Rennyo and the Roots of Modern Japanese Buddhism

Edited by

Mark L. Blum

Shin'ya Yasutomi

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International Institute
for Comprehensive Shinshu Studies
Ōtani University

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Foreword

In conjunction with the commemoration in 1998 of the 500th anniversary (by Japanese counting) of the death of Rennyo, a large number of memorial services and other events were held. One of these was a series of panels on Rennyo set up as a special section on June 22 within the 48th annual meeting of the Japanese Association for the Study of Buddhism and Indian Religion (Nihon Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Gakkai) held on the campus of Ōtani University. A great many scholars read informative articles, divided into two groupings: "Rennyo within the History of Religious Thought" and "The Faith of Rennyo and the Modern World." The Shinshū Research Institute at Ōtani University collected many of these and other essays from scholars in Japan and abroad for a volume published in Japanese under the title *Rennyo no sekai* (The World of Rennyo).

The achievements of Rennyo are nothing less than a "restoration of Shinshū." Not only did he pull the essence of Shinshū out from the mud, where it found itself a century and a half after the death of the founder, Shinran, but Rennyo also spoke to a great many people who had lost their direction in life during the troubled age that was the fifteenth century in Japan, and with plain language he extended to them the opportunity to know Shinshū. In the end, Rennyo turned the Shinshū religious organization into an enormous social entity. As a result, during the Muromachi period Shinshū acutely dealt with a host of social issues, political, economic, occupational, feminist, family-centered, and so on, giving birth to a new way of being human.

Ōtani University is an educational and research institution bearing the tradition of the Shinshū organization and is thus founded upon the spirit of this faith. Accordingly it must be said that we are also confronting the issues surrounding a "restoration of Shinshū in today's world." In this climate of the diversification of values within the flood of information that is our society, what message can Shinshū bring to people who have similarly lost their direction in life? Whether it be in societies of advanced capitalism or in societies where people are focused on fighting off starvation, wherever individuals have had their humanity taken away, what

prescription can Shinshū offer them? In facing problems such as these, what we learn from Rennyo is that the value of both advantage and disadvantage is without limit.

I would like to express my gratitude for the hard work of Professors Mark L. Blum and Yasutomi Shin'ya for putting together this volume as part of the efforts of the International Buddhist Research Unit of the Shinshū Research Institute at Ōtani University. It is an honor for us that this volume is being published by the renowned Oxford University Press, realizing our wish to make research on Rennyo available to a wider readership.

Kurube Teruo
President, Ōtani University

Acknowledgments

The many events held in Kyoto in conjunction with the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Rennyo's death ranged from special religious services to academic debates to animated feature films. For Shinshū believers affiliated with one of the two Honganji, this was a time of excitement and religious reflection. Everyone, it seemed, flocked to the Kyoto National Museum to see the special Rennyo exhibit jointly sponsored by both religious institutions. This book should be seen properly as part of that collection of events. We wish to thank all the people who have contributed their time and energy to this project. In particular the scholars, students, and staff of the Shinshū Research Institute at Ōtani University, where this and many other Rennyo-related projects were conceived and supported, deserve special recognition for their efforts.

Rennyo is one of only a handful of religious figures without whose story Japanese history simply could not be told, but in the West there has been scant appreciation of his role. It is our sincere hope that this collection of essays will serve to open up greater appreciation and dialogue about his impact.

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Abbreviations

CWS	*The Collected Works of Shinran*.
Cartas que os Padres e Irmãos	*Cartas que os Padres e Irmãos da Companhia de Iesus escreuerão dos Reynos de Iapão & China aos da mesma Companhia da India, & Europa, des do anno de* 1549 *ate o de* 1580.
Kikigaki	*Rennyō Shōnin go'ichidaiki kikigaki*. References are to edition in SSZ, unless otherwise stated.
Letters	The collection of Rennyo letters known variously as *Ofumi* 御文, *Gobunsho* 御文書, or *Shobunshū* 諸文集. References are either to compete edition in RSI or to traditional five-bundle compilation in SSZ.
Rogers	Minor L. Rogers and Ann T. Rogers, *Rennyo: The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism*.
RSG	*Rennyo Shōnin gyōjitsu*. Inaba Masamaru, ed.
RSI	*Rennyo Shōnin ibun*. Inaba Masamaru, ed.
SSZ	*Shinshū shōgyō zensho*.
SSS	*Shinshū shiryō shūsei*.
T	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大蔵経.

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Rennyo and the Roots of Modern Japanese Buddhism

MARK L. BLUM

Introduction

The Study of Rennyo

In the annals of Japanese history, Rennyo (1415–1499) is a figure of enormous influence known primarily for fashioning the Honganji branch of Jōdoshinshū into an institution of growing strength at a time when so many others were weakened by profound political, social, and economic disruption, including ten years of civil war. Rennyo created or was at the forefront of new paradigms of religion, economics, and social structure that not only enabled him and his church to survive violent attacks but led to the accruing of unprecedented power and influence among all classes of society, from peasants to courtiers. As a result Rennyo is seen by some as a savior figure, by others as an ambitious daimyō. The more sympathetic view regards him as the "Second Founder of Jōdoshinshū," who not only saved the sect from destruction by its enemies but also, through his energetic and inspired leadership, united many of its disparate communities under the institutional banner of Honganji, put it on sound financial footing, rightly established it as the dominant branch of the sectarian legacy of Shinshū founder Shinran (1173–1262), and in the end ensured the survival of Shin Buddhism as a whole. The less sympathetic view sees Rennyo as a skilled politician who distorted many of Shinran's philosophical positions in order to create a massive feudal institution of significant wealth, financially fueled by ignorant populations of believers in whose eyes Rennyo had the power to determine their postmortem fate.

Rennyo has thus been of great interest to many Japanese scholars in various fields, most commonly Buddhist studies, religious studies, political science, social and economic history, sociology, art history, and woman's studies, among others. But critical writing on Rennyo outside Japan did not begin until the 1970s, when Michael Solomon and Minor Rogers coincidentally completed dissertations on Rennyo in 1972,[1] and Stanley Weinstein published his groundbreaking "Rennyo and the Shinshū Revival" in 1977.[2] James Dobbins helpfully situated Rennyo in the context of the medieval history of Jōdoshinshū in his *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan*, but since Rennyo was the subject of just one chapter, the book precluded any detailed presentation of problematic issues.[3] It was not until the

publication of *Rennyo* by Minor and Ann Rogers in 1991[4] that we saw a full-length study on this man and his times. That study is an enormously useful guide and contains translations of most of Rennyo's *Letters*, but the concerns in this volume are considerably different from the areas where that work displayed its most critical analyses (countering Marxist interpretations, defending Rennyo's use of *anjin* as equivalent to Shinran's term *shinjin*, for example). In the decade since it was written, there has been a huge outpouring of interest in Japan attendant upon the celebrations commemorating the 500th anniversary of Rennyo's death. Particularly between 1997 and 2000 (by Japanese counting, the anniversary year was 1998), throughout the country there were a great many lectures given, ceremonies held, art exhibited, television programs and films shown, and a significant amount of new scholarship published. Since both branches of Honganji are located in Kyoto, this old capital city was the center of much of this activity, including an unprecedented Rennyo Exhibition at the Kyoto National Museum and a special subconference devoted to Rennyo at the annual meeting of the Association for Indian and Buddhist Studies held at Ōtani University that year. Forty of those papers were published in Japanese in the volume entitled *Rennyo no sekai*, and seven of the writings in this volume are translations or modified versions of those essays. If this number seems large, in fact there is much more: if one includes the modern translations of Rennyo's writings, more than sixty books about Rennyo have been published in Japan since 1997. Considering the general paucity of materials extant from the Muromachi period, this much activity reflects a much broader and more creative use of materials; in essence we have had a veritable renaissance of Rennyo studies. In selecting essays for this volume, the editors have tried to reflect many of these new approaches to communicate the richness of this field.

We cannot presume to know who this man was, but by any reckoning he was remarkable. Only seven years into his tenure as abbot of Honganji, the temple is attacked by warriors again and again until all buildings are burned to the ground. Rennyo barely escapes with his life, and while in exile not only restores Honganji but expands it into a church of national prominence with political power that rivals the greatest religious institutions of his day. It is well known that Shinshū priests have always taken wives openly after their training, but Rennyo married no less than five times, fathering twenty-seven children. While it is naïve to presume that a pristine form of Shinshū had remained unchanged from the time of Shinran until Rennyo assumed the abbotship, there is no question that he wrought many changes within Honganji that eventually affected all branches of the sect. While critics fault Rennyo for expanding the institution at the expense of its spirituality, the significant number of new converts to the Honganji religious paradigm as redefined by Rennyo suggest otherwise. Rennyo did revise and reshape both the religious institution and its religious message, but how much was lost in those revisions and how much was gained is subjective. For though we are somewhat able to grasp the *form* of Shinshū and specifically Honganji culture under its prior leaders—indeed many of their writings are extant—we can never be certain how much the differences we perceive today in rhetoric and inferred organizational structure under Rennyo's tenure reflect meaningful differences in belief, practice, and perception, and how much merely

changes in the way things were expressed in the more than 200 years that separate Shinran and Rennyo.

From our point of view today, more than five centuries after his death, Rennyo thus presents two historical faces: one spiritually appealing, magnetic, and humble; the other politically savvy, powerful, and with responsibility for the lives of tens of thousands. Even putting aside any trace of the "great man" notion of history, Rennyo nonetheless occupies a unique position in Japanese history as having transformed a relatively small religious sect in troubled times into a national organization of wealth and power. Many of the essays examine Rennyo's utilization of the symbols of his church's authority, but the fact that those symbols grew significantly in stature under his leadership tells us that Rennyo's presence itself was substantial, suggesting that in Rennyo we find both personal charisma *and* his institutional genius. Given the Weberian dictum that the mark of a truly charismatic leader is administrative incompetence, Rennyo presents a real enigma. How could both these extremes be combined in the same individual? Is our understanding of the man so off the mark that we have the wrong picture entirely? Or does the example of Rennyo essentially disprove Weber's doctrine? How much of Rennyo's success was actually due to his efforts, how much credit should be given to the attractiveness of Shinran's doctrine, and how much is a result of social, political, and economic factors is a problematic underlying all the essays here.

The fact is that before the time of Rennyo, his church, the Honganji, was only one among many branches of Shin Buddhism, itself only one among many so-called new schools of Pure Land Buddhism that were established in the previous two centuries. Moreover, Shinran's institutional legacy itself was rather weak compared with the other new developments in his time; that is, the branches of Shinran's lineage do not appear to have been among the more socially and politically prosperous or prominent among the many that sprang from Hōnen's disciples in the thirteenth century. The fifteenth-century religious landscape of Japan into which Rennyo was born was dominated by major institutions of an earlier age, such as Mount Hiei, Miidera, Kōfukuji, and the like, as well as the presence of the new Gozan orders of the Rinzai school in the capital with its strong bakufu support.

Among the newly established Pure Land schools based on Hōnen's legacy that had only grown in size and influence through the two centuries since Hōnen's death, it was the Chinzei and Seizan branches of the Jōdoshū, and the Jishū founded by Ippen, that appear to have been most influential when Rennyo first came on the scene. Even among the various lines of Shinshū, most scholars see the Takada and Bukkōji branches as overshadowing the Honganji before Rennyo's impact was felt. When the allegedly amoral and anti-authoritarian values manifest in the behavior of Honganji followers in Ōmi Province caused such ire among the leaders of Mount Hiei as to provoke the sending of troops to suppress them (discussed in chapter 7), the leaders of the Takada school were only too quick to write to the abbot of Enryakuji to clarify how their interpretation of Shinran's teaching differed from that found in Honganji-affiliated communities. Indeed, the very weakness in the political presence of Honganji during this crisis early in Rennyo's leadership is illustrated by the fact that Honganji was finally able to negotiate an end to the armed

attack against it by reaffirming its status as a branch temple within the Enryakuji institution of Mount Hiei, essentially making a public denial of its own autonomy. But that was during the Ōnin War, when most of the powerful military households were engaged in open conflict, tens of thousands of troops fought on the streets of the capital, and a general lawlessness pervaded the region.[5] It was many years before Rennyo decided it was safe to return to the capital for the reconstruction of Honganji, and the choice of Yamashina outside the urban center and the fortresslike structure that was built there is only one manifestation of his appreciation of the need for self-protection. That need resulted in various alliances with people and institutions of power, most famously with Miidera and the warlords Togashi Masachika and Hosokawa Masamoto. In 1493, six years before Rennyo's death, Masamoto would overthrow the shōgun and run the bakufu through his chosen successor, in essence becoming the most powerful man in the country. And as his power increased, so did his role as protector of Rennyo and Honganji. By this time Rennyo had administrative control over thousands of peasant soldiers, and Honganji eventually reached a position of political and religious prominence that rivaled Enryakuji and Mount Hiei itself. Under his tenure many Shin communities achieved more economic and political independence than they had ever known, and some even instituted democratic systems of government at the local level. Rennyo was courted by daimyō for the size and commitment of his community, and a major part of his legacy was an institution in Honganji that seemed commensurate with that of a feudal domain in many of its functions, prompting some to see Rennyo himself as a daimyō. After Rennyo's death, Honganji only grew stronger, whereupon Nobunaga sought its destruction as he had destroyed Mount Hiei, and yet it was the one domain that he was unable to conquer.

As was already noted, these events are not in dispute; how Honganji got to this point is disputed, however, as is the nature of its religious role in Rennyo's time. For those who see the growth of a religious organization on this scale to be impossible without an attractive and fulfilling spiritual message that both captures the imagination of its adherents and satisfies their religious needs, Rennyo's achievement, whatever it meant politically, is primarily in the area of formulating a coherent religious message. For those who see the growth of any social institution as primarily about power relations and their management, the key to understanding Rennyo lies in his strategies of control over his congregations and the infrastructure he created for his church that continued for many generations after his death. Indeed one of the most satisfying aspects of this project has been the discovery that nearly all the contributors do not regard these as mutually exclusive interpretations, and the reader will gain an appreciation of the unmistakable fact that Rennyo was a successful religious leader *and* successful political leader.

The sixteen essays that follow this introduction are divided into three parts: historical studies that examine Rennyo in the context of the history of Japan, Japanese religion, and Japanese Buddhism; Shinshū studies, which consider Rennyo and his era in terms of issues particular to the sectarian study of Shinshū; and comparative religion contributions that look at the legacy of Rennyo in terms of religious issues common to European traditions. A brief summary of some of the salient points made in the each of the essays follows.

The biographical outline of Rennyo's life written by Yasutomi Shin'ya not only presents what is currently known about the circumstances of his youth, succession to the abbotship of Honganji, geographical movement, and approach to his community, it also opens with the impact that the political instability of Rennyo's time had upon his outlook, an oft-repeated theme in all the essays. Here we see how the watershed moment in Rennyo's career is probably Enryakuji's formal announcement, on the ninth day of the first month in 1465, of its intention to destroy the Ōtani Honganji complex in Kyoto where Rennyo resided and the subsequent attack that came the next day. While that raid only partially destroyed Honganji, another attack in the third month essentially finished the job. Attacks on other Honganji communities followed, and when the bakufu finally persuaded Enryakuji to cease its persecution of what was then called *Ikkō-shū*, this point did not come until the fifth month of that year. These events illustrate the freedom of the Mount Hiei power brokers to move at will at that time, but they also highlight the fact that when Rennyo began his campaign to reconfigure the Honganji community he did so under the stress of exile. Rennyo's thought then, must be seen against this background: he lived his entire life during a period of enormous social instability, even after Honganji was rebuilt in Yamashina on the outskirts of Kyoto, when traditional centers of power like the court and the bakufu enjoyed only limited influence over the nation.

Kuroda Toshio is famous for categorizing the "establishment" Buddhism of the Kamakura period as *kenmitsu taisei*, a term that combines the words for exoteric and esoteric forms of Buddhism to indicate a religious, social, and political worldview common to all major forms of institutionalized Buddhism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While Kuroda has argued that by and large the so-called new schools of Buddhism were generally viewed merely as heretical forms of that paradigm, and thereby did not seriously challenge it, in chapter 3 he recognizes the writings of Shinran as having "aimed at surmounting the shortcomings of *kenmitsu* thought." In looking at Rennyo, Kuroda reminds us that political unrest was not the only socially meaningful characteristic of society in the fifteenth century. Rennyo lived also at a time when the sociopolitical structure of the *shōen* or manorial system in which three centers of power—court, shōgun, and religious institutions—were being replaced by individual daimyō ruling their domains as autonomous units of power. The breakdown in the *kenmitsu* power structure naturally led to a loss of authority of the old, established institutions such as Mount Hiei and the subsequent rise of interest in local cults and newer forms of Buddhism. Kuroda stresses the importance of the fact that Rennyo was speaking to a populace in which an intellectual approach to religion was much more widespread than in previous centuries when a small elite of highly educated charismatic scholar-monks determined the direction of religion. Rennyo's message should therefore be seen in the context of this "transitional" society when many people were seeking more direct control over their environment; the peasant *ikki* leagues and their uprisings are but one example. Similarly, Rennyo reinforces Shinran's assertion that true religion not only deserves a place separate from secular power structures but also fundamentally need not define itself by its relationship with those secular structures.

Next, Stanley Weinstein in chapter 4 provides a useful comparison between Shinran and Rennyo as leaders of Shinshū culture. Weinstein views Shinran as rather pure and unbending in his refusal to sacrifice his religious integrity to the demands of society. By comparison, Rennyo was "the builder" who did what was necessary to create the edifice of Honganji. Weinstein frames our understanding of Rennyo within the evolution of Japanese scholarship in the postwar period, pointing out how Rennyo had garnished an enormous amount of interest among historians, both Marxist and otherwise, because of his apparent promotion of self-empowerment movements among the populace. When Weinstein shows how, unlike Shinran, Rennyo exhibits strong sectarian consciousness and professes a doctrine in which resolute faith leads not only to the Pure Land in the next world but material benefits in this one, it calls to mind similar rhetoric from the Protestant Reformation. It raises the specter of a doctrine of "predestined salvation of the elect" in Rennyo, an association that also emerges from the contributions of Katō Chiken (chapter 15) and William LaFleur (chapter 16).

Matsumura Naoko in chapter 5 then examines Rennyo's take on what Kasahara Kazuo has labeled the Shinshū tradition of *nyonin shōki*, a twist on the phrase *akunin shōki*. *Akunin shōki*, itself a paraphrase of chapter 3 of the *Tannishō*, is Shinshū jargon for a position attributed to Shinran that if good people are accepted into Amida's Pure Land, how much more so does the Buddha welcome the bad (or the evil). Kasahara thus understood Rennyo's overt religious acceptance of women to have followed the precedent of Zonkaku,[6] who inferred that because women are seen as inherently limited as a karmic given, one should infer that it is to women that the Buddha's message is directed most intensely. Matsumura recognizes the importance of this issue for Rennyo, yet finds his view of women decidedly ambivalent. On the one hand Rennyo is clear that his sectarian tradition does not accept any differences between the spiritual potential of men and of women. On the other he repeats the traditional view that women are hindered by the infamous formula known as the "five obstacles and three submissions," and he sent one of his daughters into the house of the shōgun as a concubine, presumably to cement political ties with his church. Citing Kyōgen scripts and other contemporary sources, Matsumura shows how women were becoming increasingly recognized for their contributions in the Muromachi period, yet in areas such as divorce, society's presumption of male superiority for the most part remained unshaken. What is perhaps most fascinating here is the fact that while traveling from community to community Rennyo encouraged women to form gender-specific study groups, or *kō*, for lay and monastic alike; these strike Matsumura as strikingly similar to the self-empowering solidarity groups that began forming in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The essay by Kinryū Shizuka (chapter 6) utilizes documents written by European Catholic missionaries dating from the latter half of the sixteenth century to bring in new information on Shinshū in the century after Rennyo. Although unavoidably distorted to some degree, this material contains many things we can learn about the immediate post-Rennyo era, not the least being the forms that Shinshū took at the folk level, where many of these descriptions are based. Here we see a considerable amount of *honji-suijaku* and esoteric religious expression in which there is a rich symbolic interplay between Amida and Kannon as wish-

granting savior figures and the forms in which they manifest. The phrase *namu-amida-butsu* itself was analyzed for its symbolic content, and Kinryū also shows how many of these ideas are echoed in Edo period *dangibon*, thought to represent popular sermons. Ever aware of the danger of losing souls to incorrect religious teachings, the priest Valignano, for example, declares, "No matter what sins one has committed, [the priests]…chant the name of Amida or Shaka, and so long as one truly believes in the virtue of this act, those sins will be completely cleansed. Therefore, other atonements are completely unnecessary…this is the same as the teaching of Luther." For the missionaries, this *Ikkō-shū* was a religion of peasants. But it was also a religion that inspired great piety and loyalty; their records tell of rural *dōjō* where the members assemble thrice daily for services, and of the decapitation of a *dōjō* leader for "heresy" by a Christian daimyō in Kumamoto.

Kusano Kenshi's contribution in chapter 7 looks at the initial military attack on the Ōtani Honganji that first drove Rennyo from the capital. By examining documents produced by Mount Hiei to justify the raid, Kusano illustrates how the accusations leveled against Shinshū by Enryakuji are clearly linked to Rennyo's activities, accusing the Honganji of practices that slander both buddhas and kami. An interesting part of the criticism is over the name of *mugekō-shū* adopted by many of the Honganji-affiliated groups in the Ōmi area, which is associated with a doctrine wherein an "unhindered" Amida Buddha empowered his believers to feel similarly unrestricted in their activities. Kusano points to Rennyo's destruction of Buddhist icons (also discussed in chapter 9) as one of the most serious of the accusations. He gives examples that show how the frequent admonition in Rennyo's *Letters* against the open disdain displayed to local kami is testimony that that kind of thing was quite prevalent among Honganji followers, for they are criticized for ignoring pollution customs that result in desecrating shrine precincts. As Kusano suggests, this is not only about the ancient religion we now call Shinto but also about disrupting the political hierarchy embedded in village organizations centered around shrines.

In chapter 8 Minamoto Ryōen offers an analysis of how Rennyo's thought paved the way for the phenomenon known as *myōkōnin*, the name given to a number of lay saints in this tradition. Although most people associate myōkōnin with the Edo and Meiji periods, in fact such individuals begin to emerge during Rennyo's leadership, and Minamoto focuses on the example of Akao-no-Dōshū (d. 1516). Minamoto believes that Rennyo's nenbutsu hermeneutic, coupled with his promotion of the doctrine known as *kihō ittai*, "unified body of individual and Dharma," changed the culture surrounding Shinshū such that it led to these remarkably inspired individuals. In particular, Rennyo's shift from Shandao's view of nenbutsu as a call to personal commitment and practice to one in which both virtues are seen to be emanating from the Buddha himself through the believer clarified a point on which Shinran was not consistent. Echoing the mysticism in the *Anjinketsujōshō* (and Kōsai), Rennyo writes of the attained individual who "knows" the Buddha, who has a "dialogue" with the Buddha, and in his later years this is how he described one who has attained the goal of *shinjin* or *anjin*. This dialogic attitude is typical of the mature Rennyo and suggests that he himself could well have served as a prototype for the myōkōnin. Minamoto's essay is thus an

important reminder of the fact that Rennyo not only inspired the community-based form of Shinshū that dominated Honganji from the sixteenth through the twentieth century but also created a new path for the intensely spiritual individual who derives inspiration from discipline and personal religious experience rather than from a communal setting.

In chapter 9 Mark Blum looks at Rennyo's use of religious icons as a means of communication. He asks us to consider the production and distribution of hanging scrolls under Rennyo's tenure as commensurate with the composition and distribution of his *Letters* for the purpose of establishing and confirming relationships, dictating norms of belief, and thus delineating Honganji culture as a whole. Although Honganji had a prior tradition of bestowing sacred scrolls to its outlying affiliated communities, dating back to the time of Shinran, Rennyo plunges into this activity in a way unprecedented in its sheer volume and expense. But Rennyo's relationship with visual forms of the sacred was a complex one, and this chapter echoes Professor Kusano's focus on the significance of Rennyo's period of burning Buddhist icons and its direct impact on the justification for the persecution of Honganji during his leadership. The essay uses the example of Shinshū icons in Rennyo's day to draw our attention to the societal impact of religious icons in Japanese history as a whole, for we know that a wide freedom in iconic expression in Shinshū was significantly curbed under Rennyo when ritual use of the ten-character *myōgō* scroll initially favored by Rennyo himself and many Shin leaders before him, including Shinran, had to be proscribed after it was demonstrated to provoke intense, at times violently repugnant reactions by some of the leaders on Mount Hiei.

Chapter 10, the first essay in the Shinshū studies part, is Terakawa Shunshō's look at the Shinshū view of *ōjō* or Birth in the Pure Land, usually abbreviated here as Birth. This key concept is of crucial importance because there has been considerable misunderstanding of the implications of it in Japanese Pure Land thought; it is too often reified to nothing more than postmortem rebirth in a paradise. Terakawa first looks at Shinran's final statements on it, in his seldom-read *Jōdo sangyō ōjō monrui* and better-known *Ichinen tanen mon'i* and *Yuishinshō mon'i*. Key here is the fact that Shinran directly ties the Pure Land goal of *ōjō* to broader religious issues such as the attaining of *nirvāṇa*, the epiphanic experience of *shinjin* (the "believing mind"), and the Tanluan's twofold notion of the believer's merit transfer (*huixiang*, Japanese *ekō*). Terakawa stresses that our understanding of Rennyo's statements on practice, faith, and realization must be seen within the context of Shinran's understanding of *ōjō* as being something realized in *this* lifetime, not after death. The problem lies in the fact that Rennyo frequently uses language that beseeches the Buddha to "help me in the next life." Through his masterful understanding of Shin doctrine, Terakawa weaves an interpretive tour de force that maintains Shinran's more radical position within Rennyo while finding room for his shift in emphasis.

Kaku Takeshi in chapter 11 provides a window into how Rennyo was resurrected by some as an authoritative religious thinker in the Meiji period, when Buddhism faced government persecution and criticism from many quarters as an anachronistic institution anathema to modernization. He notes that no less a figure than Fukuzawa

Yukichi praised Rennyo for his take on the concept of *obō-buppō*, or "imperial law and the Buddhist law," which he read as advocating the modern legal principle separating church and state, an interpretation that led to Rennyo's *Letters* becoming better studied than Shinran's own writings during the Meiji period. When Kiyozawa Manshi emerged as a leading Shinshū intellectual in the 1890s, his insistence on modern, critical sectarian studies caused a rift between conservative and reform movements within the church. Examining the contribution of Soga Ryōjin, a disciple of Kiyozawa, Kaku argues that Soga sought to resolve this conflict by redefining Rennyo and his doctrines. Over the years we see how Soga writes of Rennyo as social reformer on the one hand and religious mystic on the other, and it is fascinating to see how much Soga and Kiyozawa were taken with Rennyo's embrace of both the *Tannishō* and the *kihō ittai* doctrine, the latter also discussed in Professor Minamoto's essay (chapter 8). Kaku clarifies for us how the Ōtani branch (Higashi Honganji) of Shinshū created the underpinnings of its modern doctrinal position on the basis of a *Tannishō*-centered philosophy running from Shinran to Rennyo to Kiyozawa to Soga. In Soga's words, this attitude is characterized by an approach common to these thinkers such that Buddhism is not regarded as a perfected form to be acceded to, but something to be "understood . . . through their own experiences."

In chapter 12 Alfred Bloom considers Rennyo's legacy in the context of the postwar period and his potential for inspiring progressive developments within the Honganji institution. He reminds us that Rennyo regarded the Honganji church itself as the historical manifestation of the working of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion, yet he warns against tendencies toward rigidity and inflexibility that may emerge from an acceptance of this view today. Bloom notes that Rennyo himself transformed the institution significantly, even reformulating church rhetoric to emphasize the afterlife, turning away from Shinran's focus on the experience of awakening. Bloom affirms this movie as a natural and healthy to adapt to one's surroundings in ways that are innovative if they succeed in communicating your message. As an illustration of how Rennyo's considerable communication skills were employed to this end, Bloom notes the important liturgical role in Honganji temples of Shinran's *Wasan* and *Shōshinge*, a legacy of Rennyo's efforts, begun in Yoshizaki, to print and distribute these texts so that Shin communities could each have copies for their own services. We also know that Rennyo promoted the organization of small voluntary associations usually called *kō*, also discussed in chapter 5, whose leaders he kept in his confidence, giving them his imprimatur for self-government in the service of providing a space for religious activities. It was these local groups that he was able to tie together despite geographical separation into the broad, national organization that Honganji became. Rennyo thus promoted a model of local democratic groups that were tied to a mother church that otherwise remained essentially feudal in structure.

Ikeda Yūtai has spent a number of years studying Rennyo's *Letters*, and in chapter 13 he examines the observation that these are directly inspired by and therefore another expression of the philosophy of the *Tannishō*. Such was the conclusion of a commentary on the *Tannishō* by Ryōshō in the eighteenth century and was asserted again by Soga Ryōjin, as is discussed in chapter 11. Ikeda considers

the implications of the text-critical findings of Miyazaki Enjun, who discovered that some twenty-five years had elapsed between the writing of individual sentences in the extant text copied by Rennyo, meaning that Rennyo kept this book with him over a long period of time. After discussing Rennyo's famous colophon to the *Tannishō*: "This should not be shown indiscriminately to those who lack karmic good roots," Ikeda provides a valuable analysis of the interpretive "differences" so bemoaned by that work as understood by Rennyo, according to statements in his *Letters*. Ikeda divides Rennyo's notion of heresy into four categories: (1) misunderstanding of nenbutsu practice, (2) secret practices and doctrines within certain local communities (called *hiji bōmon*), (3) public pronouncements of Shinshū doctrine before nonbelievers, and (4) teaching non-Shinshū doctrines, false doctrines, or for money.

In chapter 14, the final chapter in the Shinshū studies part, Yasutomi Shin'ya presents an example of the rich folklore tradition that has grown up around Rennyo and is little known outside Japan, offering a multifaceted interpretation of a folktale associated with Rennyo's four-year residence in Yoshizaki. A kind of *setsuwa* tale, this story has a clear religious message and found its way into the normative pictorial biographies of Rennyo but also enjoyed retelling in nonreligious contexts. A story in which women are the central characters, it concerns the tragedy of death within a family and the resultant acute spiritual needs of the remaining family members, expressed in tension between a mother-in-law and her son's widow. Yasutomi offers three interpretations of the story: as a blueprint for a Nō drama, as a statement about the traditional prejudice against women in Japanese Buddhism, and as a symbolic representation of the regional conflict between the religio-political paradigm of Honganji and that of the indigenous mountain cults in the Hokuriku area such as the one surrounding Mount Haku, or Hakusan, a mountain where ascetic, shugendo practices continue to the present day. The story communicates a number of important aspects for understanding Rennyo: that he was explicit in his doctrine of equality of men and women before the Buddha, and at times even reflected Zonkaku's earlier view, discussed in chapter 5, that Shinran's doctrine implied that women were the precise object of the Buddha's compassion; that he was enamored of Nō drama and incorporated Nō elements into his own preaching style; and that there was always some degree of social and political upheaval brought on by the expansion of Honganji's influence over an ever-widening geographical area under Rennyo's leadership, of which the *ikkō ikki* peasant uprisings are only the most salient example. The last point illustrates the complex relationship between Honganji under Rennyo and the local cults today we put under the rubric Shinto.

Chapter 15 offers a sample of Katō Chiken's extensive work comparing the lives and religious ideas of Rennyo and Martin Luther. Katō is struck not only by the similarities in their religious outlook but by their personalities as well. He notes that both were happy in domestic settings, a fact he sees as indicative of their devotion to deepening the religious consciousness of the common people. Intrigued with Luther's concept of an "invisible church," Katō implies that Honganji under Rennyo probably progressed under a similar principle. At the very least, the examples shown

here of the parallel problems faced when leaders like Rennyo and Luther attempt to realize an idealized religious community suggest the need for further inquiry into areas of consonance and dissonance between religious visions and social realities, especially for the history of Buddhism, where, outside of Śrī Lanka, Tibet, and some Chan studies, such inquiry is particularly lacking. In any case, Katō concludes that the many similarities between Luther and Rennyo naturally arise because both expound ideologies that stand on a doctrine of "faith alone," or in modern Shin language, "absolute Other-Power." This notion begs other questions: (1) Since Rennyo never used either expression, how would we understand his response to Katō's analysis? (2) Is there a similar denial of free will in Rennyo's writings to that seen in Luther's anti-Erasmus 1525 polemic *De servo arbitrio*, for there is a glaring tension between Rennyo's affirmation of universal access to the Pure Land and his belief that Birth there is not open to people born without the right karmic endowment from their previous lives? The tension between Luther's own commitment to universalism and his sense of predestination thus suggests there may be a similar presumption of a community of "the elect" lurking in Rennyo.

William LaFleur in chapter 16 considers an often overlooked aspect of Rennyo: his expression of joy. In fact Rennyo frequently uses expressions of elation to express the experience of faith, and we err in omitting this as an essential part of his message of hope. LaFleur sees this as part of a lineage of openness that defined a new religious outlook, beginning with Hōnen and moving through Shinran to Rennyo. It is not only that these forms of Pure Land Buddhism consciously distanced themselves from the secret, "hiddenness" of the older Tendai forms of Japanese Buddhism, but that they also brought a new message of confidence regarding karma to the general population, many of whom feared that their occupations precluded them from salvation. An important aspect of this openness is Rennyo's attitude of treating his followers as "fellow practitioners" rather than as disciples. This combination of humble authority and openness in Rennyo suggests a deep-seated faith in the value of freedom for bringing people to liberation though faith. LaFleur contrasts this attitude with that displayed by the Grand Inquisitor questioning Jesus in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Set in sixteenth-century Europe, a time close to that of Rennyo, this priest justifies burning heretics at the stake because, as he explains to Jesus, freedom of thought in religious matters is too oppressive for the people who actually yearn for "miracle, mystery, and authority" which the Catholic Church is able to provide. Professor LaFleur argues that Rennyo consciously moves away from all three of these elements of religion because of his focus on experience and openness.

In the final chapter Ruben Habito brings us back to the twenty-first century by considering the impact of Rennyo upon how the Shin sect has conceived its international role today. Given that Shin Buddhism under Honganji has become both large and influential both inside and outside of Japan, he asks its leadership important questions about its future direction. Comparing Honganji thought and structure to that of the Roman Catholic Church, Habito seeks to make Shin leaders more aware of the issues involved in the "translation" and "contextualization" of the religion for an international audience. This point is particularly important for

our evaluation of the legacy of Rennyo because, for Habito, Rennyo appears to have changed many of Shinran's core positions regarding the religious world outside of Shinshū. Focusing on the problem of alterity, Habito recognizes the central role that Rennyo had in shaping the Shin attitude toward the non-Shinshū world over the last 500 years, and this thoughtful essay functions as an open call for Shin to move beyond that history in order to clarify once again how Honganji as an institution can provide leadership for its believers to see other institutions of power in society today, such as the emperor and state power in general, especially in light of the complicity of both Higashi and Nishi Honganji during World War II. As an example of how a political statement from a church leader must be understood in its original context so as to limit the scope of its normative value to later generations, Habito points to Paul's letter to Titus, which, though advocating willful submission to political authority, was subject to varying interpretations over time.

Although there is little to suggest that the world in which Rennyo lived, the fifteenth century, should be considered even a premodern stage of Japanese history, the legacy of Rennyo nonetheless deserves recognition for its contribution to many of the institutional and cultural developments that we take for granted today as emblematic of Japanese Buddhist institutions in the modern period. We might consider these changes under the rubric of innovative sectarian integration, defined as a successful reworking of sectarian precedent in ways that redefined the relationship between religious idealism and institutional need. Successful in this context means growth in size and social stature of the organization, an undeniable fact in the case of Honganji, but one not without attendant controversy as well. But while the changes wrought by Rennyo have not pleased everyone, modern schools of Buddhism in Japan have all been influenced to some degree by his creative strategies of communication. I specfically refer to those that successfully infused lay populations throughout the country with a sense of identity to their sect as a national entity. By devoting considerable attention to the standardization of such things as retreats for study and practice, pilgrimage, funerary rituals, fund-raising, norms of behavior, support for women, and the assimilation of local dōjō into the greater church, Rennyo's integration of local, regional, and national forces reflects an institutional vision that formed a prototype for what later became normative in Japanese religion in the premodern and modern periods.

Having left such a deep imprint on Shinshū culture and Japanese history as a whole, Rennyo continues to be the object of historical scrutiny today. His repeated encounters with tragedy—the Ōnin war,[6] persecution and destruction of his church, exile, sectarian infighting—without giving in to despair suggest the strength of his courage and vision but also make him a compelling figure of considerable interest. However one imagines the experience of living at a time of such great insecurity, Rennyo emerges as a charismatic leader who deeply understood the anxieties of his age and fashioned a response that met with overwhelming acceptance. With the tens of books and hundreds of articles on Rennyo published in Japan in the past decade, the editors of this study make no claim of comprehensiveness. We only hope that this collection makes a small contribution to the understanding of this figure and his times, and serves to stimulate further research.

Notes

1 Minor L. Rogers, "Rennyo Shōnin 1415–1499: A Transformation in Shin Buddhist Piety," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1972. Ira Michael Solomon, "Rennyo and the Rise of Honganji in Muromachi Japan," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York, 1972.

2 Stanley Weinstein, "Rennyo and the Shinshū Revival," in *Japan in the Muromachi Age*, ed. John W. Hall and Toyoda Takeshi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 331–358.

3 James Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989).

4 Minor L. Rogers and Ann T. Rogers, Rennyo: *The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism* (Berkeley, Cal.: Asian Humanities Press, 1991).

5 See Mary Elizabeth Berry, *The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

6 Lasting nearly a decade, the Ōnin war was a tragic saga that destroyed much of the capital and yet ultimately decided nothing of consequence politically.

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