

## CONTEMPORARY BUDDHIST PRIESTS AND CLERGY

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Zen monks absorbed in deep *zazen* 座禪 meditation. Family fathers in priest robes next to their wives and children or with their colleagues in annual temple ceremonies. Part-time ascetics on spiritual pilgrimage in remote mountains, 'Mercedes priests' enjoying prestige and the fruits of tourist temples and funeral industry. Tonsured monks on periodic almsbegging in front of humbly bowing *danka* 檀家 members. Wives of priests serving tea and culture to the local community. Renunciate nuns living an isolated and quiet existence. These images of Japanese Buddhist priests identify them as individuals and yet they share many roles, interests, images and functions, the differences of which depend on sects and institutions. This article introduces aspects of the ideal and living realities of the contemporary Japanese Buddhist priest and clergy. Though mainly based on research on the Rinzai Zen branch Myōshinji 妙心寺, it also attempts to make generalizations, reflecting priesthood beyond sectarian divisions (Borup 2008).

### *What is a Buddhist Priest? Terminology and Typology*

Generally, a *priest* is understood to be a person with a certain authority within a religious organization, being part of an overall group of specialists with religious authority and functions, the *clergy*. Both words are of western (Greek) and Christian origin, and apart from the challenges of transplanting such concepts from one linguistic and cultural sphere to another, it is difficult to delimit a Japanese concept to comprise the Buddhist priest as an occupational group. The Agency of Cultural Affairs collects statistical data on religions in Japan and characterizes the clergy this way: "For the most part it refers to people who belong to a particular religious organization and devote themselves full time to its activities" (1989: 235). However, the Agency acknowledges the fact that religious organizations have their own set of criteria for concepts of 'priest' or 'clergy'. The terminology of the religious individuals and institutions has also changed throughout history, and contemporary terms suggesting the variety of institutional roles

and statuses (such as *jūshoku* 住職, *jizoku* 寺族, *kanchō* 管長, *rōshi* 老師, *danka*, *shintō* 信徒, and *montō* 門徒) were not in use in medieval Japan and thus reflect both the conceptual and the institutional development of Buddhist history.

Methods of counting the clergy differ from sect to sect and are seldom precisely defined. Traditional Buddhist groups usually use and distinguish between the generic concepts for teacher, priest and clergy, namely *kyōshi* 教師, *jūshoku*, and *sōryo* 僧侶. An official and juridical terminology as defined by the Agency of Cultural Affairs uses *kyōshi* to designate the ‘religious instructor’ as a person qualified within a religious organization (or ‘juridical person’, *hōjin* 法人) to teach. *Kyōshi* is also part of individual ranking systems in Buddhist sects. It thus designates not only an either/or status, but also a specific rank in a hierarchical grading system, which gives certain status and symbolic capital in the clergy and the institution. Using such a yardstick to measure statistics of the Japanese Buddhist clergy would leave us with 281,054 of such Buddhist religious instructors, half of which are women and less than 150 are of foreign origin (Bunkachō 2009). Such figures comprise those having been qualified to teach but not, for instance, those having been ordained or those employed as priests without such teaching qualifications.

*Jūshoku* is the term most often used to describe the priest, a title and function being part of the overall, generic term for clergy, *sōryo* (or in its abbreviated form *sō* 僧) comprising both priests, monks, nuns, retired and assistant priests. Within some organisations *sōryo* also includes the wives of priests. It is a major characteristic of Japanese Buddhism in general, that temples and clergy are part of a family tradition. Most Japanese priests are married, and the majority have taken over their fathers’ office due to the widespread temple heritage system (*seshūsei* 世襲制), being the clerical parallel to the lay supporters’ *danka* (family patron) system, both underlining Buddhism in Japan as a family religion.

*Sōryo* in monastic Buddhist organizations is, however, also often interchangeable with the concept of monk (*shukke* 出家, see below), or distinguished from this category, understood as a member of the educated clergy, having semantic affinity to other concepts and titles of honor with the same connotations: *shūkyōsha* 宗教者 (religious specialist), *bukkyōsha* 仏教者 (Buddhist priest), *oshō* 和尚 (virtuous monk), or to underline the institutional affiliation, *zensō* 禅僧 (Zen monk/priest). Thus for instance, within the Rinzai Zen Buddhist Myōshinji branch of the Rinzai Zen sect, there are approximately 7,000 *sōryo*, 3,300 of which are religious teachers

(*kyōshi*), and 2,500 full-time *jūshoku*.<sup>1</sup> In the largest Buddhist group registered with the Ministry of Education as a ‘comprehensive religious juridical person’, Rishshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, there are no less than 83,184 religious teachers (75% of whom are women) (Bunkachō 2009: 75).

Different terms for religious leaders, masters, clergy, or specialists furthermore depend on the sect—and in a broader sense—the type of Buddhism. New religions (*shin shūkyō* 新宗教) and new religious groups (*shin shin shūkyō* 新々宗教) have equivalent but also different terminology to describe their religious specialists and religious agents, the rationale of which is also to distinguish themselves from established (*kisei* 既成), traditional (*dentō* 伝統) or ‘Temple Buddhism’ (Covell 2005). Thus for instance, apart from being a generic and honorific term, *sensei* 先生 is often used among new religions to underline status as non-clerical and non-monastic Buddhism. The largest of these groups (with the status of ‘independent religious juridical person’), Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, probably has up to one and a half million teachers (Agency for Cultural Affairs 1989 [1972]: 236), since all having completed their curriculum have the right to use this title. Neither Rishshō Kōseikai nor Sōka Gakkai have clergy and temples since they define themselves as lay Buddhism—though mostly classified by others as a new religious movements.

To get an idea of such typological distinction, it might be helpful to approach the topic through some (again, Western-derived) phenomenological parallels. Max Weber (later modified by Pierre Bourdieu) distinguished between three types of religious specialists—the priest, the prophet and the magician—representing different positions in the religious landscape. In this scenario, the priest is the epitome of a person acting within and by the office of institutionalized religion, to which the prophet, coming from within or outside the religion with his or her promises of new times, is a rival. The magician, being the spiritual joker from the folk religious universe ‘beneath’ the great traditions and institutions, is in opposition to both. While the magician and the prophet in the Japanese context may be embodied structurally in folk religious shamans (magician) and the new (new) religious leaders (prophets), both of whom may have acquired personal charisma and/or status from being outside the dominant system, the priest is typically connected with

<sup>1</sup> These figures are based on written and oral information from the Myōshinji main office in Kyoto.

established religions and traditional Buddhist institutions. He is thus part of 'Temple Buddhism', or perhaps even more precisely, 'clergy Buddhism'. Clergy Buddhism is thus a generic concept comprising those established Buddhist groups having well defined clerical offices in hierarchical religious institutions.

In traditional Japanese clergy Buddhism, two other important types encapsulate historical and doctrinal differentiations: Buddhists sects that base at least some of their institutional identity on monks and a monastic system (the epitome of which are Zen, Tendai, Shingon sects) and those who do not (the epitome of which are the Jōdo and Jōdo Shin sects). While the latter in many ways has clerical ideals parallel to Protestant Christianity, the former in one sense idealizes the monk as a 'virtuoso', who has authority because of personal achievements and insights from monastic training and yet (as opposed to the prophet and magician) is 'domesticated' into the institutionalized system of a Buddhist clergy.<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, such types and linguistic differentiation are themselves Weberian ideal types and in reality they overlap. Buddhist clergy (still) do participate in folk religious 'magic'. Austere practices of Tendai monks on Mt. Hiei or the *yamabushi* 山伏 in northern Honshū mountains have throughout history been renowned for their magic powers and 'shamanistic' potentialities. Popular guidebooks write about sacred sites and austere Buddhist monks and priests from all kinds and sects, whose practice endows the temple with spiritual power "and thus makes prayers said there especially potent" (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 9). Even Jōdo Shinshū priests have been engaged in practicing something that in their traditional theology would be classified as heretic folk religiosity (such as spiritual healing, divining, selling amulets), but which none the less has been legitimized as postmodern 'true Shin belief' (ibid.: 94ff.). Priests might be 'prophetic' and in opposition to prescribed norms of the organization. Singular, charismatic persons in priestly robes with an interest and competence in challenging the religious organization can be as much in the grey zone of institutional belonging as the prophets of the sects. Despite the plasticity of the concept, the best linguistic and generic equivalent of the concept 'priest' in a Japanese Buddhist context is *jūshoku*, characterized here as the resident (head) priest of a temple (*tera* 寺, or *jiin* 寺院) with an ascribed religious role and function within a religious organization.

<sup>2</sup> See Silber 1995 on the Weberian concepts of virtuosity and charisma in relation to (Theravāda) Buddhism.

*Ideal Clerical Authority, Authenticity, and Family Terminology*

While it is relevant to record the horizontal differences between different Buddhist sects and clergy types, a more general vertical relationship and hierarchical distinction of agency has always been important in Buddhist history. Non-monastic groups such as Pure Lands sects distinguish between the clergy and laity (*zaike* 在家) or ‘householder’,<sup>3</sup> whereas the monastic Buddhist sects distinguish the latter from those ‘leaving home’, *shukke*, the equivalent to which is ‘monk’. While there are degrees of ‘being in the world’ and renunciation, the distinctive structure is ideally symbolized physically in the renunciate’s dress codes (the Buddhist robe,<sup>4</sup> tonsure), food codes (vegetarianism), dwelling place (temple, monastery), practice (meditation, rituals), doctrinal knowledge (wisdom and scholarly insight) and status (the monk and clergy being above the householder, internally being differentiated in a ranking system). Though modern-day realities have altered traditions and ideals, many sects still identifying themselves as renunciate (*shukke*) Buddhism uphold ideals of tradition, transmission and sacred kinship to legitimize the *raison d’être* of contemporary priests and clergy.

Zen Buddhist sects see themselves as the epitome of renunciate Buddhism. Although iconoclasm and negation of symbolic rank is often praised, symbols and rules of ‘face to face’ (*menju* 面授) and ‘mind to mind’ (*ishindenshin* 以心傳心) transmission remain important aspects of Zen authenticity ideals. They are described metaphorically as lighting a candle with a flame, or as water being carried and transmitted from one container to the other, and signal master-disciple lineages belonging to the sacred lineage of the Buddha and subsequent patriarchal Zen masters. The clerical tradition thus waits for patriarchs, but it is equally true that these are “patriarchs in search of a tradition” (Faure 1993: 12) having realized the truth to teach it or teaching the truth “because, having been socially defined as Chan masters, what they teach has the performative power of being the truth” (1991: 22). The sacred patriarchy is thus both, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz, a model *of* and a model *for* the institution and tradition. Each of the masters has the same attribute of being transmitter of the sacred blood lineage (*kechimyaku* 血脈), ‘blood’ being the

<sup>3</sup> Other concepts designating this status as lay include *zaizoku* 在俗 (layman), *taishū* 大衆 (general public), or simply *hisō* 非僧 (non-clergy).

<sup>4</sup> On the symbolism and ritual act of sewing Buddhist robes in order to gain merit (and thus underlining the authority of the priest), see Riggs 2004.

metaphor of both the dharma and the mind receiving it. The spiritual line of transmission is thus ascribed the same authority and authenticity as biological inheritance, guaranteeing orthodoxy and orthopraxy and embodying both the original Buddha/Buddhahood, the dharma, and the institution (*sangha*). Each figure has a particular quality and role in the Zen puzzle. Retrospectively it combines the units in a kaleidoscopic whole. This combination finds its ritual manifestation in temples and monasteries where lineages are chanted to identify past and present in a performative unity.

All Buddhisms claim a relationship to the ‘original’ Buddha/Buddhism, often considering the different Buddhist religions as alternative approaches to the same goal and origin. Zen lineages see themselves as branches of the same trunk, beginning at the same root. While institutional rhetoric and ideology have also claimed exclusiveness, uniqueness, and evolution, family terminology is and has been a major model for explaining and promoting intra- and inter-institutional belonging to such lineage (*kei* 系), transmission (*den* 傳), branch (*ha* 派), or stream (*ryū* 流). The patriarchs (*so* 祖, also ‘ancestor’ or ‘founder’) are the fathers, and their successors in the dharma (*hassu* 法嗣) are their heirs. In monastic life, the master is the father, the disciples his spiritual children, who themselves are dharma brothers, and all Buddhists are the children of Buddha.

This vertical Zen dharma lineage (*hōkei* 法系, or *hōmyaku* 法脈) is counterbalanced by a related kinship between temples (*hōrui* 法類), whose horizontal relationship is equivalent to the relations among the monks, and whose vertical relationship as branch temples to the main temple (*honzan* 本山) is equivalent to the monks’ relation to their master—a relationship further reflecting the social structures of kinship in Japanese society. The master is part of a large institution, as are the subtemples, and have several units below them (disciples and local temples belonging to the temple lineage). Both of them are the result of, and themselves generating, the lineage. The monks in the training halls have the same teacher, and the branch temples have the same mother-temple, and both monks and branch temples are on the same ‘level’ as part of the same dharma relation (*hōrui*). Just as the masters of different training halls share the same *hōrui* with other masters, so do subtemples which might be from different lineages (*hōkei*) within the main temple (*honzan*) share the same dharma relation. Dharma relations naturally can vary in intensity and significance. All priests know which temples they are affiliated with since recognition is necessary when applying for a new rank (*hōkai*), especially during significant rituals, the dharma related priests will assist and join

the celebrations. Vertical and horizontal hierarchical relations are often counterbalanced by ideals of family symbolism, an intimate relation not all individuals necessarily approve of. Some far away countryside temples might not feel closely related to either their lineage mother temple or the central mother temple complex.

Whereas intrasectarian relationships are guarded and honored, inter-sectarian and interreligious relationships are usually also kept to at least a polite level. For example in family terminology and from a Myōshinji perspective, Myōshinji priests are considered to be close brothers (*hōru* related brothers being even closer), Rinzai priests are more distant brothers, priests from other Zen lineages are cousins, and priests from other Buddhist religions are related family. On the other hand, priests from most of the new (Buddhist) religions are usually considered (at best) remote or even fallen relatives whereas Sōka Gakkai and the Nichiren sects among the other traditional Buddhist sects often have an image of being the 'black sheep' of the family. Especially in the local communities, sectarian affiliation of the temples has less importance, with some priests co-operating in ritual contexts. Clerical ideals are sanctified through tradition and hagiography, but also shaped by contemporary social and religious contexts. Such is also the case with the clerical positions when complementarily seen as ritualized and institutionalized processes.

Whether institutional identification should be based on the vertical and spiritual model (*ninpō* 人法, 'personal transmission'; in which temple lineage affiliation is defined by the monastic master's lineage) or on the temple lineage model (*garanbō* 伽藍法; in which temple lineage determines personal affiliation) has resulted in some debate among Zen clerics, including accusations of heresy and broken transmission lines. However, temple affiliation based on biology (the son inherits his fathers temple and position) has become the most widespread in all clergy Buddhist groups since the Meiji period.

#### *Monk and Priest; Shukke as Returning Sōryo*

Leaving home to go to the monastery marks a real separation and beginning of an irreversible process of initiation into the role and life of monkhood and later clergy. Also in modern Japanese monastic Buddhism, it functions as an ideal type of being religious, semantically emphasized in dichotomous pairs: *shukke*, being a monk practicing religious austerities (*shugyōsō* 修行僧) as distinguished from *zaike*; *hizoku* 非俗 (non-lay)

distinguished from *hisō* 非僧 (non-clergy); the other world (*shusseken* 出世間) being distinguished from this world (*seken* 世間). *Shukke*, however, also denotes a symbolic *movement*, a wandering between two worlds, two family domains, as well as between two personal statuses and identities. Leaving is a liminal process, a sphere of being betwixt and between two worlds in which the novice-to-be is neither a person of the social world nor yet of the monastic world (Turner 1989 [1969]: 95). Earlier it was common for the novice aspirants to travel on foot (*angya* 行脚) from home to the monastery, making the *shukke* movement a pilgrimage. Leaving is also an event in the ritual process of leaving one domain, the life of the householder or temple family, in favor of another, its conceptual other-part, the monastery taking over the space of being the new home. Already in the ordination ceremony at an early age, the family symbolically says farewell to their son, transferring him to the new spiritual father, Buddha.

In modern Japanese Buddhism, monastic life is only a transitional and temporary affair. Though highly praised in all literature as the most perfect expression of true Buddhism—especially Zen, being a ‘*shukke* religion’ (Nishimura 1983)—monastic life functions only as an important phase in the ritual process, which ideally is itself an endless process of religious education. There is a certain prestige and respect in staying many years in the *sōdō* 僧堂, but most are only *shukke* monks for a few years—and in modern times it is even possible to stay only six months or even less. A Myōshinji survey showed that half of the responding priests had spent less than two years, and 10% not even one year in the *sōdō* (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 65). In practice the length of the stay is decided in agreement between the monk and his sponsor and/or father, who both have an interest in securing a proper monastic education for the young priest-to-be. Contrary to most Theravāda Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia, monastic life in modern Japanese monastic Buddhism is primarily, just like the pastoral seminars (*shuren*) of the non-monastic Jōdo and Jōdo Shin sects, a necessary step in the institutional process of becoming a priest, *jūshoku*, the ritualized events of which are celebrated and consecrated in large ceremonies.

Though the status and meaning of the monastery has changed significantly in modern times, the system of leaving home in order to come back is not only a result of historical change; both traditional Mahāyāna Buddhist sources as well as contemporary voices insist that the proper *shukke* must return to social life. The return, however, is ideally not a return to ‘basics’, but a return to life outside the monastery with a different mind, status, and social and institutional capacity. Before entering the



*sōdō*, most monks today have been to school and even graduated from a university, typically a Buddhist one, and—as opposed to most other Asian Buddhist monks—they are generally very well educated.<sup>5</sup> In the *sōdō* the monks learn the more ideal and ritual side of the life of a monk and priest. They are being spiritually, ritually, and institutionally educated, and when ‘returning to life’, the newly educated *sōryo* have ideally incorporated these aspects into their mind and body, ready to become priests capable of transferring *shukke* power into the *zaike* life.

Often a young *sōryo* will return to his father’s temple, functioning as assistant priest under his father’s guidance until the latter’s retirement. The temple inheritance system still being the standard in Japan affirms and continues the religious genealogy of the temple family, and the majority of those entering the monk’s training halls of a Buddhist monastery are from temple families and will take over the same temple in which they were raised. The returning *sōryo* has thus come full circle in his educational, ritual process. Pragmatic reasons for returning to the social world, however, are equally important. Eighty-eight percent of the priests from the Myōshinji sect are married. Though 72% of the priests and 69% of their wives think tonsure important for *sōryo*, only 50% in 1985 kept polished tonsure—46% of those not shaving their heads because they had a part-time job alongside being a priest (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 98, 223; Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 12, 19).

### *Clerical Offices*

There are only few alternative possibilities within the institution for those *sōryo* not becoming priests in local temples, each office and term dependent on the Buddhist sects and branches. The *shike* 師家 within the Zen Buddhist sect is the teacher (師) in the monastic household (家), somewhat equivalent to the senior monk *ajari* 阿闍梨 of the Tendai and Shingon sects. He is the ‘true’ *shukke* who has—ideally, but not necessarily—gone through all the *kōan* of the particular monastic *kōan*-system, and who stays permanently in monastic life leading the monastery and guiding the monks, thus also referred to as the ‘elder teacher in the monk’s hall’ (*sōdō*

<sup>5</sup> 58.7% of the Myōshinji priests have graduated from university (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 64), a number presumably increasing in the years to come; 23.5% had gone to school with Buddhist affiliation, and 30.9% were in a school with religious relations (*shūmon kankei*; *ibid.*: 65).

*rōshi* 僧堂老師). He has received the certificate of enlightenment (*inka shōmei* 印可証明) just as he himself can transmit this to his successor. Unless returning to lay life, or taking up a position as priest in a temple, a *shike* within the Myōshinji sect is not allowed to marry but must keep the strict rules of renouncement. As such he has the prestige and generally owns the respect of being a true Zen master, a living symbol of the Zen monastic tradition, the quintessence of Zen virtues ideally incarnating wisdom, spirituality, strict discipline, individuality, and yet gentle social personality. He is, in a certain sense, the main religious figure.

The *shike* office also qualifies him to be eligible as *kanchō*, chief abbot of the sect. The *kanchō* is the formal and institutional leader of each of the Buddhist sects (the ‘political’ representative being the administrative representative, the *shūmu sōchō* 宗務総長), and as such he is the highest priest and still has the status of “semi-government official” (Ikeda 1998: 17). He is in a position to appoint and dismiss the priests and to appoint the titles in the ranking system, and he promulgates and ratifies the rules and regulations of the sect. The abbot is the ritual main figure in larger ceremonies in the main temple, and he also represents the institution on his periodic visits to the local temples (*shinke*). Monks or priests ‘turning academic’ as ‘scholar monks’ (*gakusō* 学僧) is one way of using the capabilities earned in the religious career system. Scholastic-minded monks are part of all Buddhist societies, profiling the institution as a Great Tradition. Some scholar monks are also represented at the headquarters, or in the Buddhist universities as teachers and researchers. The position as missionary teacher (*fukyōshi* 布教師) is a separate office within the framework of the headquarters, mainly as a side position of the most common office within all Japanese Buddhist sects, the common priesthood (*sōseki* 僧籍, or *sōshoku* 僧職).

### *The Priest*

*Jūshoku* is the most widely known term for priest. He is qualified to achieve his title by educational efforts, comprising both secular and religious education. In monastic Buddhism he is required to undertake some years of monastic life and practice, although modern developments and the lack of priests have opened up achieving authorized certificates to become a priest through part-time religious training and education (Borup 2008: 59–60). The priest is also chosen and appointed by the old *jūshoku* of the temple, often his own father, because of the widespread Japanese inheri-

tance system through genealogical family. Having registered at the main offices of the sect, the national and the local government, he is legally considered a religious juridical person, the official caretaker of a religious body (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人).

A priest might have employed an assistant priest (*fuku jūshoku* 副住職). The position as an assistant priest is ideally only temporary, a stepping stone to the permanent office as priest. Most often the assistant priest is the son of the priest, and after returning from the monastery he will be a priest-in-training under his father's guidance. Both of them typically live in the same temple and often with their families, even after the son has taken over the official office and his retiring father has become a 'former priest' (*zen jūshoku* 先住職). When rural temples have no permanent priest and are uninhabited (*mujū jūin* 無住寺院), they can get assistance from a priest from another temple, who is thus also holding an additional position as priest (*kenmu jūshoku* 兼務住職), carrying out an additional office as assisting part-time priest. A *kenmu jūshoku* will typically be in charge of several temples, and often he is a permanent priest in a large, prestigious, and rich temple. Though the position as *kenmu jūshoku* can be a rather profitable business, the majority within the Myōshinji branch (76.2%; Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 129) earn less than a million yen per year by this side job. The empty temples might still have adherents, and thus sources of income, but no active community, and investment of time and energy is often moderate (see Covell this volume). Almost all (97.7%) *kenmu jūshoku* from Myōshinji are male (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 118).

As a social, religious, and private person the priest must live up to the expectations of the institution and the local society. The duties (*ninmu* 任務) of the *jūshoku* are listed in the 'essential points' (*shūkō* 宗綱) in the constitution of the Myōshinji branch:

The priest of the sect's temples and churches must serve the Buddha(s) and patriarchs, observe the rules of the sect, work for the propagation of the Buddha dharma [*buppō* 仏法], conduct religious services [*hōyō* 法要], devote himself to missionary education [*fukyō kyōka* 布教教化], work for the believers [*danshintō* 檀信徒] to take the refuges, keep the dignity of the clergy [*sōryo*], not scorn or look down upon society, always measure and improve his own nature [*shishitsu* 資質], work for the maintenance and prosperity of the sect [*honha* 本派], the main temple [*daihonzan* 大本山], the temple(s) [*jūin*] and church(es) [*kyōkai* 教会], and train and educate his children [*gakuto* 学徒] and wife [*jizoku*] (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 8–9).

A handbook describes “the mottos of the sect’s priests”:

He must take pride in the clergy [*sōryo*] and priest wives [*jizoku*] of the sect.

He must work hard in understanding the doctrines of the sect and investigating the essentials of the Rinzai sect.

He must live in harmony with the believers [*danshintō*] and correct his own life.

He must bring up his descendants.

He must work hard for the propagation of Zen (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1970: 167).

Another guidebook for Rinzai Zen priests lists three main missions, or duties (*shimei* 使命), for the priest to realize and manifest (see Kōno et al. 1995: 12–17): (1) He is a person with a special profession (*senmonteki shokugyōjin* 専門的職業人), but although he does receive respect as a somewhat honored person, he is not to think of himself as an isolated individual looking down on the world from above. (2) The priest should, however, not forget that the Rinzai sect defines itself as being a *shukkeshū* 出家宗, a religion for and of renouncers. This begins with the ordination and naturally reaches its utmost peak in the monastic period, continuing the rest of one’s life as a never-ending process of cultivation. (3) The last point is to make clear that the priest is the responsible administrator and representative of the temple, of which he is to take daily care.

But although his personal ‘*shukke* character’ is often idealized as a necessary requirement, it also seems that even without ‘inner qualifications’ a priest serves well and acquires his symbolic power as a ritual specialist. The priest is the practical and daily representative of the temple for which he must deal with anything from cleaning to taking care of financial affairs. He is identified with the temple and is often called ‘Mr. Temple’ (*oterasan* お寺さん) or ‘Mr. So-and-So Temple’ (*jisan* 寺さん). He reads, understands and controls the sacred texts to which only academics and the educated clergy have access, and in conducting the correct performances of rituals, his power of being an orthodox mediator to the other world makes him a living signifier of institutional power.

However, it is underlined again and again that this special profession is not to be an isolated, other-worldly existence and profession, but must be rooted in and encompassed by a this-worldly community and life. He should, in Weber’s terminology, remember that he is a priest, neither a prophet nor a magician. A priest must reject the attitude of being an arrogant and superior religious specialist (*shūkyōsha* 宗教者) feeling superior to the common people (Kōno et al. 1995: 207). Even a religious specialist

is also a seeker (*gudōsha* 求道者) on the Buddhist path, and as such on the same level as the lay adherents. The *sōdō* life must not be a permanent way of life, but must be applied to a social life (*shakai seikatsu* 社会生活; *ibid.*: 12).

This dilemma and dynamic paradox of being within and outside the social world has always been important in Buddhist history. Telling stories about the hardships of monastic life is a popular aspect of both dharma talks and books. In general, however, only a minority seems actually to be interested in the 'spiritual' capacities of the priest or in isolated individuals renouncing the social world and thus not repaying their part of the socioreligious exchange. The ideal priest is a *shukke* of mind and heart, but a social person with his body. He is a person having gone the Buddha way but who also guides and assists others in their religious lives. The ideal is to be what could be termed a 'social *shukke*', walking the thin line between being neither too 'religious' nor too 'secular', being both *shukke* and *zaike*, a monk living *in* the world with a 'homelessness of the heart' (see also Jaffe 2001).

A survey from the Sōtō sect saying that most (73%) believers (*danshintō* 檀信徒) are interested in having a married priest expresses well the social role of the priest and his family in especially small rural communities (Sōtōshū shūmuchō 1995: 93). Criteria such as age, family, children, and personality naturally play important roles in the images of the local priests, as does the extent to which they seem to be engaged in motivating the members toward religious or social activities. The social personality of the priest is very important for his 'success' in the reciprocal relationship with his surroundings. His personality might attract members to meditation or study groups, or he may join members of the parish in playing golf or singing *karaoke*. His popularity and status depend on many variables and factors and can be of an intellectual, social, or religious character, of an inherited or acquired competence.

The way priests identify themselves with their profession naturally depends on their personal, social, and institutional interests and relations. Some are deeply interested in practicing 'true' Buddhism, perhaps integrating the profession with secular professions, while others might consider the office as priest as just a job. In a Myōshinji survey (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 26), 89% of respondents were generally satisfied with being priests—half of them because of the close contacts to people and 41% because of enjoying the role of being religious specialists (*shūkyōsha*). Those unsatisfied with the clerical position (9%) gave as reasons lack of personal religious consciousness (46%), financial matters

(35%), lack of confidence in being a religious specialist (28%) and the ignorance of the believers (18%). The greatest worry (for the whole group of respondents) was missionary activities (*fukyō katsudō* 布教活動; 24%), finding a successor (20%), financial matters (10%), while only 2% listed 'believers' (*danshintō no koto* 檀信徒のこと; *ibid.*).

In another survey from 1996 on the theme of changes from ordination until present, a third of the 1,360 respondents answered that they had generally experienced the positive expectations they had in the beginning, 4% felt that reality had not lived up to their expectations (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2004: 53–74). Thirteen percent were unsatisfied in the beginning, but had learned to accept the conditions as 'fate' (*unmei* 運命), while a third were unsatisfied in the beginning but later had positive experiences. Four out of five, however, did feel pride in being religious persons (*shūkyōsha*) from the Zen sect (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgaku 2002: 98). These figures of course cover and overlap with other problems, and the fact that 69% have a licence to teach (at public schools etc.) suggests that the office of being a priest does not in itself bring absolute satisfaction (*ibid.*: 20).

The priest and his family live in and are representatives of the temple, but they do not own it themselves, and they are not alone in decision making. All changes in the temple—from painting and restoration to deciding the wages of the priest—are (ideally) to be discussed and decided by the priest and three lay representatives (*sōdai* 総代 or *sekinin yakuin* 責任役員), who are usually, but not necessarily, members of the sect. The priest has 40% and each of the lay representatives 20% of the votes in these decisions, and if for some reason the latter in unison have some interests in controlling temple policy, they can do so. Also, if a new priest is appointed to a temple, the community might feel 'their' temple to be taken away by a private 'owner', who might even be from a distant metropolitan city, and thus a 'stranger'.

A similar source of conflict is the relationship between the old priest and his assistant priest, the latter taking over the responsibilities and thus the power of the former. The priest decides himself when he wants to give over his position. He might promise the young assistant a period of three years of training before he can take over the office, but this period might in reality be extended for many more years, even until the old priest dies. This power play naturally can be a hard challenge for the priest-to-be, economically (he is not guaranteed any wages), psychologically (living in constant uncertainty), socially (probably with a family to share his own

situation) and institutionally (his career being in the hands of another). Such kinds of problems are most often related to situations in which an outsider acquires the position of assistant priest.

### *The Wife of a Priest and the Temple Family*

Marriage among the clergy was not officially accepted until early Meiji, but both Buddhist families as well as blood transmission from father to son was an old custom often accepted and legitimated in Buddhist Japan. Although today it is the norm rather than the exception that priests are married, women in Japanese Buddhism in general have been underprivileged because they are seen both as impure and as hindrances to male enlightenment. Especially in monastic Buddhism, they constitute an ambiguous role; not really being lay, not really being clergy, and especially within ideal monastic Buddhism, they are not really supposed to be there.

Though recognized as legitimate parts of the temple family by the lifting of the ban on clerical marriage (*saitai kaikin* 妻帯解禁) in 1872, being a priest's wife has long been problematic. The fact that the priest's wife and temple family were not officially recognized until 1919 and 1925 by the Jōdo and Jōdo Shin sects, and not until 1961 in the Rinzai constitution, indicates the difficulties and the struggles of the women in a rigid patriarchal system. In the Pure Land sects marriage has become a legitimate part of the social reality, and female priests (*bomori* 坊守) are accepted as part of the overall clerical and institutional family. In monastic Buddhism, even though only few Japanese today would prefer ascetic monks in the temples, the priests' wives still somehow have to adjust to former categorizations of temple women being taboo. Even today priests' wives are sometimes referred to as 'aunt' (*obasan* おばさん)—rather than the more common *okusan* 奥さん (wife)—emphasizing the institutional and social, rather than the marital, status of the wife. Female acquaintances of young unmarried priests have to be even more camouflaged in the terminology of biological or social relationships.

The word used for temple family is *jizoku*, defined in Rinzai Buddhism as "person(s) other than priest, assistant priest, retired priest, or retired assistant priest who is/are registered at the temple or in the organization" (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 306). The priest wife is termed *jitei fujin* 寺庭婦人 (temple wife), defined as "the spouse of a priest, an

assistant priest, a retired priest, or a retired assistant priest who is registered in the temple or church" (ibid.). Although never officially mentioned as the wife of a priest, *jizoku* is often identical to *jitei fujin*. Eighty-five percent of the priest wives in the Myōshinji temples are married to the priest, while 10% are married to the former priest (ibid.: 208). The majority (65%) are more than fifty years old, and 23.8% were themselves born in a temple (ibid.: 209).

The constitution of the Myōshinji branch defines the role of the temple wife and family as follows:<sup>6</sup>

... the *jizoku* and the *jitei fujin* must together with the priest work hard for the Buddha way, always protect the graves of the ancestors, worship the departed souls of the believers, work devotedly for the prosperity of the temple, and always strive to be a model for the believers (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 306).

The temple wife in many respects is locked into the traditional virtues of a mother and a wife, representing family values and social status quo. In a guidebook for Rinzai priests' wives—a supplement to the larger book for the priests—her duties, responsibilities, and identity are explained in a normative way (Kōno et al. 1995). Correct institutional *habitus* is seen to be a proper exchange for being a *jitei fujin*—an office carrying more than half of the adherents' trust on her shoulders, and an office that some would place above the position of an assistant priest. She is first of all the priest's wife, and therefore represents him, being his assistant and the 'person behind' him and the temple. While both Jōdo and Jōdo Shin are much more liberal and egalitarian, and the Tendai sect has even established special ordinations for *jitei fujin* (Covell 2005: 133ff.), in Rinzai Zen she cannot take over the position and official responsibilities of her husband if he dies or is out traveling. In such cases she has to apply to the headquarters for help in finding an assisting priest, if she does not have a son to take over. She has to identify herself with the atmosphere (*fun'iki* 雰囲気) of the temple, its peace and tranquility. According to the guidelines, she should avoid being dirty as well as being too bright, avoid wearing fashionable dress, and avoid using too conspicuous a lipstick. She should not speak too fast or one-sidedly nor too loud or too quietly, but with a gentle and obliging voice. The book also has chapters on styles

<sup>6</sup> On the roles and ideals within the Tendai sect, being very similar to the Zen sect, see Covell 2005: 109–39.



of walking, sitting, bowing, opening the slide doors and answering the phone, on styles of welcoming guests, arranging sitting positions, serving tea, and social conversation, on cooking devotional food (*shōjin ryōri* 精進料理), on cleaning, and on the general responsibility of the family's well-being.

That women and wives also want to live their lives as such and not merely as married to the temple, the institution and the community are also potentially troublesome domains with which many have to struggle. Priests' wives often have to give up their own career to live with their parents-in-law, and even have to regard their home as the (shared) property of the community, which is another argument of many young women for refraining from saying yes to temple life. Though 57.8% to some extent feel pride in being temple wives of a Zen temple (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōgakubu 2002: 222), several women would never dream of becoming a *jizoku*, "racking their brains for ways to apply the Buddha-dharma to the current situation" (Kumamoto 2004: 480). For many, it is a burden to live up to the expectations of the priest wife's quintessential *raison d'être*; producing and bringing up a boy as a future priest-to-be.

### *Temple Sons*

The heritage system is the most common way of transmitting and securing temple life in Buddhist Japan. The priest has to live according to the sayings "before being a parent for his children, he is a teacher for his disciples" and "before being a husband, he is a teacher" (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 59). The (eldest) temple son, on the other hand, is expected to be the successor inheriting his father's temple in the clerical generation shift (*sedai kōtai* 世代交代). A child in a temple within monastic Buddhism is sometimes called *kozō* 小僧 or *hinasō* 雛僧, a 'child monk' not yet registered in the institutional ranking system. A more common (and modern) inclusive term is *gakuto* 学徒. A *gakuto* is a *sōryo* who potentially is an assistant priest, and in practice the status is often used as designation for the temple son in general, the father often being the teacher and sponsor priest who also takes care of the ordination and the daily training of the boy.<sup>7</sup> In Myōshinji defined as "a person who

<sup>7</sup> According to a survey (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2004: 57) 53% had their own father and 45% had a person outside the family as teacher.

has received robe and bowl and a Buddhist name from his preceptor, having the rank below *shuzashoku* 首座職” (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Shūmu Honjō 1997: 264).

Securing this institutional succession based on biological bonds is one of the major problems for all temple families. Within the Tendai sect, 74% of male priests are from temple households (Covell 2005: 82), and an earlier Myōshinji survey showed that 53% had inherited their position, while 62% had successors and 35% had not. On the other hand, though most priests are worried about finding a successor (*kōkeisha* 後継者), preferably his own son, the latter survey also showed that 62% did not feel the heritage system to be positive (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 18). This paradox is often discussed, revealing both emotional sentiments and open critique of a system tasting too much of the diminishing *danka* (family patron) system, the conviction of the ideological truth of the latter perhaps being the excuse of practicing the former. Another survey showed that 32% of the priests would prefer their son enter a sect-oriented university (*shūmon daigaku* 宗門大学), while 38% would respect the child's own choice of education (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2004: 63).

Securing the transmission of the temple to a son is of utmost concern to the (duties of) priests' wives. If the son does not want to become a priest, the above-mentioned guidebook encourages her to tell him of the real qualities of the temple life as not only a place and profession for conducting funerals but as a sincere and important lifestyle involving happiness for both the family and the community (Kōno et al. 1995: 49). If there is no son in the family, an option could be to find an interested son-in-law to take over. In the same way as the son might feel a pressure of responsibility, so might the young girl in having to become a priest's wife for the sake of keeping the temple in the family. Especially for a prestigious temple, it is a problem if the son does not want to take over the temple, or if he does not spend the expected time in the training hall required from such a high-ranking temple. Though not voiced in public, it can be a point of criticism that the person in charge is not really qualified (“that guy is no *shukke*”). Most parents in the temple therefore take measures to educate and socialize the son into the temple life as well as in other educational institutions. Whereas the Pure Land sects and a few Sōtō temples have acknowledged the need and positive aspects of also daughters taking over temples, the Rinzai sect continues a traditional system in which becoming a nun is the only option for women to institutionally continue the temple lineage.

*Nuns*

Paula Arai is probably right when she finds an androcentrically inherent hierarchy implicit in the vocabulary distinguishing monks and nuns. The generic term for monastic people, *sō* 僧, is also the term for (male) monks, whereas the term for nun, *nisō* 尼僧, is derived from this, perhaps suggesting that “monks are the ‘real’ Buddhist Community and nuns are a sub-Buddhist Community” (Arai 1999: 14)—which is why, according to Arai, in female monastic vocabulary *sō* is translated monastic, *nisō* as female monastic, and *nansō* as male monastic (ibid.: 15). In Japanese reading the *ni* 尼 of *nisō* is read *ama*, simply meaning ‘nun’, in daily speech often adding a honorific *-san* to it.

Although the Meiji government in 1872 issued a law allowing priests—and in 1873 also nuns—to eat meat, get married, and have free choice of tonsure, in reality for a nun to marry and not be tonsured means a return to the secular world. Postwar Japanese Zen nuns have in some ways officially achieved equality, having the same ranking system as the male clergy. But apart from a few famous individuals, Buddhist nuns live a life in the shade of the patriarchal majority. Nuns generally have the image of being non-feminine, true opposites to the general female ideal in Japan where hair, makeup, female dress, and female behavior are some of the means to express gender.<sup>8</sup> This, however, also gives them the image of being strict followers of ‘true’ Buddhism. They live, contrary to their male partners, an ascetic life in which religious practice generally takes up more time than when living as parents in temple families. Sincere practice, however, is not always enough to follow a successful career. Though being qualified and interested in taking over her father’s temple, biological and social hierarchical orders automatically make the eldest son the new priest. Stories of priests-to-be not at all being interested in religious affairs, but who—true to tradition, their father’s wishes, or their own financial ambitions—end up taking over the management in spite of having a much more qualified sister, are not unheard of, even in contemporary Japan.

<sup>8</sup> Although the same to some extent is true for male priests, they do, however, have greater freedom to act in codes of behavior less strict than the codes of the nuns. The asexuality of the nuns of a former Rinzai (now independent) Zen temple in Kyoto is twice a year recognized and complemented during a memorial service for dolls, in which a *geiko* and two *maiko* 舞妓 perform as very feminine ‘living dolls’.

Not being married and having children, combined with the lack of monasteries and of possibilities of training new nuns, naturally results in the sincere problems of continuing the tradition. In a survey, 70% of the nuns said they had no successor, 93% of the respondents being fifty years and older (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 2002: 154). In a research report from the Kyōka Sentā of the Myōshinji branch of the Rinzaï sect, the problems of the lack of nuns were discussed, suggesting possible introduction of lay training courses (*ango-e*) for women and, acknowledging the implied lesser status of contemporary nuns of monastic Japanese Buddhism, devising more positive images (*imeiji appu* イメージアップ) of nuns and nun's life (ibid.: 157).

#### *Modern Challenges to the Buddhist Clergy*

When Shinran (1173–1263) married and described himself as neither monk nor lay (*hisō hizoku* 非僧非俗), he not only paved the way for a further step in non-monastic Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, but also expressed one way of solving the challenges of being an ideal priest and yet a real social person. The Pure Land and the True Pure Land schools today have abandoned the ideal of renunciate priesthood and, like other Buddhist sects, institutionalized the clergy as an office of educated and most often also married priests. Transgressing the boundaries of 'other worldliness' and 'this worldliness' in Mahāyāna thought has legitimized mixing the categories. Especially within Chan/Zen hagiography, both the enlightened layman (such as Vimalakīrti, Pang, D.T. Suzuki) and the master as non-virtuoso and ordinary (the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, Linji) or eccentric (Hanshan, Shide, Ikkyū) have expressed the overlap and deconstruction of religious classes and dogmas. These, however, have mostly been illustrating a 'rhetoric of immediacy' (Faure 1991). The real challenge towards the sharp division between *shukke* and *zaike*, between patriarchal clergy and lay Buddhism, was not seriously challenged until modernity.

In the wake of the Meiji restoration in 1868, the Japanese Buddhist priesthood underwent dramatic changes. Not only were tens of thousands of temples destroyed and Buddhist rituals (such as *obon* お盆) prohibited or turned into Shintō ones (such as funerals). In the name of modernity and with slogans such as "exterminate the Buddha and destroy Śākyamuni" (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈), priests became symbols of what was considered an old fashioned, superstitious and imported religion. Many were branded as heretics (especially from monastic Buddhist sects) and publicly ridiculed.

With the decriminalization in 1872 for priests to eat meat and marry, the status and idea of the temple as an institutional and social 'family' changed dramatically, giving way to a new (and now officially approved) institution based on the nuclear family structure bound together by biological and sexual relations. Other rules were later made to 'humanize' the clergy. They were ordered not to abandon their civil surname, permitted to let their hair grow and wear civil clothes, and were told to follow the same mourning procedures as ordinary citizens. Buddhist priests were classified as citizens (*kokumin* 国民) belonging to a household (*ie* 家) and incorporated into the registration (*koseki* 戸籍) system, thus considered on the same level as other citizens. Degradation of the clergy thus further leveled the distinctions between clergy and lay, being different only in degree and not in kind. Some gave up their professions, some turned into Shintō priests or saw clerical authority being transferred to charismatic leaders of new religious movements.

Many of those remaining in the traditional Buddhist clergy fought to change status in constructing a reformist New Buddhism (*shin bukkyō* 新仏教) with ideals of a clergy being both modern and original, rational and spiritual, enlightened and humanized, truly Japanese and somewhat international, religiously robust and yet 'this-worldly'. Such attempts of 'protestantizing' Buddhism were part of an overall process of modernizing Buddhism (most clearly expressed in Ceylon/Sri Lanka) and were the results of historical contexts and networks of individuals from both East and West (Borup 2004). What is most characteristic of these events, with Japan paralleling post-war history, is the lay orientation and individualization ideals. In Zen circles, people such as D.T. Suzuki and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu became this-worldly ascetic ideals of the true non-clerical lay Buddhist, mastering both scriptures and meditational experiences, being uncorrupted of what was seen as institutionalized and ritualized religion.

### *Contemporary Challenges to the Buddhist Clergy*

Though major themes (such as individualization, rationalization and humanization) of Buddhist modernity, in Japan as elsewhere, were mostly isolated among intellectuals and urban elites, lay Buddhism (*zaike bukkyō* 在家仏教) and the degradation of the clergy have remained challenges of contemporary Buddhism. When an institutional organ within the Myōshinji branch was established to write a small guidebook on general education, a "chapter on peace of mind for the lay members" (*zaike anjinshō* 在家安心章) was included, the title soon being changed to

“chapter on peace of mind for our sect” (*Shūmon anjinshō* 宗門安心章). The people behind the project simply found the concept of *zaike* (‘lay’) too narrow, and the distinction between *shukke* and *zaike* too superficial. This institutional dilemma of present-day priests was expressed, in another publication, in one of the main ‘problem points’: “Originally, we were an organization of *shukke*, but how shall we explain to our successors the fact that many do not live a life different from lay people [*zaizoku* 在俗]?” (Rinzaishū Myōshinjiha Kyōka Sentā 1985: 19).

Such reflections are relevant and the objects of discussions in all contemporary monastic Buddhist institutions. Modernity has challenged clergy Buddhism not just with alternatives from new religions, but perhaps more so from secularization. Urbanization, individualization, democratization, laicization, pluralisation, and de-traditionalization have changed the social landscape for the priests, even having the funeral industry threatening the major income source of the local temples (Bernstein 2006). The clergy of the traditional Buddhist temples have lost authority. Already in 1959, a survey showed the social status of the Buddhist priest to be ‘only’ between that of a policeman and a school teacher (Norbeck 1970). Surveys today show that only a small number of people use and visit temples and priests apart from engaging in funeral services or religious and cultural festivals.

Such ‘deprofessionalisation’ (Horii 2006) is seen not only in attempts to educate lay personnel to counterbalance the diminishing priesthood in especially the countryside; it has also been described as a process of degeneration within the priesthood, the authenticity of which is questioned in a widespread ‘corruption theory’ (*sōryo no daraku* 僧侶の墮落). This discourse accuses the priests of being corrupt because they marry, drink alcohol, eat meat and earn money (some of them as ‘Mercedes priests’ in wealthy temples), primarily because of a ritualized funeral industry and a still existing *danka* and temple inheritance system. Especially within Buddhist groups with monastic institutions and ideals, the critique has caught on. When few Japanese Buddhist priests actually meditate after their period in the monasteries, when only very few are actually renunciate and ascetic, and when many Japanese can hardly distinguish a Pure Land priest from a Zen or Tendai priest, how is it possible to uphold as a symbol and ideal the concept of *shukke*? Accusations of such ‘fake world-renouncerism’ (*gisō shukkeshugi* 擬装出家主義) (Covell 2005: 118) illustrate “one of the greatest difficulties the sects of temple Buddhism face today [being] that of bridging the gap between rhetoric and reality” (ibid.: 19). In general, “most Japanese Buddhist priests themselves will

admit that the Japanese Buddhist world is very inward looking and lacking in confidence to confront mainstream society” (Watts and Okano this volume) from which especially young priests feel increasingly isolated and alienated (ibid.: 8).

Religious rhetoric of a degenerated contemporary reality as opposed to an original, pure ideal is of course neither new, nor restricted to Japanese or Buddhist discourses. In a sense, without such ideals and dichotomies, no religion would probably survive. Seeing such critiques as normative and as ideological discourses (from both outside and within the clerical and institutional world itself) helps us to put them into perspective. Such a discourse is neither neutral nor objective and, although universally detectable, is also part of a certain understanding of (true) religion being inspired by Western (Protestant) ideals of texts and origins as opposed to living and practiced contemporary religion.<sup>9</sup>

Whether constructed or not, such a critique has functions and effects within Buddhist institutions. Different strategies in different fields are embarked upon within different institutions. The brand of an exclusivist *shukke* religion is still being upheld within monastic Buddhist groups and promoted in written materials as well as performed through rituals, patriarchal lineages, and symbolic ranking systems. The ritual power transference of the lay Buddhist symbolically dying as an ordained, tonsured monk does not only transgress but also underlines the essential status hierarchy between the true ideal achieved upon death as opposed to the real (and less ideal) status of the *living* lay Buddhist.

From one perspective, funeral services and ancestor worship might be an image problem for Buddhist sects, but they remain important economically and symbolically to stress the need of continued expertise and authority of the clergy. Also non-monastic Buddhism keeps ideal images of the true priest being in somewhat direct relation to a pure (*junsui* 純粹) and original (*konpon* 根本) Buddhism and thus legitimates deviations by referring to the necessity of transmitting and re-evaluating Buddhism and Buddhist priesthood to a modern and contemporary context. Identifying and constructing new roles and functions for the Buddhist priest can be seen in supplementing a (full or half time) clerical office with counseling, school teaching, spiritual or social welfare activities.

<sup>9</sup> On these matters related to the Japanese Buddhist context, see Reader and Tanabe 1998 (especially the introduction); Covell 2005: 11ff.; Borup 2004.

All Japanese Buddhist sects have engaged in institutionalized educational (*kyōiku* 教育) and ‘cultivating’ (*kyōka* 教化) programs for both priests and the laity. Such activities serve to make the priests better priests and turn the *danka* laity into more engaged members and Buddhism-conscious believers (*shintō, monto*), as well as making both parts better representatives of their institutional roles. Such initiatives, including study assemblies, teaching courses, publications, religious practice (*katsudō*) and missionary activities (*fukyō* 布教 or *dendō* 伝道)—some of the more media-conscious of the kind bringing Buddhism to fashion shows and night bars—underline and affirm hierarchical relations between the clergy and the general populace (*taishū* 大衆), between the priest and the *danka*, between *shukke* and *zaike*. Such educational and other institutional initiatives serve to preserve a status quo, but they also reflect and affirm an opposite direction of equalization. When meditation programs for lay people are offered, the ideal of the meditating *shukke* monk is consecrated as a significant part of the (monastic) Buddhist tradition, but it also reflects possibilities of transgressing the hierarchy by a very small number of ‘truth seekers’ engaging in practice traditionally isolated for the monastic world. The Jōdo Shin Buddhist ideal of ‘oneness between clergy and lay’ (*sōzoku ittai* 僧俗一体) might be a rhetorical slogan, but it does reflect another attitude, which established Buddhism in contemporary Japan also has to acknowledge. A somewhat inclusive umbrella strategy of including ideas and practices in the Grand Narratives, to a certain extent, also accepts hybrid voices from modern members and society not automatically accepting the authority of a Buddhist clergy and institution. Demands from a contemporary, modern world also resonates with necessary reflections from within the institutional realities. Though still to a very high degree being characterized by conservatism, also voices from active Buddhist individuals and NGO’s in recent years have contributed to change. A new generation of more socially and environmentally engaged priests have thus attempted to transform the image of a dark, ritualized and traditionalized religion to a green, environmentally and socially engaged modern Buddhism (Williams this volume; Watts and Okano this volume).

As such, the role, function and status of the Buddhist priest encapsulates overall challenges and dilemmas of both the person and the office of priest and clergy. The contemporary Japanese priest has to balance between being both bearer of an ideal tradition, and yet being willing to adapt to modern society. He has to live up to being both a social family father without being too ‘human’ and yet being a professional caretaker of



a religious office without being too 'religious' in a religion which is necessarily associated with death while also proclaiming also to be a 'religion of life'. Monastic Buddhist priests must uphold to some extent an ideal of being a renunciate virtuoso *shukke* distinguished from the lay *zaike* Buddhist, but without overdoing the role that only a few of the lay society actually wants him to play. The priest thus quintessentially expresses the dilemma of Buddhism and religion in contemporary Japan, both being relics from a long history yet remaining robust symbols of a living tradition.

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