiliated with Eizon's order. Eizon and his adherents opened the door for women to realize Buddhahood in their present bodies.<sup>27</sup> Within Eizon's order, nuns became *chōrō* (heads) of convents, performed ordinations and Dharma anointments for other nuns, participated in religious fund raising, and strove for the salvation of others.

Throughout this paper I have emphasized the significant role of *tonseisō*, especially Eizon's order, in activities for the salvation of women. There is,

<sup>25</sup> See Hosokawa Ryōichi, *Chusei no Rittshū jūin to minshū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987), 115.

<sup>26</sup> See Taira Masayuki, *Nihon chusei no shakai to Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1992), 415.

<sup>27</sup> Matsuo Kenji, *Shinpan Kamakura shin Bukkyō no seiritsu* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1998), 288–93.

however, an important limitation to Eizon's thought on the salvation of women; it is from our present viewpoint a negative aspect. Eizon and his order proceeded with female salvation on the basis of the Five Hindrance doctrine, which, as explained above, presupposed that women were beings inferior to men. Therefore, in theory, women should be reborn as males before attaining Buddhahood. As Eizon's order expanded, the Five Hindrance doctrine also spread, and it is possible that the expansion of this doctrine fostered a discriminatory attitude towards women in later Japanese history. The doctrine was accepted not only by *tonseisō* such as Eizon but also by *kansō* throughout the history of medieval Japanese Buddhism, making a discriminatory attitude towards women an issue within Buddhist doctrine itself.

### Conclusion

In the first half of this paper, I proposed my own model for understanding medieval Japanese Buddhism. The model was based upon a critical distinction between two types of Buddhist monk, *kansō* and *tonseisō*. *Tonseisō* played a role distinct from *kansō* regarding salvational activities directed towards the general populace; they constructed new religious orders and absorbed secular followers; and they defined Kamakura New Buddhism as a religion rooted in concern for the individual. In the latter half of this paper, I applied this model to the salvation of women, comparing the different attitudes to the issue taken by the *kansō* and *tonseisō*. My focus here was on Eizon's order.

Finally, I would like to comment additionally on the following two points: the relationship of my model to Shintō; and the issue of the 'individual'. First, the connection between my model and Shintō may not be readily apparent. Since in this paper I have proposed the *kansō-tonseisō* model and focused accordingly on the activities of each regarding the salvation of women, the model may seem to be valid only for an explanation of the development of Medieval Japanese Buddhist history. However, the medieval period was the age of the amalgamation of Buddhism and *kami* worship (*shinbutsu shūgō*). Through the development of the *honji suijaku* theory, it was very common that *kami* shrines came under the supervision of Buddhist temples. For example, at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu-ji (in the present-day Kanagawa prefecture), *kansō* and *shinkan* (shrine officers) shared the site while living separately, and the head administrator (*bettō*) of the *kansō* also presided over the *shinkan* group.<sup>28</sup> As for the *tonseisō*'s relationship with Shintō, in the development of Ryōbu Shintō, it was the *ritsu* monks of Eizon's group who were the major promoters of this teaching.<sup>29</sup>

In my understanding, the reason *tonseisō* achieved a legitimate status and were able to establish religious organizations toward the end of the twelfth century was due, in part, to the development of medieval cities, such as Kamakura, where many types of commercial activity carried very significant roles; and also to the subsequent rise of 'individual' consciousness and 'individual' suffering among people living in the new urban areas. The meaning of 'individual' in the medieval period was, of course, not identical with the concept of the modern or contemporary individual; however, medieval 'individual' consciousness and suffering must have been similar to that experienced by modern and contemporary individuals when they first arrived in urban cities from rural villages.

<sup>28</sup> Matsuo Kenji, *Chūsei toshi kamakura no fuukei* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1993), ch. ii.

<sup>29</sup> Kubota Osamu, 'Eizon to ryōbu Shintō', in *Shintō shi no kenkyū* (Ujiyama: Kōgakkandaigaku Press, 1973).