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The Development of the Temple-Parishioner System

This essay examines the historical conditions for the establishment of the temple-parishioner or *danka* system. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginnings of this system. While there are medieval precedents, the broad development of the relationship between a temple and its parishioners as established through funerary rituals is primarily a phenomenon of the early modern period. I argue that there are roughly five distinct phases to the development of the temple-parishioner system: the proto-temple-parishioner system during the medieval period, the beginnings of the temple-parishioner system in the first half of the seventeenth century, the establishment of the temple-parishioner system in the second half of the seventeenth century, the establishment of the registration of religious affiliation, and the emergence of fully developed funerary Buddhism after 1700.

KEYWORDS: *danka*—temple-parishioner system—*terauke seido*—anti-Christian campaign—*shūmon aratame*—funerary Buddhism

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UNTIL THE LATE medieval period, commoners did not hold funerals at temples; such rituals were limited to emperors, aristocrats, and upper-class warriors. For example, Sennyūji 泉涌寺 in Kyoto was in charge of performing funerals for successive emperors until Emperor Kōmei's 孝明 reign. During the Heian period, Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nara and Byōdō'in 平等院 in Uji were established as clan temples through the donations of the Fujiwara 藤原 to pray for the repose of its family members, as was Jufukuji 寿福寺 in Kamakura (founded by Hōjō Masako 北条政子 as the clan temple for the Minamoto 源). A temple like Meigetsu'in 明月院 in Kamakura would be named after the posthumous Dharma name of Uesugi Norikata 上杉憲方 and serve as the clan temple for the Uesugi family for future generations. In other words, these types of temples were originally places where memorial services could be held for the founding donor—the *kaiki danna* 開基檀那 (the term *danna* 檀那 is the basis for the term *danka* 檀家 or temple parishioner)—and that his or her descendents would support financially thereafter. In time, temples were built for other powerful figures in Japanese society such as feudal lords and local rulers, who also financially supported the running of their family temple. Thus, in the medieval period, commoners or those without the financial means to establish their own temple never built tombs within Buddhist temple grounds or held memorial services for their ancestors at a temple.

With the collapse of the medieval order, however, lower-class warriors reigned over upper-class warriors by inverting the social order. Families that originally founded the temples (*kaiki danna*) often lost their status in society, which, in turn, made the management of temples unstable. This meant that temples searched for new economic opportunities and began to perform funerals not just for founder families but also for commoners. This shift is reflected in the topics of lectures held by eminent monks, such as those of the Sōtō Zen school. In *Eihei Kōroku* 永平広録, the collected sayings of Zen Master Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), the ratio between lectures on Zen meditation versus those on funerals is 99% (Zen meditation) to 1% (funerals). Dōgen focused on Zen meditation in the context of explicating monastic regulations. On the other hand, in *Entsū Shōdō zenji goroku* 円通松堂禪師語録, a collection of Zen Master Shōdō Kōsei's 松堂高盛 (1431–1505) sayings, the ratio between lecture topics focusing on Zen meditation to funeral is 8% (Zen meditation) to 92% (funerals). This text reveals a sharp increase in lectures on funerals and a significant decrease in those on Zen meditation. In short, by 1500, clerics in the Sōtō Zen school found themselves performing funerals as

a normal part of their daily ritual life, alongside the practice of Zen meditation. The economic basis of Sōtō Zen school temples also shifted by this point from funerary practices for founder families to those for commoners. Below, I will highlight a specific example to show how temples and funerals for commoners came to be increasingly merged as one.

The Proto-Temple Parishioner of Late Medieval Japan

Temple records from the late medieval period, which note ritual participants on a monthly basis (*geppaichō* 月牌帳) who belonged to branch temples of the Kogi Shingon school 古義真言宗 on Mount Kōya are critical to understanding ritual life of the period. For example, an analysis of the large archive of about four thousand documents held at Takamuro'in 高室院, a subtemple on Mount Kōya, reveals information about the Dharma names of lay people from about twenty-three provinces around Japan.¹ These *geppaichō* list those who commissioned monthly memorial rituals at the subtemples on behalf of deceased relatives to commemorate the anniversary of the latter's death.

The abundance of names of non-local people in these records at Mount Kōya demonstrate a growing funerary culture and can probably be attributed to increasing numbers of commoners going on pilgrimages to Ise Shrine during the late medieval period. The usual pattern was for these lay pilgrims to pray to the divinities at Ise for this-worldly benefits and on the way back, to stop over at Mount Kōya to focus on other-worldly memorial services for their ancestors.

The information contained in the ledgers—the names of the visitors to the temples, their home addresses, the dharma names and death dates of their close relatives, and the fees paid to hold memorial services—reveal that these lay people were not limited to Shingon school temple parishioners. Indeed, dharma names that are only assigned in other Buddhist schools and posthumous names assigned after Shinto or Confucian funerals appear throughout the document. What we know, then, is that at this historical juncture, local and regional Buddhist temples must have already been providing dharma names to commoners and that Mount Kōya was regarded as a sacred site that provided memorial services for people from various regions regardless of their sectarian affiliations.

An analysis of the types of dharma names recorded offers further insight into the religious practices of the time as well as how status was established through more elaborate and lengthier dharma names. If we look at TABLE 1, which is a tabulation of the dharma names of people from far-away Sagami Province recorded prior to 1600, we can note that the first record of a person with a 4-character

1. Takamuro'in's archive contains roughly six hundred pre-Meiji *geppaichō* compiled by Takamuro'in, but four other subtemples—Jigen'in 慈眼院, Daijōin 大乘院, Renjōin 蓮乘院 and Hakkōin 發光院—no longer exist.

TABLE 1: Dharma Names in the Takamuro' in *Geppaichō* (Sagami Province Section)

| | 2 characters | 2 characters (Zenjōmon-ni) | 4 characters | 4 characters (Zenjōmon-ni) | Shinshi Shinnyo | Koji/ Daiji | Ingō | Total |
|-----------|--------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|------|-------|
| 1536–1540 | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| 1541–1550 | 30 | 7 | 5 | 3 | | | | 45 |
| 1551–1560 | 118 | 4 | 3 | | | 1 | | 126 |
| 1561–1570 | 124 | 10 | 8 | 4 | | 1 | | 147 |
| 1571–1580 | 122 | 17 | 14 | 7 | | 2 | | 162 |
| 1581–1590 | 235 | 106 | 46 | 14 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 407 |
| 1591–1600 | 214 | 15 | 28 | 3 | | 3 | | 263 |
| Total | 843 | 159 | 105 | 31 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 1151 |

dharma name was recorded in the year 1536. Even though the dataset from Sagami is somewhat limited, we can conclude two things about dharma names during the late medieval period: 1) starting from 1551 onwards, in absolute numbers, there was a sharp increase in all types of ranks of dharma names (from 2- and 4-character names to slightly more prestigious 4-character Zenjōmon-ni 四字禪定門・尼 ranks all the way through the even more prestigious ranks of Shinshi/Shinnyo 信士・信女, Koji/Daiji 居士・大姉, to the exalted Ingō 院号 rank dharma name usually reserved for particularly dedicated Buddhist devotees); and 2) the vast majority of dharma names were of the 2- or 4-character type and the higher-ranking dharma names accounted for less than one percent of the total.

By comparing this data from Sagami Province with another region of Japan, we learn both of regional differences as well as shared characteristics. TABLE 2, for instance, is an analysis of similar information from pilgrims from Saku County in Shinano Province. Since Sōtō Zen temples dominate this region and do not assign simple 2-character or 4-character dharma names (only those at the Zenjōmon-ni ranks), we see sectarian factors also playing a role in accounting for differences in religious practices in these adjacent regions of Japan. Furthermore, we can note that there are no higher-ranking dharma names assigned by temples in Shinano at this stage and that the practice of giving commoners dharma names seems to have had a later start than in Sagami.

Both sets of data reveal similarities too. First, there is a sudden decrease in

TABLE 2: Dharma Names in the Rengejō'in 蓮華定院 *Geppachō* (Saku County, Shinano Province Section)

| | 2 characters (Zenjōmon-ni) | 4 characters (Zenjōmon-ni) | Koji/Daiji | Total |
|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------|
| 1523–1530 | 24 | 3 | | 27 |
| 1531–1540 | 32 | 9 | 1 | 42 |
| 1541–1550 | 18 | 3 | | 21 |
| 1551–1560 | 18 | | | 18 |
| 1561–1570 | 22 | 7 | 1 | 30 |
| 1571–1580 | 81 | 12 | 3 | 96 |
| 1581–1590 | 70 | 9 | 4 | 83 |
| 1591–1600 | 27 | 14 | 1 | 42 |
| Total | 292 | 57 | 10 | 359 |

the total number of dharma names recorded from 1591 to 1600. This should not be attributed to a decline in the number of dharma names given out to commoners, but rather reflect the historical moment when, because of the Battle of Sekigahara and the precarious state of the country as a whole, commoners were not willing to risk long-distance pilgrimages to places such as Ise or Mt. Kōya. These admittedly limited comparative data also suggest a marked increase in the practice of assigning dharma names for commoners, especially 2-character and 4-character Zenjōmon-ni-rank dharma names during the period between 1550 and 1570.

The relationship between a temple and its parishioners still appears to be somewhat loose during the late medieval period. While we cannot yet speak of a temple-parishioner system, it was during the latter part of the sixteenth century that a proto-temple-parishioner system emerged. Indeed, roughly fifty years after the reference to funerals in the recorded sayings of the Zen master noted above, we find Buddhist temples performing funerals and assigning posthumous dharma names for commoners. This nascent tie between temples and parishioners would soon be developed into an obligatory relationship forcibly mandated by the Tokugawa regime in its efforts to monitor religious elements that might undermine its emerging political authority, namely a campaign to register and force Christians to become Buddhist temple parishioners.

Anti-Christianity and the Development of the Parishioner Registration System

In the Twelfth Month of 1613 (Keichō 18), the Edo *bakufu* issued the “Order to Expel the Padres” (*bateren tsuihōrei* 伴天連追放令). Behind this move was the perception that Christians were not primarily in Japan to help enable commerce between European countries and Japan, but were a part of a broader effort to colonize Japan through the propagation of Christianity. Viewing Christianity as the enemy of Shinto and Buddhism, the *bakufu* moved towards an immediate ban on Christianity.

Behind the scenes, Konchī'in Sūden 金地院崇伝, the abbot of Nanzenji 南禪寺, a Rinzai Zen temple in Kyoto, produced the initial draft of the “Order to Expel the Padres.” And with the seal of Shōgun Hidetada, the order was proclaimed throughout the country on the 23rd of the Twelfth Month, 1613. Almost immediately, Ōkubo Tadachika 大久保忠隣, the feudal lord of Odawara Domain and the magistrate in charge of monitoring Christianity (*kirisutokyō tsuitō bugyō* キリスト教追討奉行), went to Kyoto, a major foothold of the Christians. In Kyoto, he oversaw the burning of two churches and exiled missionaries to the city of Nagasaki (who were subsequently deported from Japan).

In domains after domain, feudal lords began burning down churches, destroying Christian graveyards, and capturing Christians to force them to convert to Buddhism. Christians who refused to abandon their faith were imprisoned while those who converted were forced to produce certificates of Buddhist temple registration for “apostate Christians” (*korobi kirishitan terauke shōmon* 転吉利支丹寺請証文) as evidence of their conversion. The beginnings of the early modern mandatory Buddhist parishioner system are found in this forcible Buddhist temple registration.

The process in which an anti-Christian campaign morphed into a universal Buddhist temple parishioner registration system can be clearly documented from extant documents for Kokura Domain, which at the time included the eight counties of Buzen Province and two counties in Bungo Province.² When the “Order to Expel the Padres” was issued, Hosokawa Tadaoki 細川忠興, the feudal lord of Kokura Domain, was in Edo on “alternate attendance” (*sankin kōtai* 参勤交代). Despite the distance, he ordered the senior retainers of his domain on the 22nd of the First Month of 1614 to prepare for a campaign to suppress Christians just as soon as he completed his duties and stay in Edo. Indeed, the county magistrates took immediate action to hunt down Christians in the domain so that by the time Hosokawa returned, the order could be implemented smoothly. This resulted in the capture of 2,047 Christians, the destruction of gravesites of

2. These extant documents are in the Matsui-ke Archives held at Kumamoto University Library.

Christian missionaries as well as their Japanese followers, as well as the search and confiscation of a great many Christian articles of faith and ritual such as paintings and statues of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary (*goei* ごえい and *imaze* いませ), rosaries (*kontasu* こんたす), and crosses (*kurusu* くるす).

The Kokura Domain forced these captured Christians to convert to Buddhism and ordered these “apostate Christians” to turn in four certificates of temple registration each as evidence of their conversion. The first certificate included a vow that they had converted to Buddhism. The second certificate was a guarantee from fellow villagers attesting to their conversion. The third was a guarantee from village officials verifying their conversion. Finally, the fourth certificate was a document from the abbot of a temple in the area that confirmed that they had converted to Buddhism and had become parishioners of his temple.

Two months after the “Order to Expel the Padres” was issued, these certificates were already produced in Kokura Domain. This complex certification process reveals the degree to which the Kokura Domain focused on Christian conversion to Buddhism, with these documents ultimately being certified by a chief retainer (*karō* 家老) of the domain. This proactive response to the *bakufu*’s order was reported back to Edo. Evidence of the fourth type of document (a temple issuing a certificate attesting to a parishioner’s status as a temple member) can be found among Sōtō Zen temples such as Ankokuji 安国寺 in the castle town of Kokura, Shinsenji 深泉寺, Rakanji 羅漢寺, and Jufukuji 寿福寺 in Buzen, and Kōzen’in 興禅院 in Bungo. Of these, Kōzen’in accepted the largest number of former Christians as temple parishioners with nearly 656 new converts. These certificates from the five Sōtō Zen temples are the oldest extant documents revealing a clear relationship between a temple and its parishioners. Needless to say, other temples all over the country must have produced similar certificates, but to my knowledge, these are the earliest to survive to the present. The initial focus on certifying “fallen Christians” shifted to non-Christian commoners, who also were forced to become Buddhist temple parishioners to clarify that they, too, were not Christian. This second stage in the development of the temple parishioner that required the entire populace to register and affiliate with temples (*terauke seido* 寺請制度) meant that for the first time, all Japanese, at least nominally, became Buddhists.

Despite the relatively large numbers of “fallen Christians,” who constituted the first wave of commoners as formal Buddhist temple parishioners, there were still many Christians who maintained their faith as “hidden Christians” (*gakure kirishitan* 隠れキリシタン), especially within domains of Kyushu.

In 1635 (Kan’ei 12), the Edo *bakufu* established the new Office of Temples and Shrines (*jisha bugyō* 寺社奉行). Under the supervision of this office, the *bakufu* approved administrative head temples (*furegashira jiin* 触頭寺院) for each Buddhist sect that would require their branch temples to expose Christians in

all villages. Through an elaborate, pyramid-like structure of head and branch temples, the *bakufu* instituted a complex network for monitoring religion, which would also serve as the controlling mechanism demanding certificates of Buddhist temple registration as evidence of good standing in the new polity. In the temple town of Kyoto's Nanzenji 南禅寺, we can see a concrete example of this issuance of religious (and thereby social) standing:

To Kiun'in 帰雲院 Authorities:

The Certificate of Temple Registration for Residents of the West-Gate Temple Town of Nanzenji

Notes Concerning the *Bakufu's* Law

Item: Foreign Padres (*nanbanjin no bateren* 南蛮人の伴天連)

Item: Japanese Padres (*nihon bateren* 日本伴天連) and Junior Missionaries (*iruman* いるまん)

Item: Christianity

Any believers of the aforementioned religion should be reported.

Item: Reporting of Christians and their padres is required even if these people are [our] fathers and mothers, women, or children. In addition, no Christians may be harbored amongst our extended families or servants. We hand in this certificate as the proof for the future that we have complied with the above.

The Thirteenth of Twelfth Month, Kan'ei 12 (1635).

Sukesaku 助作 (simplified signature) and Sakichi 左吉 (simplified signature) from the area in front of Nanzenji's West Gate.³

This document directly cites *bakufu* law regarding the categories of Christians who ought to be reported to the Kyoto city deputy (*shoshidai* 所司代). The document is an attestation by two residents of the area in front of Nanzenji's West Gate, Sukesaku and Sakichi. They attest that they were not Christians and that they would report any Christian, even if they were close relatives.

The campaign by all those loyal to the regime to root out Christians became particularly acute in the wake of the so-called Shimabara Rebellion of 1637. The *bakufu* linked religious affiliation and political loyalty after Christian peasants staged an uprising in Amakusa 天草 in Higo Province and Shimabara 島原 in Hizen Province that eventually involved 40,000 rebels. A report to the *bakufu* on the Ninth of the Ninth Month, 1637 states:

In feudal lord Matsukura Nagato's 松倉長門 domain, Hizen Shimabara, Christians rose up in revolt. These Christians plundered the place and set fire to the castle in Nagasu (the residence of Matsukura Nagato no Kami Katsuie 松倉長

3. This document is held in the archives of Nanzenji in Kyoto.

門守勝家) and elsewhere. Now they have holed up in the Arie 有江 and Arima 有馬 areas.⁴

In other words, the rebels had broadened their campaign, which was initially based at Hara Castle 原城. The rebels had managed to temporarily disrupt the administration of the Shimabara and Karatsu Domains and rule the region for five months. The *Taiyuinden gojikki* 大猷院殿御実紀 notes that “[The peasants who began] the uprising tempted people by using the heretical religion [Christianity]. When people did not follow them, the rebels killed these people. The rebels dispersed treasures to those who did, making it difficult not to join.”

Responding to this emergency situation, the *bakufu* sent Itakura Naizen no kami Shigemasa 板倉内膳正重昌 (the feudal lord of Fukatsu Domain, Mikawa Province) and Ishigaya Sagakiyo 石谷貞清 (the supervisor or *metsuke* 目付) to Shimabara to handle the situation. The *bakufu* forces attacked the rebels in Hara Castle on the Twelfth Month, 1637, and again on the First of the First Month, 1638, but they were driven back on both occasions. The campaigns led to devastating losses among the *bakufu* forces (including the death of Itakura) and only light losses for the rebels.

Hearing this, Shōgun Iemitsu sent massive reinforcements. The *bakufu* forces readjusted their battle strategy. They began a campaign to cut off food supplies and coordinated attacks with the help of other feudal lords after a hundred day siege. The 30,000 rebels, in their furious attempt to defend Hara Castle, used up all of their ammunition and finally even resorted to using pots, pans, stone, and lumber as weapons against the *bakufu* forces before a final surrender. The surviving rebels—men and women of all ages—were decapitated, and their heads were put on public display. Roughly 124,000 men on the *bakufu* side died in this battle. *Bakufu* expenses totaled nearly 98,000 *ryō* for the five-month suppression of the rebellion (YOSHIDA 1973).

Because of the human and financial cost of the rebellion, which the *bakufu* blamed at least partially on Christianity, the authorities took a very severe stance vis-à-vis any religious ideology or group that could potentially be mobilized against the regime. In the decade following the Shimabara rebellion, the *bakufu* increased directives to feudal lords to intensify the anti-Christian campaign including a prohibition in mid-1639 on allowing foreign padres from landing in ports in their domains, on all gatherings of Christians, and on the hiding of Christians. Reports of large numbers of Christians being arrested increased, and in the Fourth Month of 1640, the *bakufu* appointed Inoue Chikugo no kami Masashige 井上筑後守政重 to the new investigator of religion office (*shūmon aratame yaku* 宗門改役) also known as the magistrate in charge of investigating

4. This document is from the *Kan'ei nikki*, owned by the Meiji University Library.

Christians (*kirishitan sensaku bugyō* キリシタン穿鑿奉行). His main role was to expose Christians, compel all Japanese to obtain certificates of temple registration, and have village officials produce registries of religious affiliation (*shūshi ninbetsu aratamechō* 宗旨人別改帳) for everyone in their village.⁵

By 1643, the *bakufu* had issued a total ban on Christianity with the proscription of the religion issued in the Twelfth Month of 1642 and on being a Christian in the Second Month of 1643. This ban was enforced with death as the potential penalty for breaking the law. Even prior to the enactment of this law, Christians in Nagasaki had famously been executed. The capture and execution of Christians continued unabated in various provinces with a new prison dedicated to holding suspected Christians built in Edo in 1646. In this massive anti-Christian campaign, Buddhist clerics of all sects also played a part in this broad state campaign to regulate the religio-political realm.

Indeed, behind the development of the Buddhist temple-parishioner system was a culture of fear: fear of being suspected or exposed as a Christian, a status increasingly punished with the death penalty. The notion of “informants” and “exposing Christians” permeated every province. As early as the Ninth Month of 1638, the *bakufu* promulgated their policy of pardoning “apostate Christians” (Christians who converted to Buddhism), even offering monetary rewards to “apostate Christians” who informed the authorities about other Christians. This policy, posted on notice boards throughout Japan, stated:

Item. For one who exposes a padre (*bateren*): 200 silver coins

Item. For one who exposes a junior missionary (*iruman*): 100 silver coins

Item. For one who exposes a Christian: 30 or 50 silver coins, depending on who exposes these people

Even though they once belonged to the same religion, once they have converted, all charges will be dismissed and monetary rewards, as stated in this notice board, will be awarded.

The Thirteenth of the Ninth Month, Kan'ei 15 (1638)⁶

These rewards were extremely generous. The reward of 200 silver coins for the exposure of a padre would be, if converted to rice, the equivalent of twenty years of rice consumed by an average four-person family. Similarly, to expose an *iruman* was equivalent to the amount of rice that a family of four would consume for ten years, and to expose a regular Christian, enough for three to five years. As a result, many Christians became informants against fellow Christians. This

5. On the Twelfth of the Seventh Month of the same year, Inoue Chikugo no kami Masashige was provided with 6,000 *koku* and became the feudal lord with a 10,000 *koku* stipend. This unprecedented promotion reveals how Shōgun Tokugawa Iemitsu rewarded those who focused on his priority of rooting out Christianity in Japan.

6. This document is from the *Kan'ei nikki*, owned by the Meiji University Library.

is despite the fact that there are no extant documents chronicling that people actually received such large rewards as those stated in the notice board. Indeed, the reward could have been used as a ploy to expose Christians. However, what is clear is that many people were motivated by these government directives to betray and expose Christians. Thus, the power of such government-issued orders had a profound effect.

It was during this period that all Japanese were compelled to produce certificates of temple registration (*terauke shōmon* 寺請証文). This was accomplished in part by having Buddhist clerics certify that people were not Christians. Initially, the abbots of all clan temples in territories under the direct control of the *bakufu* (*tenryō* 天領) were compelled to certify that parishioners of their temples were not Christians. If any parishioner was suspect, the cleric would have to appear before the authorities to defend himself. This practice—and indeed, draft versions of documents where Buddhist clerics signed and certified the absence of Christians in their parish—became the template for the general practice of temple-parishioner registration advocated by the *bakufu*.

As this practice of temple-parishioner registration became normative in all regions of Japan, the nature of Japanese Buddhism changed significantly. This is because many commoners did not belong to a parish temple prior to this point and further, not all villages (numbering close to 65,000) in Japan had temples that could accept villagers as parishioners. Thus, when the *bakufu* demanded these certificates, a link between a temple and a potential parishioner had to be established swiftly.

Many of these new parishioners chose their temple affiliations without doctrinal or faith considerations, but based on geographical proximity to a temple. Similarly, Buddhist sects quickly used halls or chapels dedicated to a local deity or Amida, Shakyamuni, or Fudō and elevated them to a temple status with fully ordained lay clerics initially serving local parishioner confraternities. Previously, religionists from the village had serviced such halls on a seasonal basis. In some cases, they established these religionists on a permanent basis. In others, they installed the disciple of an abbot at a powerful temple nearby. And there were also cases in which a devout practitioner of semi-clerical/semi-lay status, who often had religious names ending in *-ami* or *-hijiri*, was selected to serve local parishioner confraternities at the newly elevated temple. All this was because temples were urgently needed in order to produce certificates of temples registration. As a matter of fact, nearly seventy percent of Buddhist temples still in existence today were quickly established after the *bakufu* required temples to issue certificates of temple registration. Since Buddhist temples responded so quickly to the *bakufu* initiative, we can say that for Buddhist sects, this was a great opportunity to establish a temple-parishioner system using the authority of the *bakufu* to legitimize this new arrangement.

The Establishment of the Temple-Parishioner System

After the establishment of the system requiring the populace to register with Buddhist temples and once all Japanese were affiliated with one, the bond became formalized between temples and parishioners. This is the basis of the fully developed temple-parishioner system in Japan. This system shifted the power relationship between Buddhist temples and their parishioners towards the temples (unlike the medieval relationship between a lay donor/parishioner and their clan temple). In contrast to the medieval relationship between a lay donor/parishioner and their clan temple, here the *bakufu* had designated the Buddhist temples as the legal arbiters of their parishioners' religious affiliation.

The first appearance of the legal basis for Buddhist temples acting in this role can be found in a *bakufu* law from 1660 (Manji 2) when the *bakufu* issued three articles concerning the ban on Christians. One of these states:

Item. Peasants and townspeople are to be investigated by five-household mutual responsibility groups (*goningumi* 五人組) and parish temples (*dannadera* 檀那寺). Investigations should be conducted on anyone whose religion is suspect.⁷

This law, in other words, assigns the responsibility of checking on the religious status of peasants and townspeople to the five-household mutual responsibility groups and parish temples.⁸ Measures like this increasingly provided temples with legal authority to insist on a strong parishioner relationship with the temple, which can be considered to be the third stage in the establishment of the temple parish system.

By 1664, the establishment of a domain-based magistrate of temples and shrines (宗門奉行 or 寺社奉行) in each domain gave further legitimization to this process. The primary task of this magistrate was to investigate Christians thoroughly and record their findings by producing registries of religious affiliation (*shūshi ninbetsu aratamechō* 宗旨人別改帳) annually.

Inaba Masanori, the feudal lord of Odawara Domain and a senior counselor within the shogunate issued one early registry in the Fourth Month of 1665. It seems from the preface to the 1665 *Sagami no kuni Ashigara Kamigun Chitsushimamura Kirishitan aratamechō* 相模国足柄上郡千津嶋村吉利支丹改帳 that

7. This law corresponds to *Ofuregaki kanpo shūsei* 御触書寛保集成, no. 1232.

8. A similar law followed, emphasizing this responsibility. A 1663 *bakufu* law banning Christians states: "Christianity has been prohibited for many years, however, even now it has not been completely eliminated. Retainers working on lands directly controlled by feudal lords and people in temples and shrines, in towns and elsewhere, should be thoroughly investigated by five-household mutual responsibility groups and parish temples. (*Ofuregaki kanpo shusei*, no. 1234)

Inaba had already required temples in his domain to submit registries of religious affiliation.⁹ Among the points made in this document are:

- 1) Villagers must obey the ban on Christianity issued in 1664 and expose Christians following the instructions on the notice boards.
- 2) There are no Christians (nor those appearing to be Christian) in Chitsushima Village at all.
- 3) Villagers, men and women alike, receive certificates of religious affiliation from their parish temples certifying that they are not Christians. If any villager in Chitsushima Village is accused of being a Christian, the abbot of the parish temple, the village head, the head of the neighborhood fire-prevention group, and the five-household mutual responsibility group will go anywhere to defend themselves. If a villager has to change their religious affiliation because of marriage, adoption, a move, and so forth, the villagers will need to have new certificates issued and submit them. The religious investigation registry, this time around, focused on servants and people over fifteen years old living in Chitsushima Village. Individual certificates were submitted alongside the master registry.
- 4) Christians are not present among the villager's parents, brothers and sisters, wives and children, and uncles and aunts. If there is someone who has converted from Christianity to Buddhism, this will be reported honestly and never hidden from the authorities no matter how long ago the conversion occurred.
- 5) From now on, if there is a villager who appears to be a Christian, he/she must be reported. If one wants to keep a corpse at home to perform a funeral instead of asking a temple to do it, one needs to report it, in order to avoid being suspected as a Christian. If a villager does not report such an incident and is accused, he/she must be ready for any punishment.

This kind of registry of religious affiliation enabled parish temples to monitor all the activities of a parishioner's family by compiling individual family registers (*koseki* 戸籍) as well as these master list registers produced for the state, which together can be considered to be the fourth stage in the establishment of the temple parish system.

Shifting Power Relations between the Bakufu, Local Officials, and Buddhist Clerics: The Emergence of Funerary Buddhism

Once the temple-parishioner system was established, abbots of Buddhist temples came to have more power than village officials in controlling Christians and producing registries of religious affiliation in villages. *Bakufu* officials, concerned both about the lack of religious training of many of these abbots and

9. This document is held at the Meiji University Museum Library.

the potential conflicts between secular village officials and Buddhist clerics over the collection of taxes, began rethinking their policy of protecting the Buddhist establishment. Through a new series of regulations targeting the buying and selling of clerical robes and ranks, the articulating of the length of training for clerics, the clarifying of head and branch temple relationships, and the marriage and sexual conduct of clerics, the *bakufu* imposed itself on the shape of Buddhist institutions through defining the frameworks for conduct. In terms of the relationships between temples, secular local authorities, and parishioners, the *bakufu* began siding with local authorities over Buddhist temples in regard to whether secular law trumped Buddhist laws on temple grounds. Further, the *bakufu* began to acknowledge the right of parishioners to choose with which temple they wished to affiliate.

Precisely because the temple registration system had so rapidly increased the number of Buddhist temples and clerics, the *bakufu* was concerned with both reducing these numbers as well as the potential of these temples and clerics to economically exploit parishioners without oversight. In some regions, local lords took anti-Buddhist sentiment to even greater degrees. For example, Tokugawa Mitsukuni 徳川光圀, the feudal lord of Mito Domain and Ikeda Mitsumasa 池田光政, the feudal lord of Okayama Domain, had nearly sixty percent of temples in their domains destroyed and many Buddhist clerics forcibly laicized.

The response of the Buddhists to these efforts at curbing and regulating their institutions was to stabilize the increasingly fixed bond between a parishioner family and their parish temple through funerary and memorial rites in a system that has been termed “funerary Buddhism” (*sōshiki bukkyō* 葬式仏教).

The ritual practices surrounding funerals and memorial services for the deceased members of parishioner families have their roots in the belief in the Ten Kings (*jūō* 十王), which originated in China. The basic idea was that a series of rituals needed to be performed during the first forty-nine days after death (at seven-day intervals) by the descendents of the deceased so that the dead might escape punishment in hell and be reborn in the heavenly realms. In addition to these seven rituals, the belief in the Ten Kings involved making propitiatory rituals to each one of the Ten Kings that guarded the hell realms, which added up to three more rituals (on the hundredth day, first year, and third year after the death). These ten memorial rites for the dead (*jū butsuji* 十仏事) were primarily practiced by the warrior class in medieval Japan, but in the Edo period, the number of memorial service rituals were increased to thirteen—namely the seventh anniversary, the thirteenth anniversary, and thirty-third anniversary were added to the Ten Buddhist services—and the idea of the Thirteen Buddha services (*jūsan butsuji* 十三仏事) took root among people. With the increasing standardization of these mortuary rites in the context of temple-parishioner relations, by 1700 many temples added to a parishioner’s responsibility vis-à-vis the temple

by insisting on a Fifteen-Buddha series of memorial services (*jūgo butsuji* 十五仏事), adding the seventeenth and twenty-fifth anniversary of the death date.

This ritualization allowed ample opportunity to strengthen not only family ties but also the ties between the temple and the parishioner family. Yet the bond here was not simply a ritual one. If temples were able to secure the commitment of a parishioner family to the temple—either because the *bakufu* insisted on temple affiliation or because parishioners could not live in their villages without having official certificates of temple registration—it meant that the bond also brought financial benefits to the temple. Not only did a parishioner need to pay a fee (an average of ten to twenty *mon* per person during the Edo period) to the abbot for writing the required certificate, but years of ritualization of the dead also ensured a stable income for the temple. By 1700, temples required parishioners to have gravestones for their family's dead and emphasized the importance of holding memorial services (especially the Fifteen-Buddha series of memorial services) for their ancestors. This fifth stage in the development of the temple-parishioner system is characterized by the total implementation of the notion that all Japanese were under the religio-political umbrella of their parish temples.

Conclusion

During the Edo period, commoners did not have the right to choose their religion. Today, though it is widely held that all Japanese are Buddhists, most Japanese view temples simply as places where they hold funerary and memorial services, so their faith in Buddhism is not all that strong. This customary aspect of the temple-parishioner system was so deeply ingrained in the Japanese psyche that it did not collapse even during the anti-Buddhist campaigns of the Meiji period, when the system was officially abolished. Even the immediate postwar Religious Corporations Law (*shūkyō hōjinhō* 宗教法人法) did not substantially affect this relationship between a Buddhist temple and its parishioners because parishioner groups at the family and village level continued to overlap. However, in recent decades, this system is finally crumbling as the rapid depopulation of rural Japan in favor of urban centers has affected the ability of parishioner families to remain intact, and the ability of Buddhist clerics to run rural temples, in economically viable ways.¹⁰

[Translated by Duncan Williams]

10. Nearly thirty percent of rural temples do not have abbots at present.

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