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Author(s): William M. Bodiford

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William M. Bodiford

ZEN IN THE ART OF
FUNERALS: RITUAL
SALVATION IN
JAPANESE BUDDHISM

Funeral rituals, even ones with an artistic aura, rarely appear in descriptions of Zen art or Zen practice. Although little commented on, the art of Buddhist funerals in Japan is very Zen. In order to understand the Zen of Japanese funerals, first one must leave behind preconceptions based on religiously inspired images of what Zen should be and, instead, examine how Zen functions as a religion in Japanese society. One of the most important social roles of Zen, as in other religions, is to guide the living through the experience of death. Buddhist scholars, who should know better, not uncommonly disparage funerals as mere ritualism peripheral to fundamental Zen insights. Yet for lay people suffering the loss of a loved one few occasions are charged with more emotional power and religious meaning.¹ Zen funerals, furthermore, like their counterparts in medieval European Christianity, historically constituted one of the more significant regular meeting points between the closed religious world located within monastic institutions and the larger secular community they served. The exploration of Zen funerals thus can aid our understanding of how the religious worldview of monks attained expression in the world actually lived by lay people as well as how monastic institutions, by giving new meaning to the process

¹ One need only read the traditional hagiographies of Buddhist monks to realize the profound impact of familial death experiences for awakening individuals to the truth of Buddhist teachings. For suggestive studies of the varied roles that myths, ceremonies, and conceptions of death have in human societies, see Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh, eds., *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976).

of death, were able to claim privileged social and economic roles among the living.² This article presents a brief overview of the historical development of key elements of Zen funerals in the Sōtō Zen tradition to show how Zen monks manipulated the symbols of Zen enlightenment to provide spiritual solace to the living and religious salvation to the dead.³ An examination of these practices will demonstrate the limitations of the usual academic answers to the question, What is Zen?

Most descriptions of Zen fall into two camps, sometimes placed in opposition, which could be called (in the words of Alan Watts) “beat Zen” and “square Zen.”⁴ The first refers to the widespread belief in an intrinsic spiritual link between Zen and artistic endeavors. This view, now commonly associated with Watts himself and D. T. Suzuki, asserts that Zen represents the sublime achievement in personal, artistic self-expression.⁵ The association between Zen and artistic skill has become such a cliché that most books published today with the word “Zen” in their titles actually concern topics unrelated to Buddhism or religion.⁶ In contrast to this popular image, Buddhist scholars have stressed the earnest character of Zen as it appears in its traditional Buddhist setting: the Zen monastery.⁷ Instead of artistic pursuits, Zen

² The social functions and ritual forms of monastic funerals have been too little studied in either Buddhist or Christian settings. I have drawn inspiration from Miriam Levering, “Ta-hui and Lay Buddhists: Ch’an Sermons on Death,” in *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, ed. David W. Chappell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 181–206; and Gregory Schopen, “On Avoiding Ghosts and Social Censure: Monastic Funerals in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 20 (1992): 1–39. The religious connections between worldview and world actually lived is discussed in Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton, A.S.A. Monographs 3 (London: Tavistock, 1966), pp. 3–4, 28.

³ This article is based on a paper first presented at the University of Iowa in 1990. I wish to thank Raoul Birnbaum and David Klemm, for suggestions that helped me clarify my organization of the information, and thank Albert Raboteau and Constance Berman for suggesting the significance of European parallels. The themes mentioned herein are treated in full in William M. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming).

⁴ Alan W. Watts, *Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen* (1958; reprint, San Francisco: City Lights, 1959).

⁵ For insightful evaluations of the images of Zen presented in the writings of these two influential authors, see Louis Nordstrom and Richard B. Pilgrim, “The Wayward Mysticism of Alan Watts,” *Philosophy East and West* 30, no. 3 (1980): 381–401; and Margaret H. Dornish, “Aspects of D. T. Suzuki’s Early Interpretations of Buddhism and Zen,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 3, no. 1 (1970): 47–66.

⁶ A cursory glance through one book catalog yielded such titles as *Zen in the Art of Archery*, *Zen and the Art of Writing*, *Zen in the Art of Painting*, *Zen and the Art of the Macintosh*, *The Zen of Samuel Beckett*, *The Zen of Running*, *The Zen of Money*, etc.

⁷ Philip P. Yampolsky expressed the majority view of Buddhist scholars in his assertion that, “when Zen flourishes as a teaching it has little to do with the arts and . . . when the teaching is in decline its association with the arts increases.” See his introduction to *The Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 9.

monasteries house a tightly disciplined community of monks engaged wholeheartedly in re-creating an ancient life-style based on the legacy of the Buddhist patriarchs. Typically, the day's activities begin at four o'clock in the morning with the first of four daily periods of Zen meditation (*zazen*). During these meditation periods the monks sit cross-legged, lined up together in the meditation hall for about two hours of silent contemplation. When the monks are not engaged in communal meditation, they occupy themselves with an endless variety of religious rituals and monastic chores. Not a single idle minute is tolerated. These monastic monks have no time for art. They single-mindedly pursue the soteriological goal of Zen enlightenment. According to the scholars who direct our attention to this monastic pursuit, the essence of Zen lies in a life of meditation and enlightenment.

Yet these two descriptions of Zen Buddhism share a key similarity. Critics of Zen would assert that both types—the artistic Zen as well as the Zen in the monastery—constitute self-centered, basically selfish pursuits. This might well be the reason for some of the popularity of Zen in America. Whether focused on artistic self-expression or focused on the realization of self-enlightenment, both images of Zen seem designed to appeal to traditional American sentiments of rugged self-reliance, individualism, and freedom. This special Zen self-reliance, however, can be obtained only by years of effort and strict training, either in meditation or in art. Aspiring Zen artists and Zen monks both set forth on a rigorous quest for a transcendental, superhuman experience—an experience of insight or enlightenment—that will guide their art and their religion.

To many observers, this superhuman experience appears beyond the grasp of the average person. Anyone who has attempted either Zen art, such as the Tea Ceremony, or even a single session of Zen meditation knows how difficult it can be. Few people can take the necessary time away from families and jobs to devote years to harsh training in the pursuit of a narrow, personal goal. Zen advocates typically assert that to know Zen one must experience it directly. Yet if one cannot thus personally pursue the path of Zen, then what spiritual benefits can Zen offer? Indeed, however appealing some descriptions of the attainments of the accomplished Zen masters might seem, for many would-be converts Zen practice is too impractical. This very criticism of Zen, in fact, was common in medieval Japan. The famous Buddhist saint Myōe (1173–1232, a.k.a. Kōben), for example, expressed great interest in Zen and became an accomplished meditator. Yet Myōe wrote that the Zen school had nothing to offer laymen.⁸

⁸ Myōe, *Kyakuhaimeiki*, fasc. 1, reprinted in *Kamakura kyū Bukkyō*, ed. Kamata Shigeo and Tanaka Hisao, *Nihon Shisō Taikei*, 15 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1971), p. 116.

This exclusivity is especially associated with the style of Zen taught by Dōgen (1200–53), the founder of the Japanese Sōtō tradition.⁹ Dōgen stands out for his uncompromising insistence on strict, monastic Zen. Although he lived at a time of religious ferment when many popular religious movements in Japan competed for new converts, Dōgen did not attract a large following. Instead he devoted his energies to the cultivation of a few dedicated monks. He founded only a single, small, isolated monastery in the rural mountains of northeastern Japan. There he taught that single-minded sitting in Zen meditation embodies the essence of Buddhist enlightenment. According to Dōgen, this enlightenment must be realized in meditation and expressed in accordance to strict ritual forms. Dōgen wrote detailed commentaries on the monastic codes, in which he described how every action, from cooking to use of the toilet, must be performed as an expression of living enlightenment. In his more extreme writings Dōgen even went so far as to assert that people living outside the monastery cannot attain enlightenment.¹⁰ The severity of this assertion is clear when we remember that in a Buddhist context enlightenment implies salvation. In this instance, therefore, Dōgen denied that laymen and laywomen could attain salvation.

Contrary to the descriptions summarized above, neither the artistic approach to Zen nor the monastic approach accurately depicts the Zen Buddhism found in Japan. This is not to say that Zen-inspired artists do not exist or that Zen monasteries do not train monks in meditation. Zen artists and Zen monks can be found in limited numbers. But at the vast majority of Zen temples—and there are about twenty thousand Zen temples versus only seventy-two monasteries—no one practices art, no one meditates, and no one actively pursues the experience of enlightenment. The popular image of Zen known in the West and the image promoted by scholars both fail to reflect this reality. Neither tells us what religious functions truly occur at Zen temples. Surveys of Zen priests reveal that most monks stop practicing meditation as soon as they leave the monasteries at which they receive their basic training. Once monks return to their local village temple, lay-oriented ceremonies, especially funeral services, occupy their energies to the total exclusion of either Zen art or Zen meditation. Statistics published by the Sōtō school state

⁹ This exclusivity was noted by medieval Tendai critics of Dōgen, who labeled his teachings the doctrines of an *engaku* (Sanskrit *pratyekabuddha*, i.e., one who clings to a self-centered enlightenment, unconcerned with the welfare of others); see Kōsō, *Keiran jūyōshū* (ca. 1311–48), in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (hereafter cited as *T*; Tokyo, 1928), 76:539c–540a. The accuracy of this characterization, of course, is another question. It is possible to interpret Dōgen as a popularizer.

¹⁰ Dōgen, *Shōbō genzō*, “Shukke” chap., in *Dōgen Zenji zenshū* (hereafter cited as *DZZ*), ed. Ōkubo Dōshū (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1969), 1:598.

that about 77 percent of Sōtō laymen would visit their temples only for reasons connected with funerals and death. A mere 7 percent would do so for what they termed spiritual reasons. Less than 2 percent would go to a Zen priest at a time of personal trouble or crisis.¹¹

These statistics, of course, are not at all unusual in modern Japanese Buddhism. For various historical reasons funeral rituals have come to represent the main source of financial income at most Buddhist temples in Japan, not just those affiliated with one of the Zen schools. Yet most people would judge the preponderance of funeral services at Zen temples simply as evidence showing the decline of “real Zen” in modern Japan. In this view, the Zen temples still exist, but the practice of Zen has all but disappeared. Presumably some distinction can be made between “Zen in itself” and the so-called non-Zen practices commonly found within the Zen school.

This distinction, however, is not clear-cut. Historically, Zen monks first popularized the widespread practice of Buddhist funerals in Japan. Prior to the emergence of independent Zen sects in Japan, only the wealthy nobility sought to supplement traditional Japanese funeral rites with special Buddhist services. The majority of Japanese people, in contrast, generally lacked access to the Buddhist clergy and economic prosperity required for elaborate Buddhist funeral rites. It was Zen monks who first introduced and popularized affordable funeral rites that appealed to the religious sentiments of the common people.¹² These Zen rites came to define the standard funeral format that was emulated by most other Japanese Buddhist schools.¹³ In other words, Buddhist funerals are *not* external to traditional Zen practice. The image of Zen as a religion of artistic insight and enlightenment is incomplete. In Japan, Zen monks always have used their powers of insight and enlightenment to serve the more immediate worldly needs of their patrons. The realm of Zen enlightenment extended beyond the monastery walls into the homes of laymen.

ZEN FUNERALS

To find the origin of Zen funerals, one must look first to the Chinese monastic codes followed by Japanese Zen monks. As mentioned earlier, Dōgen (the founder of the Japanese Sōtō tradition) had stressed the spiritual importance of monastic regulations because they codify

¹¹ Ian Reader, “Zazenless Zen? The Position of Zazen in Institutional Zen Buddhism,” *Japanese Religions*, 14, no. 3 (December 1986): 7–27.

¹² Tamamuro Taijō, *Sōshiki Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1963), pp. 211–22.

¹³ All Japanese schools except Nichiren and Jōdo Shinshū generally follow the sequence of ceremonies described in the Zen monastic codes (*shingi*). Even the terminology is the same (e.g., note the use of Zen term *gan* [literally “niche”] for coffin); see Fuji Masao, ed., *Bukkyō girei jiten* (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1977), pp. 281–336.

ritually meaningful expressions of enlightened activity. The activities described in these codes include funeral rites. Buddhist funeral rites were developed by Chinese Buddhists relatively late, in order to adapt Buddhism to traditional Chinese sensibilities. The first detailed account of Chinese Buddhist funeral rites is found in an eleventh-century Chinese Buddhist encyclopedia. It contains twenty-six entries on funeral rituals, most of which are explained by means of quotations from the Confucian classics, such as the Book of Rites (*Liji*), the Book of Documents (*Shujing*), and the Book of Odes (*Shijing*).¹⁴ In fact, all the funeral ceremonies referred to by this encyclopedia, except cremation and the chanting of Buddhist scriptures, parallel earlier non-Buddhist Chinese rites.¹⁵ This same pattern is found in the earliest Zen monastic code, the *Chanyuan qinggui* compiled in 1103.¹⁶ The description of the funeral for a Zen abbot in this text prescribes a sequence of ceremonies modeled on the traditional Chinese Confucian rites for deceased parents, with the abbot seen as the symbolic parent of his disciples. On the abbot's death, his direct disciples would wear robes of mourning and retire from their normal duties, while the other monks in the monastery would be assigned the functions of praising the abbot's accomplishments and of consoling his disciples. The deceased abbot's corpse would be washed, shaved, dressed in new robes, and placed inside a round coffin in an upright, seated position, as if engaged in meditation.

The subsequent funeral ceremonies then would take several days. A special altar would be prepared on which to display a portrait of the abbot as well as his prized possessions—his sleeping mat, fly whisk, staff, meditation mat, razor, robes, and so forth. The altar and coffin would be decorated with flowers. Decorative banners would be placed on both sides of the coffin. Other banners that proclaim Buddhist doctrines, such as a verse on impermanence, would adorn the room. The abbot's final words or death poem would also be prominently displayed. The hall containing the altar would be lined with white curtains, while additional lanterns, incense burners, white flowers, and daily offerings

¹⁴ Daocheng, *Shishi yaolan* (1019; published 1024), fasc. 3, in *T*, 54:307–10.

¹⁵ Ishikawa Rikizan, "Zen no sōsō," *Nihongaku* 10 (December 1987): 140–42. Regarding the importance of traditional Chinese ritual concerns in Chinese Buddhism see Michihata Ryōshū, *Bukkyō to Jukyō*, Regurusu Bunko (Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1976), pp. 49–64. The ritual structure of Chinese funerary rites are explored in terms of cultural constructs such as hierarchy, gender, and ideology in James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁶ *Chanyuan qinggui*, ed. Zhanglu Zongae, fasc. 7, "Wang seng" and "Zun su qianhua"; rev. ed. *Yakuchū Zennen shingi*, ed. Kagamishima Genryū, Satō Tatsugen, and Kosaku Kiyū (Tokyo: Sōtōshū Shūmichō, 1972), pp. 237–48, 259–63. The following description of Chinese monastic funerary rites is based on this monastic code.

would be set out. On the day of the actual burial or cremation, an elaborate procession consisting of resident monks, lay patrons, and local government officials would carry not just the coffin, but also the altar, the abbot's portrait, and the special banners to the grave site. Invited guests would deliver a series of eulogies in praise of the late abbot. Afterward, a commemorative meal would be served to all present. The Zen code replaces Confucian explanations found in the eleventh-century encyclopedia mentioned above with statements that emphasize the ritual confirmation of the enlightenment of the deceased. All ceremonies would be staged as the final nirvāṇa of an enlightened Buddha.

EARLY ZEN FUNERALS IN MEDIEVAL JAPAN

When Zen rituals were introduced to Japan, the patrons of Zen temples, who would have been invited to witness the ceremonies provided to deceased monks, saw that the series of complex ceremonies honored the deceased far more than the Buddhist rites previously available. In earlier Japanese Buddhism, many funeral rites seem to have lacked physical proximity to the location and disposition of the corpse.¹⁷ Depending on circumstances, a disparate variety of rituals might be performed at separate temples. The funeral of Emperor Goichijō (died 1036) provides a good example. His funeral involved rites performed at seven different temples, ranging from esoteric fire invocation ceremonies (*goma*) to simple chanting of the Buddha's name (*nenbutsu*). Diaries of the government ministers directing the funeral reveal that earlier precedents, not doctrinal consistency or personal religious inclinations, largely determined the selection, order, and sites of the rituals.¹⁸ In contrast, the Chinese-style Zen monastic codes described an integrated series of rituals performed at a single temple and clearly focused on the honor and tranquility of the deceased, whose corpse or portrait occupied center stage. The first Japanese laymen to receive Zen funerals were among the ruling elite who sponsored the activities of the new Zen institutions. The Zen funeral of the regent Hōjō Tokimune in 1284 at the hands of the Chinese Zen monk Wuxue Zuyuan (1226–86, Japanese Mugaku Sogen) is a prominent example of a patron's having received monastic rites.¹⁹ Tokimune had invited

¹⁷ See Tamamuro, *Sōshiki Bukkyō*, pp. 100–112; and Nakata Hisao, "Heian jidai no kizoku no sōsei: Toku ni jūichi seiki wo chūshin to shite," in *Haka no rekishi*, ed. Uwai Hisayashi, *Sōsō Bosei Kenkyū Shūsei* 5 (Tokyo: Meicho Shuppan, 1979), pp. 183–204.

¹⁸ See *Ruijū zatsurei*, extracts from the diary of Minamoto Tsuneyori (975–1039), entries for 1036:5:1–19, in *Gunsho ruijū*, ed. Hanawa Hokinoichi (Tokyo: Keizai Zasshisha, 1894), 18:613–21.

¹⁹ Regarding Hōjō Tokimune and Wuxue Zuyuan, see Martin Collcutt, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 70–73.

Wuxue to Japan in 1278 and had built the new Zen monastery En-gakuji for him. When Tokimune approached death, Wuxue ordained him as a Buddhist monk and presented him with new vestments. The newly ordained Tokimune then received a full Chinese-style Zen funeral, at which Wuxue delivered two separate eulogies.²⁰

Another detailed account of an early Zen funeral in Japan describes the cremation of Yoshihito (1361–1416), an imperial prince. Yoshihito was wealthy and wellborn. He was the son of Emperor Sukō and the grandfather of the future Emperor Gohanazono. The events of his funeral were recorded in the diary of his son, Sadafusa.²¹ On the evening following Yoshihito's death, his head was shaved, and his body was washed and dressed in Buddhist robes. A group of monks was assigned to chant Buddhist scriptures. On the following day, senior monks from the major Zen monasteries that had ties to the imperial family (i.e., Tenryūji, Kenninji, and Nanzenji) visited Yoshihito's residence to plan his funeral. The dates and leaders for each of the ceremonies were selected. The monks were informed of Yoshihito's Buddhist name so that the proper banners and a mortuary tablet (*ihai*) could be prepared. It is important to note that this Buddhist name already existed, thus indicating that Yoshihito had received a lay ordination before his death. Throughout the next two days, different groups of monks arrived for a series of chanting sessions. On the third day, with family relatives, ministers, and important aristocrats in attendance, the main Zen ceremonies began. First, his coffin was presented. The coffin of a Zen abbot would be placed in the monastery's lecture hall, but for Yoshihito a nearby Amida chapel served as the place of honor. After the eulogies and the presentation of offerings, the ceremonies were adjourned. On the following day, after more offerings of incense and scripture chanting at the chapel, the coffin was carried to the cremation site. For the cremation ritual, a temporary altar had been erected outside the east gate of the Amida chapel. Cut pine and cedar trees were arranged around the spot where the table for offerings and the pyre were set up. Temporary *torii* (Japanese-styled sacred gateways) made of unhewn hackberry (*enoki*) wood also were placed in line with the four cardinal directions.²² The procession was led by two monks carrying incense stands, followed (in order) by the four main banners, a gong and drum,

²⁰ Wuxue Zuyuan, *Bukkō kokushi goroku*, fasc. 4, in *T*, 80:174c–175a. The “Hōkōji Dono” in these passages refers to Hōjō Tokimune.

²¹ Sadafusa, *Kanmon gyoki*, entries for 1416:11:20–26, 1417:2:30, in *Zoku gunsho ruijū hoi* (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1930), 3:49–53, 70. For this reference I am indebted to Ishikawa Rikizan, “Chūsei Sōtōshū kirikami no bunrui shiron,” pt. 9, *Komazawa daigaku Bukkyō gakubu kenkyū kiyō* 45 (1987): 169.

²² For a detailed diagram of the layout used for this type of elaborate funeral, see *Sho ekō shingishiki*, fasc. 4, in *T*, 81:661a–b.

Yoshihito's mortuary tablet, and finally his coffin. The senior Zen monks, walking directly behind the coffin, led a group of 100 Zen monks who chanted a mystical formula (*Amidaju*) dedicated to the Buddha Amida. Koten Shūin, a former abbot of one of the major Zen monasteries (Tenryūji), presented the final Zen sermon and lit the cremation fire. As the fire burned, senior Zen masters led the monks in a series of scripture-chanting ceremonies.

The funerals of Hōjō Tokimune and of Yoshihito demonstrate that early Japanese Zen monks made no distinction between funerals for an abbot within the monastery and funeral services for laymen from outside the monastery. Both received the same series of ceremonies, the same banners, offerings, and decorations. Zen leaders delivered the same stereotyped categories of Zen sermons for both. This is an important point. In China, Zen funeral rituals—like all the rituals found in the monastic codes—were intended only for ordained monks, *not* for laymen.²³ In China clear divisions separated clerics from laymen; they differed not only in dress and appearance but also in the types of ordinations and precepts they observed. In Japan this was not the case; the Japanese Tendai tradition of ordination by bodhisattva precepts alone ultimately allowed the same vows for monks and lay persons. Both Tokimune and Yoshihito had received such lay ordinations before their deaths. Tokimune's ordination was administered on his deathbed. Yoshihito's prior ordination is indicated by the fact that he had already received a special Buddhist name before his death.

For a Zen funeral to be performed, first the deceased must be ordained as a Zen monk. The popularization of Zen funerals and the popularization of lay ordinations, therefore, entailed one another. The funerals of Hōjō Tokimune and Yoshihito demonstrate the appeal of Zen funerary rites among the ruling elite, who could have just as easily employed ritual specialists of the traditional Buddhist establishments. Evidence for the popularization of Zen funerals and ordinations, however, comes not from among such social leaders, but from among the lower levels of society in the rural countryside, where access to rituals specialists was more limited. Dōgen, by founding his monastic community in the remote countryside, placed his successors in a position to become leaders in providing rural Japanese with the same Zen rituals that had appealed to Hōjō Tokimune and Yoshihito.

By the time of Jochū Tengin (1365–1440)—if not earlier—Sōtō Zen teachers had begun conducting public lay ordination ceremonies and

²³ Regarding the interaction between Chan (Japanese Zen) teachers and lay funeral services in China, see Levering (n. 2 above), pp. 181–206.

lay funerals on a regular basis.²⁴ Scanty records hardly mention early Sōtō ordination activities but show that mass ordination ceremonies in the second half of the fifteenth century could attract people from all segments of rural society: regionally powerful lords and peasants, merchants and blind men, river boatmen and servant women, some of whom resided in hamlets as far as 20 kilometers removed from the site of the ceremony.²⁵ Not surprisingly, recorded sayings (*goroku*) of Sōtō Zen masters during this period reveal a steady increase in the percentage of funerals conducted for lay men and women. Only approximately 17 percent of the funeral sermons by Jochū Tengin, for example, concerned clerics; the remainder were delivered for lay people. Half a century later, in the case of Sensō Esai (died 1475), clerical funerals had declined to 11 percent of the total (i.e., 37 out of 353). Moreover, as the numbers of lay funerals increased, more of the last rites were conducted for the types of lay people who had occupied the bottom rungs of the social ladder. The majority of funerals conducted by Shōdō Kōsei (1341–1508) were for peasant farmers, or for people of even lower status, such as itinerant entertainers.²⁶

The full social dimensions of this gradual popularization of Zen funerals among the peasant population of rural medieval Japan are not clear. Jacques Le Goff has suggested that changes in medieval European funerary rites, especially the popularization of church burial and greater attention to the care of the corpse, ultimately reflected wider social changes, which reveal a heightened concern with the fate of the

²⁴ For references to Jochū Tengin's lay ordination ceremonies, see Hirose Ryōkō, *Zenshū chihō tenkaishi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1988), p. 475. The popularization of lay ordinations before Jochū Tengin's time is suggested by an incident in which Bassui Tokushō (1327–87) criticized his Zen master, Kohō Kakumyō (1271–1361), for following the Sōtō Zen practice of attracting lay support by handing out ordination charts. Although today Kohō Kakumyō usually is not regarded as a Sōtō monk, in fact he was one of the prominent disciples of the Sōtō patriarch Keizan Jōkin (1264–1325); see *Bassui oshō gyōjitsu*, in *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, ed. Hanawa Hokinoichi and Hanawa Tadatomi (1822; reprint, Tokyo: Keizai Zasshisha, 1902), 9:638–39.

²⁵ Hirose Ryōkō, pp. 422–81.

²⁶ Social status can be deduced from references to the lay men's and women's Buddhist ordination titles, which reflected the rigid hierarchical distinctions of Japanese society. These titles often appear in conjunction with stereotyped references to the deceased that reveal his or her occupation. The starting point for this type of analysis is the *Sho ekō shingishiki*, a sixteenth-century guide to rituals used at rural Rinzaï Zen temples. This text explains in detail the proper titles to be used on mortuary tablets (*ihai*). More than thirty different titles are listed for every type of person, from an emperor, to yamabushi, to a blind man (*Sho ekō shingishiki*, fasc. 4, in *T*, 81:668a–b); see Matsui Shōten, "Chūsei kōki ni okeru Sōtō Zenryō no katsudō: Sōsō wo chūshin to shite," *In-dogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 16, no. 2 (March 1968): 236. For detailed statistical analyses of social status in Sōtō funeral sermons, see Hirose Ryōkō, pp. 384–90.

individual.²⁷ In Japan too little evidence remains to draw firm conclusions, but certainly Sōtō Zen funeral sermons contain unusually positive estimations of the value of the peasant life-style. In one sermon Sensō Esai, for example, cited the example of the Zen patriarch Baizhang Huaihai to assert that religious truth is found not in book learning but in working the land.²⁸ In another funeral sermon Shōdō Kōsei praised agricultural labor as the true cultivation of unconditioned virtue.²⁹ Clearly, in both Japan and Europe, access to medieval monastic funerals provided lay men and women with new avenues to the spiritual promise of salvation.³⁰ This promise, naturally, was addressed to the living, who thereby found new meaning in life and new economic ties to their religious institutions.³¹

But it can be questioned whether the larger implications of lay access to monastic funerary rites shared more than surface similarities in medieval Europe and Japanese Zen. In western European monasteries the most common form of lay access to monastic funerals was by obtaining admission to a holy order *ad succurrendum* (i.e., shortly before death). Someone in grave danger of death who had rendered prior service (or sufficient donations) to a holy order could request a monk's habit so as to die in a state of grace.³² In this way, the lay person could obtain medical care in the monastic infirmary, spiritual assistance in facing death, and assurance of the brethren's prayers to ease passage in the hereafter. In this process the individual's own initiative and religious conviction was crucial. In the case of Sōtō Zen ordination ceremonies and funerals, however, the Zen master played the key role, while lay men and women were mainly passive participants. Public ordination ceremonies were group affairs, at which whole households, servants, and collateral families accompanied a village leader or family

²⁷ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 233–34.

²⁸ Sensō Esai, *Sensō Zenji goroku*, fasc. 2, in *Sōtōshū zensho* (hereafter cited as *SZ*; 1929–35; rev. ed., Tokyo: Sōtōshū Shūmūchō, 1970–73), vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:327b. A well-known story states that, when concerned disciples deprived the elderly Baizhang Huaihai of his hoe, he refused to eat until they allowed him to work in the fields again.

²⁹ Shōdō Kōsei, *Entsū Shōdō Zenji goroku*, fasc. 3, in *SZ*, vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:518a.

³⁰ For an insightful discussion of the roles of funeral rituals at one medieval religious center, see Sharon Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 141, 219.

³¹ Speaking of English monasteries, Susan Wood has noted: "To be all buried in one place was a concrete expression of family solidarity; and knowing that the monastery which cared for their ancestors' souls also housed their bones, the living patron and his family would be readier to care for and endow it"; see her *English Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Thirteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 131.

³² This practice is discussed in detail in Joseph H. Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry into Religious Life from 1000 to 1260: A Social, Economic and Legal Study* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), pp. 26–36.

elder. The essential passivity of the lay participants is nowhere more evident than in the fact that Zen ordinations could be, and most often were, conducted posthumously. Rather than attempting to die in a state of spiritual conversion, as in the European *ad succurrendum* process, Japanese lay men and women were dependent on the Zen master to effect their spiritual transformation in their stead after death. In order to understand how this transformation could be effected, and the doctrinal basis of posthumous ordinations, it will be necessary to review briefly the Buddhist precepts used in Japanese Zen Buddhism.

BODHISATTVA ORDINATIONS IN JAPANESE ZEN

Dōgen regarded the precepts as a fundamental part of the transmission of Zen. Nonetheless, Dōgen rejected the Buddhist precepts of his Chinese master Rujing in favor of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts used in Japan. Dōgen labeled the Buddhist precepts observed by Chinese Zen monks as being “Hīnayāna,” a pejorative term. According to Dōgen, observing the Hīnayāna precepts would entail breaking the bodhisattva precepts.³³ Dōgen argued that precepts common to both groups, such as the standard Buddhist vow not to take life, actually differ as much as heaven and earth.³⁴ Dōgen’s assertion implies that nearly identical words must conceal completely different inner meanings. Normally when someone undergoes a Buddhist ordination, as each precept is read, he or she is asked three times whether or not he or she vows to observe the precept and embody it in all daily activities. The person being ordained must answer in the affirmative all three times for each precept. During an ordination conducted according to either group of precepts, the precept master would ask an identical question, roughly: “Do you vow to refrain from all killing?” The question naturally arises, therefore, How can there be such a great difference between these two types of precepts?

Dōgen did not explain this point, but Kyōgō, one of his disciples, did.³⁵ According to Kyōgō, religious insight, not literal readings, must determine the correct interpretation of each precept.³⁶ Kyōgō argued in traditional Japanese Tendai fashion that the bodhisattva precepts are not mere precepts but actually embody the essence of the Buddha. Kyōgō asserts that in contrast to the Hīnayāna precepts, which just control our karmic (*urō*) actions, the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts

³³ Dōgen, *Shōbō genzō*, “Shoaku mokusa” and “Sanjūshichi bodai bunpō” chaps., in *DZZ*, 1:280, 517.

³⁴ Dōgen, *Shōbō genzō*, “Sanjūshichi bodai bunpō” chap., in *DZZ*, 1:517.

³⁵ Kyōgō, *Bonmōkyō ryakushō* (i.e., a commentary on the *Busso shōden bosatsukai kyōju kaimon*), in *Eihei shōbō genzō shūsho taisei* (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1974–82), 14:482–632.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14:520.

describe Buddha nature (i.e., reality) itself. The Mahāyāna precept “not to kill” should be interpreted not as a vow against killing, but as a realization of living enlightenment that clears away the “dead,” static entities of our illusions.³⁷ This realization embodied in the precepts allowed early Sōtō Zen masters to imply that ordination with the precepts is equivalent to the attainment of Buddhahood itself.³⁸ Certainly one who attains enlightenment would fully express the spirit of the precepts in all activities. Yet within 150 years of Dōgen’s death, Sōtō teachers had begun to reverse this equation. Chiō Eishū (1371–1426), for example, stated that “The Buddha’s precepts are the most important affair of our sect. Since antiquity they have been transmitted from Buddha to patriarch down to me. When sentient beings arouse their religious aspirations and receive the [bodhisattva] precepts, then they attain the same level of great enlightenment as the Buddhas.”³⁹ Regardless of one’s subsequent conduct, the power of the precepts and the Buddhahood they represent can never be lost.⁴⁰ The ordination ceremony itself is all-important. Even someone who cannot fathom the logic of Zen enlightenment can attain salvation merely by relying on the power of the precepts.

POSTHUMOUS ORDINATIONS

Medieval Sōtō monks popularized funerals among the common people of rural areas. The elaborate style of funeral suitable for an abbot was simplified to reduce their expense. However, the promise of salvation implicit in the Zen funeral rites became more strongly stressed. The lay funeral ceremonies would begin inside the residence of the deceased, where the surviving household members who sponsored the funeral services could observe many of the special rituals performed to ensure the salvation of the deceased, the most important of which would be the posthumous ordination. For this ritual, Sōtō monks would consecrate the area next to the deceased as a small chapel (*dōjō*) and set up a chair and a table with flowers, incense burners, lanterns, and a vessel for sanctified water to be used for ritual anointment and ablution of the corpse. All the ordination procedures would be performed just as if the precepts were being administered to a living person, except for the verses chanted. For a posthumous ordination, the precept administrator and his assistant would chant a special verse that proclaims the nonexistence of an individual

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14:487–89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14:590–91. Also cf. *ibid.*, 14:485, 490, 509, 522, 530–31, 537, 541–42, 567, 596, and *Fanwangjing* (Japanese *Bonmōkyō*), fasc. 2, in *T*, 24:1004a, lines 19–21; and Dōgen, *Busso shōden bosatsukai sahō*, in *DZZ*, 2:269.

³⁹ *Nihon Tōjō rentōroku*, fasc. 5, in *SZ*, vol. 16, *Shiden*, 1:335b.

⁴⁰ *Baisan oshō kaihōron*, attributed to Baisan Monpon (died 1417), in *SZ*, vol. 3, *Zenkai*, p. 1a; and Dōgen, *Busso shōden bosatsukai sahō*, in *DZZ*, 2:269.

self. In a typical Zen paradox, it is this nonexistent individual who makes nonexistent vows to observe the precepts. As if addressing a living being the precept administrator would ask the deceased three times for each precept whether he or she intended to observe the Buddhist teaching. The corpse, of course, would offer no reply.

Zen religious symbols further emphasized the power of the ordinations. The Sōtō Zen master would individually anoint each participant with sanctified water (*shasui*).⁴¹ In this ritual, a special wand tipped with pine needles is dipped in sanctified water and then waved over the head of the deceased in order to demonstrate that the physical bond between the recipient, the Zen master, and the Buddha is complete. More important, at the end of the ceremony the deceased would be presented with a Buddhist bowl, a Buddhist robe, and a special Zen lineage chart (*kechimyaku*).⁴² This chart would list the names of all the Zen patriarchs, beginning with the Buddha himself and continuing through the famous masters of China, who have transmitted the precepts down to the present Sōtō teacher and through him to the laymen. A new Buddhist name would be used instead of the deceased's secular name. That new religious name would be directly linked to the Buddha by a red line that signified the layman's new Zen "blood lineage." Sōtō monks taught that this chart was ultimate proof of one's own unity with the Buddha.⁴³ They asserted that Zen monks alone could endow laymen with such a direct link to the Buddha because only they received the secret, mind-to-mind transmission initiated by the Buddha. Such a tangible guarantee of salvation had great appeal. The chart was viewed as a special talisman, handled according to strict taboos. From this point, the funeral rites for the deceased would be performed as if he or she had been an actual monk or nun. The corpse's head would be shaved, and the body would be washed and dressed in the deceased's new Buddhist robe.⁴⁴ When placing the corpse in the coffin, the monks would also place the *kechimyaku* alongside the body.

Posthumous ordinations in order to allow Buddhist funeral rites for laymen is a Japanese innovation. Chinese Buddhist scripture contains no provisions for this practice. The scripture containing the bodhisattva

⁴¹ See Dōgen, *Busso shōden bosatsukai sahō*, in *DZZ*, 2:264; and Sugimoto Shunryū, *Zōtei Tōjō shitsunai kirikami narabi ni sanwa no kenkyū* (1938; rev. ed., Tokyo: Sōtōshū Shūmichō, 1982), pp. 164–69.

⁴² *Motsugo jukai no sahō*, transmitted 1567; and [*Sasō gishiki*:] *Motsugo jukai sahō*, Yōkōji initiation D, transmitted 1616 by Kyūgai Donryō; reprinted in Ishikawa Rikizan, "Chūsei Sōtōshū kirikami no bunrui shiron," pt. 2, *Komazawa daigaku Bukkyō gakubu ronshū* 14 (1983): 128–29.

⁴³ *Kechimyaku no san*, in *Bukke ichi daiji yawa*, reprinted in Ishikawa Rikizan, "Chūsei Sōtōshū kirikami," pt. 2, p. 144.

⁴⁴ Ishikawa Rikizan, "Chūsei Sōtōshū kirikami," pt. 9 (n. 21, above), pp. 173–77.

precepts, the *Bonmōkyō*, states that the Buddhist precepts should be administered to everyone and to every type of being, from heavenly spirits to lowly beasts. Yet even this liberal scripture limits ordinations to those who can understand the questions of the precept administrator.⁴⁵ A corpse, however, can offer no indication that it hears and understands the questions of the precept administrator. The silence of the corpse presented medieval Sōtō monks with a *kōan*—a Zen problem to be resolved through Zen insight. In resolving this *kōan*, medieval Sōtō monks reinterpreted silence as the ultimate affirmative response, the proper Zen expression of the ineffable. For example, one secret *kōan* initiation document (*kirikami*) includes the following questions and answers:

How can one posthumously become a monk?

Answer: Neither saying “No” nor “Yes.”

A phrase?

No self appearance;

No human appearance.

Explain [its meaning].

Answer: When [something has] absolutely no appearance, it can become anything.

Teacher: But why does it become a monk?

Answer: Not saying “No” and “Yes” is truly becoming a monk.

A phrase?

Answer: The sage and the ordinary know for themselves [who they are].⁴⁶

In a similar vein, another *kirikami* that was presented to the deceased during posthumous ordinations states that not making an outward show of cultivating the precepts while inwardly not clinging to false views truly is to be a monk.⁴⁷ These texts assert that the dead are ideal Zen monks simply because they have left behind the bounds of worldly distinctions. Yet on a deeper level, in typical Zen fashion, these *kōan* texts force the Zen monks administering precepts to confront their own mortality. Zen tradition has especially emphasized the cultivation of a fearless tranquility in the face of death, even to the extent that one genre of Zen literature consists of poems composed just before dying. One medieval author, Mujū Dōgyō (1226–1312), asserted that Zen monks were especially impressive in facing death because they routinely meditated as if they would soon die. According to Mujū, monks

⁴⁵ *Fanwangjing*, fasc. 2, in *T*, 24:1004b.

⁴⁶ *Motsugo sasō no san*, in *Bukke ichi daiji yawa*, reprinted in Ishikawa Rikizan, “Chūsei Sōtōshū kirikami,” pt. 2, p. 148.

⁴⁷ *Busso shōden hōsan no daiji*, copied 1631 by Kyūgai Donryō, reprinted in Ishikawa Rikizan, “Chūsei Sōtōshū kirikami,” pt. 9, pp. 175–76.

of other Buddhist schools could not compare to Zen monks in their mastery of death.⁴⁸ Possibly the remarkable popularity of Zen funerals among laymen resulted not only from the inherent grandeur of the ceremonies developed in Chinese Zen monasteries but also from the ability of the Japanese Zen monks to impress laymen with their own tranquility in the face of death.⁴⁹ It would have been this ability that confirmed the promise of salvation inherent in the final segment of the Sōtō Zen funerals, namely, the funeral sermons preached by the Zen masters.

FUNERAL SERMONS IN MEDIEVAL SŌTŌ

Medieval Sōtō funeral sermons followed a fairly standard form. Usually they are extremely brief and employ cliché quotations from Zen *kōan* texts. The successful performance of the Zen funeral, therefore, depended on the Sōtō monks' own mastery of Zen *kōan* language and its stereotyped questions and answers. Usually, this question-and-answer sequence would proceed in a four-part procession: an introduction that provided an appropriate context, a leading question, a significant pause, which was often marked in the text by the teacher's signaling with his torch (e.g., by drawing a circle of fire in the air, by lighting the cremation fire, or by throwing the torch through the air), and a concluding couplet or statement by the teacher that indicated the Zen approach to the resolution of the question. For example:

On drawing a large circle [in the air] with the torch, [the teacher] said: The very depth of great enlightenment! The perfect illumination of great wisdom! Dharmas arise from non-being. The Way leads from the treacherous peaks to the level plain. The falling [cherry] blossoms and the singing birds: Every spot is presently complete (*genjō*). At this very moment, what words would surmise this finish?

A long pause.

The fields burn without extinguishing. The spring winds blow and already there is life.⁵⁰

In this case, the Zen master waves his torch like a magic wand, drawing a large circle in the air. This circle is the Zen symbol of enlightenment and of ultimate emptiness. Looking out over the fields, the Zen master sees all the signs of springtime: trees in bloom, the return of the songbirds, and burning of the fields in preparation for a new season's

⁴⁸ Mujū Dogyō, *Shasekishū*, ed. Watanabe Tsunaya, *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei* 85 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1977), pp. 451–52.

⁴⁹ Ishikawa Rikizan, "Chūsei Sōtōshū kirikami," p. 8, *Komazawa Bukkyō gakubu ronshū* 17 (1986): 179–83, 191–92, and "Zen no sōsō" (n. 15 above), pp. 144–46.

⁵⁰ Fusai Zenkyū, *Fusai Zenji goroku*, fasc. 2, in *SZ*, vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:156b.

planting. The Zen master does not eulogize the deceased. Instead, he directly confronts the problem of how the living must face death. His answer is just a religious platitude: In the springtime, the season of renewal, the death of the layman, like the withering of the previous winter, is seen as but one part of the greater cycle of life. Yet, the fact that the sermon accompanied the burning cremation fire would have rendered Zen master's remarks especially dramatic. The physical acts of lighting the fire and waving the torch through the air would symbolize the ability of the Zen master to confront death, while the reference to the burning corpse and his concluding affirmation of life would reinforce the image of spiritual salvation.

Numerous sermons contain vivid references to the burning flames of the cremation fire, forcing the audience to confront the finality of death.⁵¹ Yet the rhetoric of Zen demands that sermons simultaneously conclude with an assertion of religious tranquility in which death cannot disturb, as in the following:

The cages of life and death are but phantom relations. When these phantom relations perish, suddenly [one] returns to the source. One morning: wind and moon. One morning: perishing. An eternity of long emptiness; an eternity of solidity. The late “name,” aware of the great matter of Life and Death, took refuge in the Great Ascetic [i.e., the Buddha], converged on the place beyond knowledge [i.e., enlightenment], and marched through the gateway to perfect nirvāṇa.

Pause.

“Marching through” indicates what?

Throwing down the torch:

Where the red fire burns through the body, there sprouts a lotus, blossoming within the flames.⁵²

The “lotus within the flames” (*kari ren*) is just one of the many stereotyped Zen *kōan*-like expressions used in Sōtō funeral sermons to indicate the ultimate conquering of death. In other sermons the cremation might be compared to a mud cow entering the ocean (*deigyū nyūkai*; i.e., the dissolving of all dualistic distinctions) or to a wooden horse

⁵¹ For example, Kishi Iban (1404–68), *Kishi Iban Zenji goroku geshū*; Sensō Esai, *Sensō Zenji goroku*; Don'ei Eō (1424–1504), *Don'ei Zenji goroku*; and Shōdō Kōsei, *Shōdō Zenji goroku*; in *SZ*, vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:237b, 238a, 243a–247a, 249b, 250a, 252a, 253b, 254a–b, 255b, 258a, 263b, 314a, 319b, 323a, 328b, 335a, 349b, 353b, 354b, 361a, 362a–b, 363a, 364a, 381a, 382a, 384a–b, 385a, 495a, 498b, 499a–b, 503a, 505b, 506b, 510a–b, 511a–b, 513b, 516a, 569b.

⁵² Shōdō Kōsei, *Entsū Shōdō Zenji goroku*, fasc. 5, in *SZ*, vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:513a–b. The word for “name” in the text indicates where the deceased person's Buddhist title normally would be inserted. A particular name was not recorded since this sermon was meant to be used for a variety of different funeral services.

dancing in a fire (*mokuba kachū*; i.e., false delusions being destroyed without a trace).⁵³

The transcendence of death described in these assertions is predicated on the implied assertion that the deceased had attained Buddhahood (i.e., salvation) through the performance of the Zen funeral service. Unlike traditional Japanese funerary rites, which had focused on the removal of the pollution of death from the deceased's household, the Zen ceremonies emphasized the positive function of the funeral for the spiritual benefit of the deceased. The precept ordination ceremonies and last rites reinforced one another to offer a new degree of spiritual assurance that previously had been unavailable to average Japanese.

The paradoxical Zen affirmation of life in sight of the burning corpse, however, could also have helped confirm the non-Buddhist, yet popular, Japanese notion that the dead continue to exist within this world.⁵⁴ Many Sōtō funeral sermons assert that the dead neither ascend to heaven (*tendō*) nor fall into hell (*jigoku*), a statement that could be construed to agree with the traditional Japanese belief that deceased ancestors remain in a nebulous proximity to their descendants.⁵⁵ While there is no evidence that Sōtō teachers had encouraged popular belief in a soul, neither did they discourage it. To many laymen, no doubt, the salvation described in Sōtō funeral sermons would have meant only the promise that their loved one had been freed from the torments that follow death. We know, for example, that many of the laymen who witnessed the Zen funeral of Prince Yoshihito (described above) believed that the cremation fires had liberated his spirit (*tamashii*) from his body.⁵⁶ The following example illustrates how a Sōtō funeral sermon based on the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness can seem to affirm our human attachment to the world:

Genjō kōan is the great difficulty. Right now, try to perceive what is in front of your eyes. Look! The dangling flower is opening—the lotus within the flames. . . . [The cycle of] birth-death and nirvāṇa are like last night's dreams.

⁵³ For example, Kishi Iban, *Kishi Iban Zenji goroku geshū*; and Sensō Esai, *Sensō Zenji goroku*, in *SZ*, vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:236a, 242–45, 248a, 251b, 255b, 260a, 261b, 315b, 339a, 341b, 348a, 353b.

⁵⁴ Regarding the relationship between Buddhist thought and Japanese belief in an afterlife, see Takeda Chōshū, *Sosen sūhai: Minzoku to rekishi*, Sāra Sōsho 8 (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1957), pp. 240–44.

⁵⁵ For examples of this assertion, see Kishi Iban, *Kishi Iban Zenji goroku geshū*; and Sensō Esai, *Sensō Zenji goroku*, in *SZ*, vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:236b, 243a, 246a, 248a, 343b, 348b. Japanese conceptions of where the departed reside are discussed in Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 63–68.

⁵⁶ *Kanmon gyoki*, entry for 1416:11:24, in *Zoku gunsho ruijū hoi* (n. 21 above), 3:52b.

Enlightenment and affliction are as empty as the billowing smoke. At this very moment, the grand sister sheds her tainted form. Ultimately, to where does she travel?

Throwing down the torch:

The origin of lakes and streams lies in the ocean. The moon sets but does not leave the sky.⁵⁷

Laymen probably could not have understood all the religious imagery in this Zen funeral sermon. But the message of spiritual assurance would have been clear enough. The burning corpse is the flower of enlightenment. The dead sister has transcended this tainted world of life and death. Surely, she has found salvation.

Zen funerals must be seen as combining two approaches to Sōtō Zen. For laymen these ceremonies offered tangible assurance of salvation in a manner that retained a strong sectarian “Zen” identity but which demanded no Zen training. For the Zen monks, however, just the opposite was true. Only rigorous meditation practiced inside the monastery wall served to ensure the efficacy of the rituals that the Zen monks performed. Only extensive internalization of the Zen questions and answers presented in *kōan* texts granted monks fluency in the symbolism of the rituals. The enlightenment attained by Zen monks in their meditation practice would be transferred to laymen first through the posthumous ordinations. The layman’s salvation then would be confirmed by the Zen master’s funeral sermon, which displays his spiritual power and his mastery of the Zen *kōan* discourse. The art of Sōtō Zen funerals, therefore, represents more than just a personal aesthetic expression. It is a dramatic performance that enabled laymen to participate in the Zen master’s enlightenment, not by forcing laymen to share in a monastic experience of Zen, but by cloaking the layman’s human experience in the robe of Zen enlightenment. This ritual art of transformation lies at the heart of the development of the lay-centered Zen tradition found in modern Japan.

University of California, Los Angeles

⁵⁷ Kishi Iban, *Kishi Iban Zenji goroku geshū*, in *SZ*, vol. 5, *Goroku*, 1:256b.