

Commemorating Life and Death: The Memorial Culture Surrounding the Rinzai Zen Nun Mugai Nyodai

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... In coming, she had no origin, in leaving, she left no trace; she was not born in the past, she is not dead at the present ...¹



This chapter focuses on the veneration of the renowned Buddhist nun Mugai Nyodai 無外如大 (1223–1298) in Rinzai Zen circles and the elaborate memorial ceremonies (*onki* 遠忌) periodically held in her honor. My research is based primarily on the material objects and documents preserved at three Kyoto imperial convents (Daishōji 大聖寺, Hōkyōji 宝鏡寺, Hōjiin 宝慈院) and two other temples historically connected with the abbess (Shinnyoji 真如寺, Shōkenji 松見寺). By examining commemorative imagery of Mugai Nyodai (including painted and sculptural portraits) and accompanying inscriptions or documents, references to Nyodai in the poems and texts written by Zen prelates, and records of special death anniversaries and memorial rites, I will trace the tradition of celebrating her life and commemorating her death, and show how Nyodai's legacy was established and transformed in the centuries

* I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the imperial convents Daishōji, Hōjiin, and Hōkyōji, and the temples Jōtokuji, Shinnyoji, and Shōkenji, for graciously permitting me to study works in their collections and include photographs in this essay. I would also like to express my appreciation to Professors Barbara Ruch and Monica Bethe for reading and making insightful comments on an early draft, and to Katsura Michiyo from the Kyoto Chūsei Nihon Kenkyūjo (Medieval Japanese Studies Institute) for helping me to decipher some of the Japanese documents and prepare and obtain permission forms. Lastly, I am deeply indebted to Norman Waddell for generously providing translations of the Chinese verses and inscriptions included here.

1 From the eulogy that was written for Mugai Nyodai by Priest Zekkai Chūshin 絶海中津 (1334–1405). See full text below.

following her death. Since rites are one of the main themes of this volume, the chapter includes a detailed description of events during the *onki* at Shinnyoji commemorating Nyodai's four hundredth death anniversary. *Onki* played a key role in establishing Nyodai's legacy, which has great relevance to the tonsured women who have devoted their lives to practicing and teaching Zen in Japan's Rinzai convents. The continuation of memorials for so many centuries is a measure of the high esteem Buddhist clergy, both women and men, have for her.

Many questions remain concerning Mugai Nyodai's early life since the extant biographies of her were written in later centuries. The conflicting accounts may be due to the intermixing of tales regarding at least one and possibly two other women with Nyodai's life story.² The "real" Nyodai was born into the Adachi 安達 family and married into the Kanazawa Hōjō 金沢北条 clan. After her husband died, she studied with the eminent Chinese priest Wuxue Zuyuan (Jp: Mugaku Sogen 無学祖元 or Bukkō Kokushi 仏光国師, 1226–1286), who was appointed as abbot of Kenchōji 建長寺 monastery and later Engakuji 円覚寺 monastery in Kamakura. She is also recorded as practicing meditation under the guidance of Enni Ben'en 圓爾辯圓 (Shōichi Kokushi 聖一国師, 1202–1280), founder of Tōfukuji 東福寺 monastery in Kyoto. According to one legend, she even burned her face to remove any traces of femininity that initially prevented her from pursuing spiritual training at Tōfukuji.³ Nyodai received dharma transmission (*inka* 印可) from Wuxue Zuyuan and is one of the few women to be included in the official dharma lineage of the Rinzai school.⁴ She eventually settled in Kyoto where, with her teacher's endorsement, she founded the convent Keiaiji 景愛寺,⁵ which was later ranked the highest among the Five Mountain Convent Association (Niji Gozan or Amadera Gozan 尼寺五山)—a parallel institution to the well-known Five Mountain (*gozan*) Monastery System for male Zen priests. Keiaiji's prestige remained intact after Nyodai's death, for it was headed by a succession of abbesses from aristocratic families. The convent's network expanded over time, at one point encompassing more than fifteen branch temples.

2 Mujaku 無著/無着 and Chiyono 千代野 are also names used to refer to Nyodai. For further details on Nyodai's biography and the intermixing of identities, see Tanaka, *Ama ni natta onnatachi*, pp. 92–103; and Yanbe, "Mugai Nyodai to Mujaku" and "Mugai Nyodai den to Chiyono densetsu."

3 See the section on Mugai Nyodai in Ruch, "Burning Iron Against the Cheek," pp. lxxiv–lxxvi.

4 She is listed in *Enpō dentō roku* 延宝伝灯録 (Enpō era record of the transmission of the lamp), a collection of biographies of Chan/Zen prelates compiled by the Rinzai priest Man-gen Shibana 卍元師蛮 (1626–1710) and published in 1706.

5 Keiaiji was located near the present-day intersection of Itsutsujii and Ōmiya streets.

In the late thirteenth century, Nyodai founded a small temple in northern Kyoto called Shōmyakuan 正脈庵 in memory of her spiritual mentor Wuxue. Her ashes were later interred there. In the fourteenth century Shōmyakuan was made into a larger temple by the eminent priest Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351), who renamed it Shinnyoji; since that time it has been closely affiliated with the Rinzai monastery Shōkokuji 相国寺. The presence of Nyodai's bodily relics figured importantly in the decision to make Shinnyoji the mortuary temple of the Hōkyōji imperial convent, which I will discuss below.

Nyodai's convent, Keiaiji, burned to the ground in 1498 after the Ōnin wars, approximately two hundred years after her death, but the abbess's legacy endured. Her portrait sculpture was rescued from the fire and transferred to one of convent's branch temples, Hōjiin,⁶ where it remains today and has been designated as an Important Cultural Property (figs. 7.1a and 7.1b). This life-size, startlingly realistic statue showing the abbess seated in meditation posture, is believed to date to the end of the thirteenth century, around the time of Nyodai's death at age seventy-five.⁷ Made of cypress wood, the sculptural portrait displays the crisp, vigorous carving typical of the era; marks left by the chisel are still visible on the wood surface. Faint traces of pigment can be found on her face and neck.⁸ The most dynamic aspect of this sculpture is Nyodai's face: it may be the most important material document remaining that conveys a sense of Nyodai's powerful persona. The sculptor has brilliantly rendered distinctive features, such as the slight differences in the shape and alignment of the abbess's eyes, the loose skin below them and other lines of age, her wide, open nostrils, and the drooping right side of her mouth, which Barbara Ruch speculates may have been caused by a stroke.⁹ Nyodai's gaze is penetrating, an effect made all the more realistic by her glistening inlaid crystal eyes.

Mugai Nyodai must have been a remarkable spiritual master, for during her lifetime and after her death she was revered as a towering figure in the Zen Buddhist world. One of the earliest testimonials to her is the eulogy composed by the Rinzai priest Zekkai Chūshin 絶海中津 (Butchi Kōshō Kokushi 佛智廣照国

6 Nyodai allegedly resided at Hōjiin while Keiaiji was being built.

7 See Nishikawa Kyōtaro's discussion of Figures 35–37, *Chūnsō chōkoku*, pp. 30–31.

8 The statue was restored in 1971, at which time pigments applied in the Edo period were removed. Records that I was able to examine from the Bijutsuin conservation atelier in Kyoto note that originally the wood was covered with hemp, coated with lacquer, and then painted.

9 Ruch, "Burning Iron Against the Cheek," p. lxxv.



FIGURE 7.1A *Portrait sculpture of Mugai Nyodai, ca. late 13th c., cypress wood with traces of polychromy, 73.2 cm, Hōjiin*
 SOURCE: NISHIKAWA KYŌTARO, *CHINSŌ CHŌKOKU*, NIHON NO BIJUTSU 123 (TOKYO: SHIBUNDŌ, 1976), FIG. 37

師, 1334–1405).¹⁰ A disciple of Musō Soseki, Zekkai was appointed as abbot of Shōkokuji in 1392 and again in 1397. His verse is evidence that a memorial service was held to mark Nyodai's one hundredth death anniversary, which would have been the year 1398. Titled "Words on Offering Incense on the Day Commemorating the Hundredth Death Anniversary of Nyodai Zenji, Founder of

10 Included in the record of his sayings. See Kajitani, *Zekkai goroku*, vol. 2, pp. 12–13, 129–133.

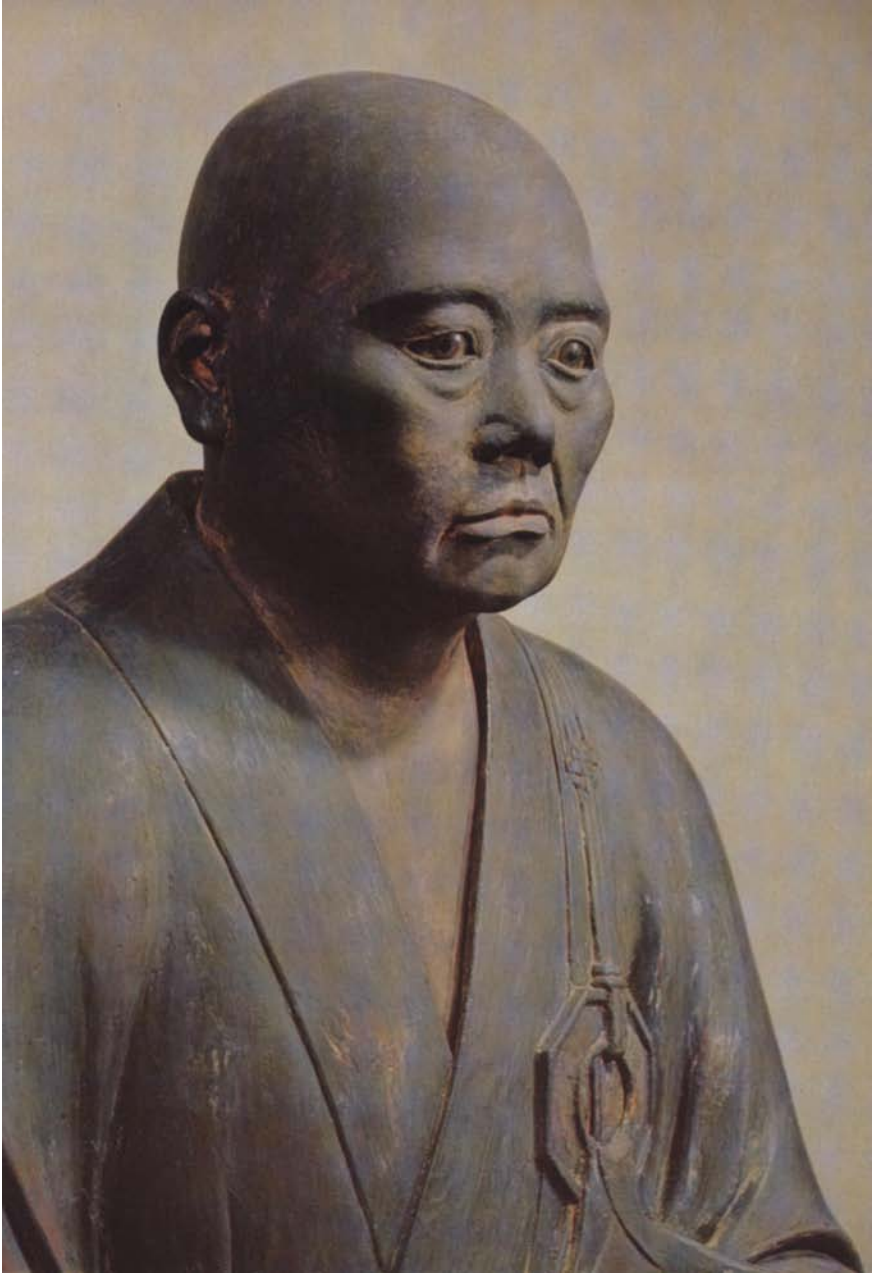


FIGURE 7.1B *Detail of fig. 7.1a*

Keiai Convent (*Keiai niiji kaiki Nyodai Zenji hyakunenki senkō* 景愛尼寺開基如大禪師百年忌拈香), the text may be translated as follows:¹¹

The nun Zongchi¹² succeeded to Bodhidharma's dharma and the nun Wuzhuo¹³ was one of the radiant lights of her teacher Dahui.¹⁴ But how was it that Nyodai Zenji of our own Japanese Rinzai school came to bequeath Keiaiji to future generations, a convent whose plants and grasses have continued to emit their wonderful fragrance to the present day? With eloquence and a skill in dealing with students that was utterly free and untrammled, she raised high her teacher Wuxue Zuyuan's¹⁵ enlightened mind-seal. With great discernment and deep understanding she established a splendid new training hall at Keiaiji. The means she used in instructing students were severe, her mind remaining constant amid the storms and waves of the karmic ocean. Rules and precedents in the temple were modeled on those laid down by Baizhang.¹⁶ Following the style of Deshan,¹⁷ she made the Dharma hall the center of her teaching activity. In her Zen activities, she worked with completely independent freedom, destroying the old nests to which students had attached themselves. She always served as a vessel ferrying beings across the vast seas of suffering and delusion. The lightning thrusts she employed in providing sustenance to her students resembled those of nun Liu Tiemo.¹⁸

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- 11 Translation by Norman Waddell, based on the annotated rendition of the verse by Kajitani Sōnin in *Zekkai goroku*, vol. 2, pp. 129–133.
 - 12 Zongchi 摠持 (dates unknown) was a daughter of Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (464–549; r. 502–549), who purportedly became a disciple of Bodhidharma. She is included in fascicle 1 of the *Enpō dentō roku*. See Bussho Kankōkai, *Enpō dentō roku*, vol. 108, p. 45.
 - 13 Wuzhuo 無著 (lit. “no attachment”) is the layname of the Chinese Chan (Zen) nun Miaozong 妙總 (1095–1170), who became a dharma heir of Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163).
 - 14 In Zekkai's verse, the Chinese Chan priest Dahui Zonggao is referred to as “Fori” 仏日 (Sun of the Dharma), which is an honorary name given to him by a high-ranking government official.
 - 15 In Zekkai's eulogy Wuxue is referred to as Jōshō 常照, a reference to one of his posthumous honorific titles, Enman Jōshō Kokushi 円満常照国師.
 - 16 Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (Jp. Hyakujō Ekai, 720–814). According to traditional Chan/Zen accounts, Baizhang established a set of rules for monastic discipline called *Baizhang qinggui* (Jp. *Hyakujō shingi* 百丈清規, Pure rules of Baizhang).
 - 17 Deshan Xuanjian (Jp. Tokusan Senkan 徳山宣鑑, 780–865), a Chinese Zen master famous for hitting his pupils with a cane to spark their spiritual awakening.
 - 18 Liu Tiemo or “Iron-grinder Liu” (Jp. Ryū Tetsuma 劉鐵磨, dates unknown), was a disciple of Guishan Lingyou (Jp. Isan Reiyū 澱山靈祐, 771–853).

She retrieved and wielded the deep, recondite teachings of the great nun Moshan,¹⁹ which had long lain dormant. Using words to sweep away words, she silenced the one-sided gabbling of Gavāmpati.²⁰ Using poison to dispel poison, she rotted out the guts of Sunyata divinity²¹ and cast them into oblivion. Her activities and enlightenment were in perfect agreement: actions matching enlightenment, enlightenment matching actions, no objects apart from mind, no mind apart from the external world, objects and mind both utterly dismissed. In her seventy-sixth year, her teaching activity suddenly ceased, only to continue without limit throughout the trichiliocosmic universe.²² In coming, she had no origin, in leaving, she left no trace; she was not born in the past, she is not dead at the present. Over a hundred years, time passing and things changing, the true form of Nyodai Zenji is totally revealed in all its imposing majesty throughout eternity. The Buddha-eye that had opened in the center of her forehead was like a single red sun-disc shining down over the land of the mulberry tree [Japan].

In this eulogy, Zekkai praises Nyodai as both abbess and dharma teacher, positioning her within a female lineage of exemplary Chinese nuns. She is also lauded for vigorously maintaining the Zen spirit of eminent male monastics, suggesting that in the end, Nyodai had transcended gender.

Extant Writings and Personal Artifacts

Nyodai's fame as a strict Zen master was legendary, but unfortunately no contemporary records of her Zen teachings have survived. There are two *waka*

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- 19 Moshan Liaoran (Jp. Massan Ryōnen 末山了然, active 9th century), a disciple and dharma heir of Gaoan Dayu (Jp. Kōan Daigu 高安大愚, active 9th century). She is one of the first women dharma heirs included in the official Chan genealogical history, *Jingde chuang lu* (Jp. *Keitoku dentōroku* 景德傳燈錄, Jingde-era record of the transmission of the lamp), compiled in 1004.
- 20 喬梵鉢提; a man who became a monk; because of transgressions of speech committed in a former life, he was born with a mouth that was always ruminating like a cow.
- 21 According to the text of the *Sūrangama Sūtra* (Ch. *Da foding shoulengyan jing*; abbreviated in Japanese as *Ryōgon-kyō* 楞嚴經), which was widely read by Chan/Zen prelates, the Sunyata divinity 舜若多神 is a formless deity representative of emptiness. See Kajitani Sōnin's annotation in *Zekkai goroku*, vol. 2, p. 132.
- 22 "Trichiliocosmic" refers to the concept in Buddhist cosmology of a "third-order" universe containing three thousand clusters of a thousand worlds each, i.e. a billion-fold universe.

poems attributed to her, however, which can be regarded as expressions of her awakened mind. The first verse is the one Nyodai allegedly composed after the wooden bottom dropped out of the water bucket she was carrying as she was gazing at the reflection of the moon inside it. She no longer held the moon—a symbol of enlightenment—but through “losing” it, she understood its emptiness or nonexistence and at the same time the distinction/non-distinction between the real moon and its reflection, thus coming face to face with a deeper reality.

No matter how you look at it, when the bottom of the bucket falls away, it will not hold water nor will it house the moon ²³	<i>Tonikaku ni takumishi oke no soko nukete mizu tamaraneba tsuki mo yadorazu</i>
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The second *waka* was written as reply to her teacher Wuxue Zuyuan, presumably during the period when she was undergoing *kōan* training with him.²⁴

The master spoke and I replied	<i>Kokushi no ōse arishi Kotae nishi</i>
Not understanding, I had surely lost my way. But now I realize my Self is moon on water, none other than floating cloud. ²⁵	<i>Shirade koso mayoi kitsurame mizu no tsuki ukaberu kumo o mi no tagui tomo</i>

Due to the warfare and conflagrations in Kyoto during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which destroyed many temples along with their records, there is a hiatus in information regarding how Mugai Nyodai was perceived during those centuries. This tumultuous era saw a great deal of relocation and rebuilding of temples in Kyoto, and life in the old capital did not really settle down until the seventeenth century. Keiaiji was never rebuilt, but the abbesses of two affiliated Kyoto convents, Daishōji and Hōkyōji, symbolically maintained Nyodai's lineage by continuing to hold concurrent titles as honorary abbess of the

23 Translation by Barbara Ruch. See *Amamonzeki*, p. 61.

24 A copy of this second *waka* may be found in the collection of the Daishōji.

25 Translation by Barbara Ruch.



FIGURE 7.2 *Waka poem by Mugai Nyodai, ca. 13th c., hanging scroll, ink on paper, 28.3 × 43 cm, Daishōji*

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO

lost ancestral convent, referring to themselves as the “nth generation abbess of the former Keiaiji.” This practice has continued to the present day. As a result of their linkage with Nyodai and Keiaiji, the abbesses of Daishōji and Hōkyōji were granted the special privilege of wearing purple robes instead of plain black ones.

Among the treasures preserved at Daishōji convent are some writings in Nyodai’s hand. Included are: 1) a letter of land transfer (*yuzurijō* 讓状) believed to be written to the Rinzai Zen master Kōhō Kennichi 高峯顕日 (Bukkoku Kokushi 仏国国師, 1241–1316),²⁶ designated as an Important Cultural Property; 2) a letter to an undesignated recipient; and 3) the second of the two *waka* poems quoted above (fig. 7.2). There are other extant written documents attributed to Nyodai, but further study is required before they can be properly verified.

26 Dated the seventh day of the seventh month, 1286. The name Kennichi appears in the letter, as a contributor to Keiaiji. Kōhō Kennichi was also involved in the restoration of Shōmyakuan (before it was renamed Shinnyoji) and was a teacher of Musō Soseki.

Among the objects associated with Nyodai that have been passed down in related temples are two clerical vestments (surplices or *kesa* 袈裟): a yellow silk *kesa* (presently in the collection of Shōkokuji monastery) and a brown hemp *kesa* preserved at Shōkenji.²⁷ As will be discussed below, Shōkenji is a temple in Gifu Prefecture where, according to tradition, Nyodai lived and practiced before moving to Kyoto.

The system of ranking *gozan* convents died out with the dissolution of the Muromachi shogunate, but because of the historical connection with Keiaiji, Daishōji and Hōkyōji retained their high status among the Kyoto convents. Due in large part to their interest in maintaining and promoting her reputation as an exemplary female cleric, convents and temples associated with Nyodai were gradually restored to their former glory. The flourishing of the *bikuni gosho* (比丘尼御所 lit. “nun’s palaces”)²⁸ system in Kyoto during the Edo period, in which convents such as Daishōji and Hōkyōji came to be headed by daughters from imperial or high-ranking courtier families and were supported financially by land grants and stipends from the shogunate, created an environment conducive to keeping the spirit of Mugai Nyodai alive. Hōkyōji in particular played an important role in efforts to highlight and perpetuate Nyodai’s stature in the Buddhist world.

Restoration of Shinnyoji (Formerly Shōmyakuan) Founded by Nyodai

For example, the temple where Nyodai’s ashes are interred, Shinnyoji, was designated as the mortuary temple (*bodaiji* 菩提寺) for the abbesses of Hōkyōji. An interest in maintaining strong bonds with Mugai Nyodai, even in death, no doubt underlay the desire for Hōkyōji abbesses to be interred there. Enshrined inside the Dharma hall (*hattō* 法堂) at Shinnyoji is a sculptural portrait of Nyo-

27 In addition, there is a vestment described in an inventory of Hōkyōji treasures as a *hōe* 法衣 (Buddhist robe) which the convent has been unable to locate. It, too, may have been a *kesa*. See the section on Hōkyōji in *Kyōto-fu jūin jūkibō: Jūin jūki meisai chō, kaisei Zen Rinzai shū*.

28 *Bikuni gosho* were private convents for tonsured royal or aristocratic women. The practice of appointing imperial women as abbesses was initiated in the Muromachi period; by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were approximately fifteen convents headed by princess-nuns that were designated as *bikuni gosho*. The majority were located in Kyoto and belonged to the Rinzai school of Zen.

dai (fig. 7.3); the date of its creation is unknown, but there is a document recording that the image was restored in the twelfth month of 1627, suggesting that it dates at least to the sixteenth century and possibly earlier.²⁹

The statue shows the abbess sitting with hands in meditation pose similar to the Hōjiin sculptural portrait but with eyes staring straight ahead. Her robes and surplice, rendered in a similar fashion, include the hexagonal ring securing her *kesa*. Nyodai's facial expression is not quite as severe as the Hōjiin statue, but the mouth is similarly downturned at the corners, although lacking the dropped right lip. The sculptor clearly sought to represent Nyodai in her later years: signs of age are the three deep horizontal creases on her forehead and the lines underneath her eyes and on either side of her mouth.

The father of numerous daughters who became heads of *bikuni gosho*, Emperor Gomizunoo 後水尾天皇 (1596–1680; r. 1611–1629) was instrumental in transforming Shinnyoji into a mortuary temple for Hōkyōji. In 1656, following the death of his daughter Kugon Rishō 久巖理昌 (posthumously Senju-in 仙寿院, 1631–1656), who had been appointed as abbess of Hōkyōji ten years earlier, he sponsored the rebuilding of the Dharma hall at Shinnyoji so that it could serve as the site of memorial services for her and subsequent Hōkyōji abbesses. Near the Dharma hall was a cemetery where Senju-in and other abbesses were interred. Restoration was completed in the twelfth month of 1656, and the emperor installed a portrait sculpture of his deceased daughter.³⁰ At this time the statue of Nyodai was already in place and Gomizunoo was well aware of Shinnyoji's spiritual and historical connections with the preeminent nun.

29 The document in question is the 64th volume of *Rokuon nichiroku* 鹿苑日録. See Tsuji, *Rokuon nichiroku*, vol. 5, p. 372. *Rokuon nichiroku* is the diary of successive chief priests at Rokuonji 鹿苑寺 (Kinkakuji 金閣寺), ca. 1487–1651. I am grateful to Priest Egami Shōdō of Shinnyoji for calling my attention to this document. The Shinnyoji Nyodai statue was examined by a team of specialists, including scholars from the Kyoto Prefectural Cultural Properties Protection Division and the Agency for Cultural Affairs, as well as a restoration expert from the Bijutsuin conservation laboratory in September of 2012. At that time the head was removed to look inside the statue's main cavity, but no inscription was visible, nor were there any objects placed inside the statue. The statue was restored again in 1847, at the time of Nyodai's five hundred and fiftieth *onki* (recorded in *Nyodai Oshō gohyakugojūnen onki fushin narabi shozatsuhi chō* 如大和尚五百五拾年遠忌普請並諸雜費帳 [Record of construction and miscellaneous expenses connected with Abbess Nyodai's five hundred and fiftieth death anniversary]) and possibly again in the twentieth century.

30 For information on this statue and others placed inside the hall, see Fister, "In Memoriam?"



FIGURE 7.3 *Portrait sculpture of Mugai Nyodai, ca. 16th c., wood, Shinnyoji*
SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO

From this time on Shinnyoji became a setting for funerals and memorial services for deceased Hōkyōji abbesses as well as for memorial events honoring Mugai Nyodai.³¹ This was in addition to annual rites and special memorial ceremonies for Nyodai periodically held in Kyoto at Hōkyōji and Daishōji convents.

Revival of Shōkenji Where Nyodai Did Spiritual Training

Another temple connected with Nyodai's legacy that was revived in the seventeenth century was Shōkenji in present-day Gifu Prefecture. It was there that she allegedly had a spiritual breakthrough during a trip to fetch water from a spring or well, the inspiration for the *waka* verse cited earlier. From the mid-seventeenth century Hōkyōji abbesses helped to revive Shōkenji, which had fallen into ruins, and it was made a sub-temple of that imperial convent during the tenure of Abbess Richū 理忠 (1641–1689), another daughter of Emperor Gomizunoo, who headed Hōkyōji from 1656 to 1689.³² A new sculptural portrait of Nyodai (fig. 7.4) was enshrined at Shōkenji in 1659, and in the years that followed, many objects were gifted by Hōkyōji abbesses to that sub-temple.

The circumstances surrounding the creation of the Nyodai portrait sculpture at Shōkenji are recorded in a document placed inside the statue that was composed by Shōkenji restorer-abbess Yōshin 養心 (d. 1687), who spearheaded the restoration of buildings and negotiated the convent's affiliation with Hōkyōji.³³ Funds for the statue, made by the Kyoto Buddhist sculptor Hanbei 半兵衛 (dates unknown),³⁴ were raised from among local parishioners. Yōshin wrote that she went to see the Keiaiji [Hōjiin] (see fig. 7.1) and Shinnyoji (see fig. 3) sculptures of Nyodai in Kyoto in the fourth month of 1659, and asked the sculptor to model it upon the latter.

31 Respects were also paid to Nyodai during unrelated ceremonies at Shinnyoji. According to the *Shinnyoji kiroku* 真如寺記録, which records daily events and rituals at Shinnyoji, during annual rites such as the *segaki* 施餓鬼 ceremony in the seventh month food offerings were always placed in front of the statue of Nyodai as well as that of her mentor Wuxue.

32 Richū was posthumously known as Kōtoku-in 高德院.

33 *Zō Nyodai Oshō izō ki* 造如大和尚遺像記 (Account of the making of Abbess Nyodai's statue). Dated the last day (*sugomori* 晦日) of the sixth month of 1659 and calligraphed by Priest Soin 祖因 (dates unknown) of Rinsenzenji 臨泉禪寺. I am indebted to Matsuo Shōdō, the current chief priest of Shōkenji, for allowing me to photograph this document in October 2015.

34 Hanbei is identified in the above document as working at an atelier located in the vicinity of Teramachi and Nijō streets in Kyoto.



FIGURE 7.4 *Portrait sculpture of Mugai Nyodai, 1659, wood with polychromy, Shōkenji*
SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO

In the Shōkenji portrait, Nyodai is represented seated in a chair, in meditation posture, with inset crystal eyes staring forward in the manner of the two portrait sculptures discussed above. However, Nyodai's face is covered with white pigment and her eyebrows are painted in. Her visage does not have the severity of the Hōjiin image, but rather could be described as solemn, with the corners of her mouth turning downward. There are no distinguishing features and the lack of prominent wrinkles makes Nyodai appear more youthful. She is dressed in a purple robe and brocade *kesa*, which like the two previously discussed Nyodai statues is secured by a hexagonal ring. The *kesa* is brilliantly decorated with gold foil cloud forms and red/green flowers. It is likely that it was restored and repainted at some point.

Interest in preserving and promoting Nyodai's legacy at Shōkenji remained strong, and approximately fifteen years later (1676), a biography of her was compiled called the *Seizan Keiai niji kaiki Nyodai shōden* 西山景愛尼寺開基如大禪師小伝 (Biography of Zen Master Nyodai, founder of the Seizan Keiai Convent).³⁵

Large-Scale Ceremonies Honoring Nyodai's Special Death Anniversaries

Prayers were always chanted on Nyodai's death anniversary—the twenty-eighth day of the eleventh month—in the convents associated with her. However, beginning in the late seventeenth century, large-scale special memorial services called *onki*³⁶ honoring Nyodai were regularly held at Daishōji and Hōkyōji, as well as at Shinnyoji and Shōkenji. The first of these took place in 1697, marking Nyodai's four hundredth death anniversary. In preparation for such important *onki*, funding was often sought for restoring the host temple's buildings and icons. At the time of the 1697 *onki*, commemorative painted portraits of Nyodai were commissioned and installed at both Hōkyōji and Daishōji. This was clearly a joint endeavor to revive and preserve her memory. It is likely that there were earlier painted portraits of Mugai Nyodai, but

35 Several versions of this biography, which was later recopied, are preserved at Shōkenji. For the text, see document 431 in *Seki shishi*, pp. 1047, 1063–1066. Seizan 西山 is the “mountain name” of Hōkyōji.

36 Death anniversaries which are marked by special rites are the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, twenty-fifth, fiftieth, and one hundredth anniversaries, and thereafter at fifty-year intervals.

they did not survive the ravages of the Ōnin wars. I will give a brief description of the newly created portraits and then discuss the commemorative ritual itself.

The two nearly identical portraits (figs. 7.5 and 7.6) are painted with ink and color on silk. There are no signatures or seals to identify the artists. (While very close in many respects, there are slight differences in the brushwork suggesting that they were painted by different people.) Nyodai is rendered in three-quarter view typical of Rinzai Zen portraiture style, seated in a chair, and facing toward her right. The main difference between the two portraits is the style of lacquered chairs and the brocade cloths draped over them. In the Hōkyōji portrait, the chair is black with a high back and straight legs, whereas in the Daishōji portrait, the chair is carved red lacquer with curved legs and a lower rounded back. In both the abbess is shown seated with her hands in meditational Zen posture; her ceremonial shoes, almost identical, are placed on a lacquer stool in front of the chairs. She is dressed in a formal silk purple robe, indicative of her high rank, with a *kesa* draped over her left shoulder, affixed with ropes and strips of cloth to what appears to be a tortoiseshell hexagonal ring. In the Hōkyōji portrait, the purple pigment has discolored to brown and the silk background of the scroll has also darkened, suggesting that it was exposed to more light than its counterpart at Daishōji. The light brown gauze weave silk (*monsha* 文沙) *kesa* worn by Nyodai in both portraits is identical: the pattern woven in white is called *kaki no heta* 柿の籠. The detailed rendering of the woven cloth and the tortoiseshell ring in both portraits suggest that it was based on an actual *kesa*, perhaps one of Nyodai's. Unfortunately, no such *kesa* has been found in either convent's collection.

For the depictions of Nyodai's face in the Hōkyōji and Daishōji portraits (figs. 7.5 and 7.6), I believe the artists used the portrait sculpture at Shinnyoji (see fig. 7.3) (and possibly the one at Hōjiin; fig. 7.1) as a reference. Similarities include the overall shape of the head with full cheeks and prominent rounded chin, the three horizontal creases on her forehead, lines around her eyes and mouth, and the slightly downturned corners of her mouth. The fact that the right side of Nyodai's mouth droops ever so slightly in both painted portraits suggests that the artists viewed the Hōjiin statue with this distinctive feature. However, the severity of the Hōjiin Nyodai image has been softened; the overall mood projected in these painted portraits is one of enlightened dignity.

Both paintings have inscriptions dated 1697 and written by Taikyō Kenrei 太虚顕霊 (1680–1705), the 101st abbot of Shōkokuji, recording that the portraits were made as memorials on the occasion of Nyodai's four hundredth death



FIGURE 7.5
Portrait of Mugai Nyodai,
17th c., hanging scroll, ink
on silk, inscription (dated
1697) by Taikyo Kenrei,
Daishōji

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO



FIGURE 7.6
*Portrait of Mugai
Nyodai, 17th c.,
hanging scroll, ink on
silk, inscription (dated
1697) by Taikyo Kenrei,
Hōkyōji*
SOURCE: AUTHOR
PHOTO

anniversary.³⁷ The Chinese-character verse Priest Taikyo inscribed above the portraits is the eulogy quoted above by Zekkai Chūshin, composed three hundred years earlier on the occasion of Nyodai's one hundredth death anniversary.³⁸ Taikyo made minor changes (or possibly mistakes) in characters when copying this verse so the inscriptions on the two portraits are not one hundred percent identical.

Onki commemorating Nyodai's four hundredth death anniversary were held on the twenty-eighth day of the ninth month at Hōkyōji, the twenty-eighth day of the tenth month at Daishōji, and the twenty-eighth day of the eleventh month at Shinnyoji. The dates were no doubt staggered since some of the same clergy were expected to attend all three *onki*. The three memorial services are briefly described in the *Sangaryō nikki* 參暇寮日記,³⁹ and there are two records preserved at Shinnyoji which give further details about the rites carried out there.⁴⁰ Using information from these accounts, I will outline the course of events during the *onki* at Shinnyoji, which is the best documented.⁴¹

The Shinnyoji *onki* was attended by thirty priests from Shōkokuji monastery and its sub-temples, as well as the abbesses of the Daishōji and Hōkyōji imperial convents. Offerings of "incense money" (*kōshi* 香資) totaling three hundred *monme*⁴² were received from the participants.⁴³ The main "sponsors" were Daishōji, Hōkyōji, and the host temple, so their contributions were proportionately large. Records include a detailed accounting of payments for food and other items used in preparing the meals served to participants and for the offerings placed in front of the images. Included are condiments and stock items such as *miso* bean paste, soy sauce, sake, tofu, pickles, cooking oil, *fu*

37 Taikyo was also chief priest of the Shōkokuji sub-temple Jiun'an 慈雲庵. He served as chief celebrant in the *onki* ceremony for Nyodai held at Daishōji at this time.

38 He omitted the first three sentences, which serve as a kind of introduction, referring to famous nuns in China.

39 The *Sangaryō nikki* is the diary from an office called the Sangaryō at Shōkokuji monastery dating from the years 1682–1871. See *Shōkokuji shiryō*, vol. 3, pp. 501–503.

40 *Nyodai Oshō yonhyakunen-ki shoshiki chō* 如大和尚四百年忌諸式帳 (Record of various rites connected with Abbess Nyodai's four hundredth death anniversary) and *Nyodai Oshō yonhyakunen-ki kōshi chō* 如大和尚四百五拾年忌香資帳 (Record of "incense offerings" for Abbess Nyodai's four hundredth death anniversary).

41 I am grateful to Abbess Tōun of Daishōji, Chief Priest Egami of Shinnyoji, and Katsura Michiyo from the Kyoto Chūsei Nihon Kenkyūjo (Medieval Japanese Studies Institute) for helping me to read these accounts and for explaining their contents.

42 One *monme* was worth 3.76 grams of silver. In the Kyoto-Osaka region, silver was the basis for currency instead of gold, which was used in Edo.

43 A record of these donations is preserved at Shinnyoji; see note 40.

(wheat gluten), vinegar, charcoal, green tea, salt, rice, and *konbu* (kelp). A significant amount was spent on fresh produce, which included daikon, carrots, black beans, spinach, bean curd skin (*yuba*), several kinds of yams and mushrooms, ginkgo nuts, parsley, Japanese mustard greens (*mizuna*), mountain asparagus (*udo*), ginger, *zenmai* fern, dried gourd strips (*kanpyo*), burdock root, arrowroot, sesame seeds, dried persimmons, and *mikan* and *yuzu* citrus fruits.

Among the items purchased explicitly for use by the imperial abbesses was high grade tobacco. (Smoking in long-stemmed tiny-bowled pipes was a common practice even in the convents at that time.) Other miscellaneous items in the record of payments are incense (*jinkō* 沈香) and candles for the ceremony, two pairs of wooden clogs (*geta*), twenty-nine pairs of straw sandals (*zōri*), and several kinds of paper (used for record keeping and for placing under the food offerings). The total cost of the *onki* ceremony came to approximately 294 *monme*, which was less than the amount of donations received.

On the late afternoon of the day before the ceremony, there was a short “pre-ceremony” service *shuku-ki* 宿忌 in the Dharma hall. The abbot of Shinnyoji, Tenrin Tōkaku 天倫等格 (dates unknown), served as the main celebrant and made an incense offering to Nyodai. Participating priests, including the Shōkokuji abbot Tenkei Shūjō 天啓集仗 (dates unknown), performed a ritual perambulation of the hall while chanting sutras (*gyōdō* 行導). All the priests then made incense offerings and left the hall. Those who did not live close by stayed overnight at Shinkōan 真光庵, a building on the grounds of Shinnyoji used for lodging.

The main ceremony took place the following morning. Participants gathered at Shinkōan hall and were led to the abbot’s quarters (*hōjō* 方丈), where they were served a light meal with tea and sweets.⁴⁴ An offering of food arranged on a special lacquer tray table was placed in front of Nyodai’s portrait statue at Shinnyoji, consisting of white rice, *manju* buns, pounded rice cakes (*kinomi mochi* 木ノ三餅), and *rakugan* 落雁 sweets. Food offerings were also placed in front of statues of three other eminent priests, who lived in Nyodai’s time and are enshrined in Shinnyoji’s Dharma hall: Wuxue Zuyuan (Bukkō Kokushi), Kōhō Kennichi (Bukkoku Kokushi), and Musō Soseki.

44 The *onki* records give details about the purchases of utensils for serving tea: high quality blue and white tea bowls (presumably decorated with chrysanthemum crests) for the abbesses, two Kiyomizu-yaki tea bowls, hand towels, tea napkins, bamboo whisks, tea scoops, and tea ladles.

After finishing the refreshments, the priests returned to Shinkōan hall to get dressed for the ceremony. The abbesses from Daishōji and Hōkyōji arrived and were seated in the Dharma hall. A bell was rung to signal the other priests to proceed to the hall. After they had all entered and assumed their positions, an offering of rice gruel (*kenshuku* 獻粥) was made in front of Nyodai's statue. This was done by the chief celebrant Tenrin, who then, together with Shōkokuji abbot Tenkei, made offerings of rare fragrant wood incense (*nenkō* 拈香). They and the other high-ranking priests who assisted all wore special ceremonial silk robes called *dōgu-e* 道具衣 draped with a nine-panel *kesa*, whereas the other participants wore lesser ceremonial robes and smaller seven-panel *kesa*.

Led by the chief celebrant, the participating priests chanted sutras and did ritual prostrations in front of Nyodai's statue. Portraits (sculptural or painted) were always the visual and liturgical focal point of *onki* ceremonies. While reciting one of the sutras, the priests did another ritual perambulation of the Dharma hall. After making individual incense offerings, the group of priests filed out of the hall and returned to Shinkōan. At that point the two abbesses made their offerings of incense, after which they were guided to the abbot's quarters. Since they were members of the imperial family, protocol required that the two princess-nuns remain separate from the other guests.

A vegetarian meal consisting of simmered vegetables, broiled tofu, rice, kelp, a clear soup, and pickles was served to participants after the ceremony, followed by traditional sweets. The abbesses, along with the nuns and attendants accompanying them, were served a more elaborate meal. The first course (*gozen* 御膳) was nearly the same as that served to the other participants. This was followed by a second course (*ni no gozen* 二御膳) comprising *kuroae* (tofu and mixed vegetables flavored with black sesame); simmered arrowhead (*kuwai* 慈姑), rock mushrooms, and ginkgo nuts; and a clear soup with burdock root, broiled wheat gluten, spinach, and mountain asparagus. The third course (*onhikimono* 御引物) was a dish of simmered oyster mushrooms, yams, mustard greens served together with burdock root and broiled wheat gluten. The last course (*ojūbiki* 御重引) was served in a two-tiered container and consisted of broiled Japanese parsley, bean curd skin, and burdock root. The meal was topped off by an assortment of traditional sweets (*adzuki* bean jelly [*yokan*], tangerines [*mikan*], *manju* buns, yam [*yama-imo*], and dried persimmon).

Nyodai's four hundredth death anniversary was also marked by a ceremony at Shōkenji in Gifu in 1697. As was the case in Kyoto, this *onki* was also an occasion to raise funds for the restoration or rebuilding of lost structures. A document remains revealing that the abbess sought financial support from people in the domain and also the Nagoya castletown several years in advance of the

onki for rebuilding the *hōjō*, which was completed in 1693.⁴⁵ She initially borrowed one hundred *ryō* from the domain and then applied for permission to go out and collect money, receiving contributions from people ranging from the domain lord to ordinary folk.

For participating nuns, *onki* served as occasions to celebrate their spiritual link with Mugai Nyodai as well as pay tribute to her. The abbess of Hōkyōji at the time of the 1697 *onki* was Tokugon Rihō 徳巖理豊 (1672–1745), a daughter of Emperor Gosai 後西天皇 (1638–1685; r. 1655–1663). Especially keen on identifying Hōkyōji and herself as part of Nyodai's lineage, Abbess Rihō played a major role in reviving Mugai Nyodai's legacy. No doubt inspired by the anniversary memorial services in which she was actively involved, she gathered all the documents she could find and compiled a biography of Nyodai, which was completed in 1712.⁴⁶ Numerous transcriptions were made of this biography and deposited at related temples, ensuring that Nyodai's legacy would be transmitted.⁴⁷ Rihō also compiled a lineage document (*keizu* 系図) tracing her convent's origins back to Nyodai and Keiaiji.⁴⁸ A consummate painter, she did a portrait of Nyodai, but its whereabouts are unknown.⁴⁹

Abbess Rihō also turned her attention to the convent's mortuary temple, Shinnyoji. In addition to refurbishing Nyodai's gravesite, in 1723 she donated funds to construct a special memorial chapel (*shidō* 祠堂) within the Dharma hall to enshrine the portrait sculpture of Nyodai.⁵⁰ This "chapel" is located behind and to the right of the high platform housing the temple's main image of Śakyamuni, next to a *shidō* chapel for Nyodai's teacher Wuxue. Two years later Rihō composed an epitaph for Nyodai, which she had engraved on a plaque to hang on the wall adjacent to Nyodai's memorial chapel. On the back of the

45 This and other Shōkenji documents are published in *Seki shishi* 関市史. See document 426, pp. 1046, 1058–1060.

46 There are two versions by her hand in the collection of Hōkyōji: *Keiai kaisan shiju [hon]gan Shōmyaku Sōken Nyodai Oshō den* 景愛開山資壽[本]願正脈勳健如大和尚傳 (Biography of Abbess Nyodai, founder of Keiai[ji] and Shōmyaku[an]) written in cursive script and *Mugai Nyodai-ni densho* 無外如大尼伝書 (Biography of nun Mugai Nyodai) in regular or standard script.

47 In the collection of the Imperial Archives, Imperial Household Agency is a handwritten copy dated 1712 by Rihō: *Keiai kaisan shiju [hon]gan Shōmyaku Sōken Nyodai Oshō den* (abbreviated *Nyodai Oshō den* 如大和尚傳 on the cover).

48 *Keiaiji godaidai* 景愛寺御代々.

49 A painted portrait of Nyodai is among the objects listed in the *Honkakuin no miya seikō ryakki* 本覚院宮成功略記 (Outline of princess-nun Honkakuin's [Rihō] achievements).

50 From a manuscript (*Hōshū Sochū hitsuroku* 鳳洲祖冲筆録) written by Shinnyoji priest Hōshū Sochū (1672–1757), included in *Sangaryō nikki* 11. See *Shōkokuji shiryō*, vol. 4, p. 365.

plaque is a list of objects and ritual/offeratory implements that Rihō gifted to Shinnyoji in the autumn of 1725, presumably for use in memorial services, since the list is titled “Ritual implements [to be placed] directly in front of Abbess Nyodai (*Nyodai Oshō shinzen hōki* 如大和尚真前法器).” Included are such things as a *hossu* 搨子 ceremonial whisk, altar cloth (*uchishiki* 打敷), incense burner, tray, and flower and water vessels. As a result of Abbess Rihō’s persistent efforts to record and pay tribute to her spiritual ancestor, Nyodai’s heritage was firmly etched into history.

At nearly the same time that structures related to Nyodai were being renovated at Shinnyoji, similar restoration activity was taking place at Shōkenji in Gifu. Abbess Rihō supported her convent’s sub-temple in these endeavors, donating a *Death of Buddha* painting (*nehan-zu*) by her own hand to Shōkenji in 1718.⁵¹ In 1725, a founder’s hall (*kaisandō* 開山堂) was built at Shōkenji and in 1731 the main worship hall (*hondō* 本堂) was restored. Rihō wrote the temple’s name in large-scale calligraphy that was carved into a wooden plaque and hung above the entrance.⁵² Documents reveal that funding for the construction was collected from people in the region, as in the case of the 1697 *onki*.⁵³ A petition for support written by Daisen 大泉 (dates unknown) of Shōkenji in 1725 includes a brief biography of Nyodai to bolster the convent’s image and convince would-be donors of its importance.⁵⁴

Several years later (1737), on the occasion of turning over the abbacy of Hōkyōji to the young princess-nun Richō 理長 (1725–1764), Rihō wrote out a set of instructions for her successor to follow.⁵⁵ She began by stating that Hōkyōji belongs to the lineage starting with Śakyamuni, passed on to Bodhidharma, through the Rinzai school, from Wuxue Zuyuan to Mugai Nyodai, and emphasized that Nyodai’s lineage has been carried on by Daishōji and Hōkyōji convents following Keiaiji’s demise. Among the important annual rituals to be observed she specifies Nyodai’s death anniversary.

Abbess Rihō’s efforts to distinguish the convent and herself as part of Nyodai’s lineage had not gone unnoticed: as early as 1711 the two Ōbaku Zen priests

51 The date is inscribed inside the lid of the wooden box containing the painting. See also Shōkenji document 432, *Seki shishi*, p. 1066.

52 For an illustration, see Fister, “Creating Art in Japan’s Imperial Buddhist Convents,” pp. 159–160.

53 Shōkenji documents 424 and 426, *Seki shishi*, pp. 1046, 1056–1060.

54 *Seki shishi*, p. 1059.

55 The precepts are mounted in a long handscroll (approximately 14 meters), which Rihō titled *Kochō no yumegatari* 胡蝶の夢語 (Story of the dream of a butterfly). Collection of Shinnyoji.

who were her spiritual mentors had written verses in which they compared Rihō to Mugai Nyodai.⁵⁶ Pertinent lines from their verses appear below.

Bodhidharma's matchless Zen Dharma,
with ten thousand golden hooks,
Has been shouldered by a person of great capacity;
She will return and from now on walk in Abbess Mugai's footsteps,
Their combined virtue is destined to receive unending acclaim.

DAIZUI DŌKI 大隨道機 1652–1717

... How unusual, a lady of noble birth undertaking the practice of Zen,
Manifesting vital Zen activity rivaling that of former Abbess Mugai.

HYAKUSETSU GEN'YŌ 百拙元養 1668–1749

These verses suggest that by the eighteenth century, the name of Mugai Nyodai was a symbol of a superior female Zen master. Nyodai's biography was included in two collected biographies of Zen masters published in 1706: *Enpō dentō roku* 延宝伝灯録 (Enpō era record of the transmission of the lamp, vol. 19)⁵⁷ and also the *Honchō goen* 本朝語園 (vol. 9). The renowned Rinzai priest Hakuin Ekaku 白隠慧鶴 (1686–1769) was obviously familiar with her life story, and he made reference to Nyodai's attaining enlightenment when the bottom of her water bucket dropped out at Shōkenji in his *Oniazami* 於仁安左美 (Wild thistles, 1752),⁵⁸ a kind of sermon written in the form of a letter to the abbesses of the Hōkyōji and Kōshōin 光照院 imperial convents after he visited them in Kyoto.⁵⁹ Mugai Nyodai was one of a handful of nuns and female devotees whom Hakuin held up as models to the princess-nuns.⁶⁰

Hakuin himself was inspired to do at least one painting of Nyodai, throwing up her hands in surprise as the round bottom drops out of her bucket (fig. 7.7).

56 Both of these documents are dated 1711 and preserved at Hōkyōji. For the full text of the verses and further details, see Fister, "Daughters of the Dharma." Translations by Norman Waddell.

57 See Bussho Kankōkai, *Enpō dentō roku*, vol. 108, p. 260.

58 See Zen Bunka Kenkyūjo, *Hakuin Zenji hōgo zenshū*, vol. 2, pp. 187–188.

59 The abbesses were Jōshōmyō-in 淨明妙院 (1725–1764) and Jōmyōshin-in 淨明心院 (1730–1789), both daughters of Emperor Nakamikado 中御門天皇 (1702–1737; r. 1709–1735). Hakuin visited their convents several times during a trip to Kyoto in 1751 and wrote the *Oniazami* after returning to his home temple. See Yoshizawa, "Hakuin Zenji kana hōgo, yodan."

60 Among the others were Chūjōhime 中将姫 (ca. 8th century), Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701–760), and the nun Eshun 慧春 (ca. 14th century). Hakuin admonished the princess-



FIGURE 7.7 *Portrait of Chiyono [Mugai Nyodai]* by Hakuin Ekaku, 17th c., hanging scroll, ink on paper, 36.6×57 cm, private collection

SOURCE: PHOTO COURTESY OF THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR ZEN BUDDHISM, HANAZONO UNIVERSITY

He added the following verse, playing off the *waka* written by Nyodai quoted above (the last three lines are the same).

Chiyo [Nyodai] hoped to draw water in her bucket but it lost its bottom and it could not hold water nor could it house the moon	<i>Chiyo no fu ga tanomishi oke no soko nukete mizu tamaraneba tsuki mo yadorazu</i>
---	--

No matter how you look at it when the bottom of the bucket falls away, it will not hold water nor will it house the moon	<i>Tonikaku ni takumishi oke no soko nukete mizu tamaraneba tsuki mo yadorazu</i>
--	---

nuns for living too lavishly, urging them to adopt a more austere lifestyle and to pursue Zen practice during all of their daily activities, not just in *zazen*.

Around the same time Hakuin's *Oniazami* was published, *onki* honoring Nyodai's four hundred and fiftieth death anniversary (1747) were held in Kyoto at Daishōji, Hōkyōji, and Shinnyoji, and in Gifu at Shōkenji.⁶¹ There are two documents preserved at Shinnyoji detailing the preparations for the service held there.⁶² The ceremony itself was similar to the 1697 ritual. In preparation for this event the sliding doors in the Reception hall (*kyakuden* 客殿) were repaired and new tatami mats installed. A portrait of Nyodai was borrowed from Hōkyōji to display in the center of the Reception hall, where participants went for a vegetarian banquet following the main ceremony.

Shōkenji also acquired a portrait of Nyodai around the time of this death anniversary (fig. 7.8). According to the inscription (dated 1758) by Myōkō Kanjin 妙光閑人 (dates unknown), it was painted by the nun Nakami 仲見 (dates unknown) who was residing at Shōkenji. A piece of paper placed in the box records that it was donated in memory of the laywoman Shinshōin Kanshitsu 真照院乾室 (d. 1758). Nyodai is depicted sitting in a high-backed carved red lacquered chair, facing to her right as in the portraits discussed above, with hands in a meditation posture, eyes staring forward, and lips pursed in concentration. She is wearing a plain brown robe, but her *kesa* is brilliantly colored, with patterns of floral scrolls and clouds on red, white, light blue, and dark blue grounds. It is unusual among portraits of Nyodai because it shows the Zen abbess looking very attractive and idealized, her head covered by a light blue hood often worn by tonsured women. The youthful manner of representation may be due to the fact that Nyodai's stay at Shōkenji was during an earlier period of her life, before becoming a full-fledged Zen master, and therefore the nuns at Shōkenji had a rather different vision of her. In contrast, the Kyoto portraits all depict Nyodai as an older, "defeminized" nun.

The final portrait of Nyodai (fig. 7.9) that I will discuss was painted six years prior to her five hundredth death anniversary (1797).⁶³ It was presented to Shinnyoji by Hōkyōji, perhaps to be used in future ceremonies. (As noted above,

61 On the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth days of the ninth month (Hōkyōji), twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth days of the tenth month (Daishōji), and twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth days of the eleventh month (Shinnyoji). Recorded in *Sangaryō nikki* 19. See *Shōkokujī shiryō*, vol. 5, pp. 80–82.

62 *Nyodai Oshō yonhyakugojūnen-ki zatsuyō chō* 如大和尚四百五拾年忌雜用帳 (Record of miscellaneous expenses connected with Abbess Nyodai's four hundred and fiftieth death anniversary) and *Nyodai Oshō yonhyakugojūnen-ki kōshi chō* 如大和尚四百五拾年忌香資帳 (Record of "incense offerings" for Abbess Nyodai's four hundred and fiftieth death anniversary).

63 The box inscription is dated 1791.



FIGURE 7.8
 Portrait of Mugai Nyodai by
 Nakami, 1758, hanging scroll, ink
 and color on silk, 100.6 × 38.9 cm,
 inscription (dated 1758) by Myōkō
 Kanjin, Shōkenji
 SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO



FIGURE 7.9

Portrait of Mugai Nyodai by Imei Shukei, 1791, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, inscription by Daiten Kenjō, Shinnyoji

SOURCE: AUTHOR PHOTO

fifty years earlier Shinnyoji had borrowed a portrait of Nyodai to display in the Reception hall at the time of the four hundred and fiftieth year *onki*.) The newly dedicated portrait appears to be based on the statue of Nyodai at Shinnyoji, and was painted by Imei Shukei 維明周圭 (1730–1808), the 115th abbot of Shōkokuji.⁶⁴ Nyodai is shown seated facing to her left in three-quarter pose in a low chair with curved armrests as in the Daishōji portrait. Unlike all of the other portraits, her hands are not in the standard meditation pose with the tips of the thumbs touching, but rather her right hand is grasped by her left hand. Her face, however, bears a close resemblance to the statue, especially the shape of the head, full cheeks, round chin, and placement of wrinkles and creases. The stern-looking abbess wears a plain brown robe and tan *kesa* woven with a pattern of clouds and grasses with blue cloth squares. Her rather austere form is set off by the green and red brocade cloths covering the chair.

The portrait was inscribed with the following laudatory verse by Imei's teacher, the 113th abbot of Shōkokuji, Daiten Kenjō 大典顕常 (1719–1801), who was an eminent poet of Chinese-style *kanshi* 漢詩.⁶⁵

Venerating with deepest reverence this great Bodhisattva among
 women,
 Whose lamp of radiant wisdom long illuminated the lightless cross-
 roads.
 I can hold up three characters and refer to her as a Moon-faced
 Buddha,⁶⁶
 But not even a flicker of her Zen mind can I inscribe over a *chinsō*
 portrait.

64 There is no signature, but Imei's seals are visible in the lower left.

65 Daiten had close connections with both Daishōji and Hōkyōji convents, and many letters and poems by him can be found in their collections. According to the *Daiten Zenji nenpu*, which was appended to the book *Daiten Zenji*, he served as chief celebrant at the *onki* honoring Nyodai's five hundredth death anniversary at Daishōji on the twenty-eighth day of the tenth month in 1797 and Hōkyōji on the twenty-eighth day of the first month of 1798. See Obata, *Daiten Zenji*, pp. 438–439.

66 Among the Buddhas of the past are the Sun-faced Buddha (Nichimenbutsu 日面佛) and the Moon-faced Buddha (Gachimenbutsu 月面佛), standing for a long-lived and short-lived Buddha; the Sun-faced Buddha is said to live for 1,800 years; the Moon-faced only one day and one night. See *The Blue Cliff Record*, Case 3. Daiten's reference to Nyodai as a Moon-faced Buddha may be an allusion to her spiritual awakening at Shōkenji, when the reflection of the moon she was gazing at "fell" out of her wooden water bucket.

Easier to say that like Moshan,⁶⁷ her true heights remained unbarred,
Or to say that it was the great earth itself that were her shape and fea-
tures.⁶⁸

The actual ceremonies commemorating Nyodai's five hundredth death anniversary were held at Daishōji and Shinnyoji in 1797, Shōkenji in 1798, and Hōkyōji in 1799. Hōkyōji's was delayed due to reconstruction at the convent.⁶⁹ The first *onki* to take place was the one held at Daishōji on the twenty-eighth day of the tenth month of 1797.⁷⁰ This was followed by a ceremony at Shinnyoji on the exact anniversary of her death, on the twenty-eighth day of the eleventh month of 1797. A major event that occurred at the Shinnyoji *onki* was the presentation of one of Nyodai's *kesa* to Shinnyoji by the abbot of Chōtokuin 長得院, a sub-temple of Shōkokuji.⁷¹ It is common to display *kesa* and other contact relics such as prayer beads near the portrait at an *onki*. Nyodai's *kesa* remained at Shinnyoji⁷² for many years before being returned to Shōkokuji, most likely in the twentieth century.

Restoration, the gifting and transferal of objects associated with the abbess, as well as the creation of new imagery accompanying *onki* were essential to keeping Nyodai's memory alive. This practice continued into the following century. Documents reveal that on the occasion of an *onki* at Shinnyoji honoring Mugai Nyodai's five hundred and fiftieth death anniversary (eleventh month of 1847), the Nyodai portrait sculpture at Shinnyoji, as well as four other statues there, were restored by the Buddhist sculptor Tōji Jōkei 東寺定慶 (dates

67 Moshan is the name of a famous Chinese Buddhist nun and Chan (Zen) master of the Tang dynasty. Literally, the two characters mean "Mt. Mo." See note 19.

68 Translation by Norman Waddell.

69 The *onki* at Hōkyōji took place on the twenty-eighth day of the first month; accounts appear in both the *Shinnyoji kiroku* and *Sangaryō nikki*. See *Shōkokuji shiryō*, vol. 7, pp. 319–323.

70 A record of this *onki* is preserved at Daishōji: *Gokaisan Nyodai-ni Zenji gohyakukaiki gohō-jichū shoki* 御開山如大尼禪師五百廻忌御法事中諸記 (Record of the five hundredth death anniversary rites for the founder, nun and Zen master Nyodai). See also *Shōkokuji shiryō*, vol. 7, pp. 289–292.

71 *Sangaryō nikki* 66, 67; see *Shōkokuji shiryō*, vol. 7, pp. 289–292. The inscription on the *kesa* box by Chōtokuin priest Emon/Ebun 惠汶 (dates unknown) states that it was conserved and presented to Shōmyakuan [Shinnyoji] on the occasion of Mugai Nyodai's five hundredth death anniversary in 1797.

72 An undated inventory of objects at Shinnyoji, *Shinnyoji kōkatsu chō* 真如寺校割帳, notes that the *kesa* is in a storage chest there.

unknown).⁷³ The letter of land transfer calligraphed by Nyodai in the collection of Daishōji convent was restored at the time of this *onki* as well.⁷⁴ Thirteen years later (1860) the abbess Kandō 貫道 (dates unknown) of Shōkenji arranged for a woodblock version of Nyodai's biography to be printed and distributed by the convent.⁷⁵ This is yet another example of the determination of temples associated with Nyodai for the abbess not to be forgotten. Their interest was double-edged: historically Nyodai was important and promoting their connection with her gave them prestige.

The absence of records after the 1847 death anniversary rites suggests that the observance of *onki* and other convent traditions was disrupted in the Meiji period (1868–1912) when, as part of an anti-Buddhist movement, the new government made Shintō the state religion and forbade the imperial family from taking Buddhist vows. With no imperial candidates for abbesses and their stipends terminated, the convents suffered. To my knowledge, *onki* commemorating Nyodai's six hundredth anniversary (1897) were not held in Kyoto.⁷⁶ However, in 1898 an *onki* did take place at Shōkenji in Gifu, which was distanced from the political scene in Kyoto and had its own base of patronage independent from the imperial court. The main ceremony was held on March 3.⁷⁷

The tradition of honoring Mugai Nyodai was revived in the late twentieth century, perhaps the result of the convents having regained status as religious/cultural institutions along with financial stability, and her seven hundredth death anniversary was celebrated in both Japan and in the United States.

73 *Nyodai Oshō gohyakugojūnen onki fushin narabi shozatsuhi chō.*

74 The inscription inside the lid of the wooden box housing this letter of land transfer, dated the twenty-eighth day of the ninth month of 1848, records that it was restored for the five hundred and fiftieth death anniversary held the previous year. The box inscription is by Eichū Shūsei 盈沖周整 (d. 1861), chief priest of Jishōji 慈照寺 who served as the 120th abbot of Shōkokuji. Shūsei later added an inscription to a portrait of the founding abbess of Daishōji, Gyokugan Goshin 玉巖悟心 (d. 1407), indicating that he was closely connected with the convent.

75 Copies of this woodblock edition are preserved in the collection of Shōkenji.

76 The exception being a small-scale memorial service held at Hōjiin in 1901, in conjunction with a ceremony celebrating the completion of a new *hondō* there. In this case the main event was the celebration of Hōjiin's new worship hall. *Hōryū Sensei genkōroku*, p. 9.

77 Various records connected with this *onki* remain at Shōkenji, including records of incense offerings by clergy and laypeople. On this occasion a special ceremony was held for worshippers to take or renew bodhisattva vows (*jukai-e* 受戒會 or *jubosatsu-kai-e* 受菩薩戒會); lists of the people still remain, including laypeople and nuns.

In the years leading up to the international event, separate *onki* were held at Hōkyōji (1994.11.28),⁷⁸ Daishōji (1997.11.28), Hōjiin (1998.10.10), and Shōkenji (1998.10.25). Manabe Shunshō, a Buddhist priest and painter of Buddhist imagery, created a seven hundredth anniversary portrait in 1998 of Nyodai based on the two portraits preserved at Daishōji and Hōkyōji discussed above, and donated it to the Kyoto Medieval Japanese Studies Institute housed in Daikan-kiji.

Barbara Ruch, professor emeritus of Columbia University, has played an important role in bringing international attention to Nyodai in her publications and presentations at scholarly conferences.⁷⁹ With the blessing and support of Abbess Kasanoin Jikun of Daishōji, she arranged for an *onki* for Nyodai to be held at Columbia University in New York City on November 21, 1998. The ceremony took place in St. Paul's Chapel, in front of a Buddhist altar arranged before an exact replica of the Nyodai portrait statue at Hōjiin.⁸⁰ Nuns from eight convents participated, and Abbot Fukushima Keidō of Tōfukuji monastery performed a special incense offering and poetic invocation. After the ritual offerings were made and the abbess serving as chief celebrant offered incense and gave an invocation, the nuns performed the rituals of perambulation and scattering of petals (*sange* 散華) while chanting the *Kannon Sutra* (*Kannongyō* 觀音經). The ceremony was accompanied by an international symposium in Nyodai's honor, and several treasures related to Nyodai lent by convents were displayed in the university's C.V. Starr East Asian Library Kress Rare Book Suite.⁸¹

This event and the publicity and scholarly interest it generated cemented Nyodai's legacy in the Western world and furthered her recognition in Japan. She was among the historical nuns highlighted in the exhibition *Amamonzeki, A Hidden Heritage: Treasures of the Japanese Imperial Convents* held at the University Art Museum of Tokyo University of the Arts in 2009.⁸² A google search on the internet for "Mugai Nyodai" currently yields more than 1,400,000 hits in

78 A description of the 1994 Hōkyōji *onki* appears in *IMJS Reports*, pp. 1–2.

79 For example, Ruch, "The Other Side of Culture"; "Unheeded Voices; Winked-at Lives," pp. 102–106; "Obstructions and Obligations"; and "Burning Iron Against the Cheek."

80 The replica was borrowed from the Kanagawa Prefectural Kanazawa Bunko Museum. For a photograph, see *Amamonzeki*, p. 55.

81 The symposium was titled "The Culture of Convents in Japanese History." For the contents of the exhibition (November 6–December 4, 1998), see the catalogue *Days of Discipline and Grace*.

82 See *Amamonzeki*, pp. 54–61.

Japanese and approximately one thousand hits in English. Regrettably, however, in many cases the few historical facts we know are intermingled with fiction, especially in entries and blogs created by lay practitioners. Even her name has been mis-romanized in greatly out-of-date entries. I believe we are at a critical juncture with regard to Nyodai's position in religious and cultural history. It is imperative that scholarly studies advance, perhaps involving scholars of various disciplines so that we can track down more historical sources and document the legacy of this elusive Zen master so that she will be more fully and accurately understood.

In sum, this chapter has demonstrated how Mugai Nyodai's image, in part through periodic memorial ceremonies and commemorative portraits made in connection with them, has been constructed and reconstructed over the centuries. While we do not really know much about Nyodai as a historical person beyond her being recognized as a dharma successor to a leading Chinese Zen master, she represents an ideal that Buddhist practitioners, especially women, have aspired to achieve through study and disciplined practice, and continues to serve as a model for women in the present and future. Respect and admiration for the abbess still burns strong within the remaining convents and temples closely associated with her, and not wanting to wait for her 750th memorial date in 2048, preparations are underway to commemorate Nyodai's eight hundredth birth anniversary in 2023.

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