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The Purple Robe Incident and the Formation of the Early Modern Sōtō Zen Institution

The transition from the medieval to the early modern Buddhist order was directed in large measure by a new regulatory regime instituted by the Tokugawa *bakufu*. These new directives issued from Edo increasingly regulated every aspect of both political and religious life during the first half of the seventeenth century. As the *bakufu* extended its control over domains through a pyramidal hierarchy of order towards the center, similar formations of regulation governing Buddhist sectarian order emerged in an increasingly formalized fashion. At the same time, power did not operate in a unilateral direction as Buddhist institutions attempted to shape regulation, move toward a self-regulatory model of governance, and otherwise evade control by the center through local interpretations and implementations of law. This essay takes up how state regulation of religion was managed by Sōtō Zen Buddhism, with particular attention given to rules governing the clerical ranks and the robes worn by clerics of high rank. The 1627 “purple robe incident” is examined as an emblematic case of the new power relationship between the new *bakufu*’s concern about subversive elements that could challenge its hold on power; the imperial household’s customary authority to award the highest-ranking, imperially-sanctioned “purple robe”; and Buddhist institutions that laid claim on the authority to recognize spiritual advancement.

KEYWORDS: Sōtō Zen Buddhism—Tokugawa *bakufu* and religion—*hatto*—“purple robe incident”

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BUYŌ INSHI 武陽隱士 was the pen name of an anonymous writer from the late Edo period whose essay, *Seji kenmonroku* 世事見聞録, was critical of many aspects of Edo society at the time, including what he considered the degenerate activities of merchants, government officials, and Buddhist clerics.¹ While speculation about his identity has ranged from the possibility that he was a shogunal retainer or a moneylender to his being a judicial clerk, his wish to remain anonymous because of his biting remarks has made it difficult for modern scholars to trace his true identity (AOKI 1999; TSUJI 1955, 172–73). The *Seji kenmonroku* section on religious institutions includes the following commentary about the Sōtō Zen sect in which he decries the moral and spiritual degeneration of Zen clerics who were unable to live up to new sect and government regulations on clerical training. He also sharply criticized the practice of bribery to purchase clerical ranks and higher-rank colored robes as well as the general atmosphere in which money dictated clerical success.

[Recently], Buddhist clerics, from all the sects, have been breaking both governmental and sectarian regulations. Neither having the [required] years [of experience] nor moral discipline, they walk the path of greed.... To take up an example or two, I will start with the Sōtō school. According to the rules set by the first Shogun Ieyasu, for a cleric to be considered fully qualified, he must attend clerical training retreats for twenty years. For the same cleric to become an abbot of a temple, twenty-five years are necessary. These rules were determined through discussions between the sect and a high-ranking cleric of a different sect.²

The clerical training includes a ceremony where clerics sit across from each other to hold a question-and-answer session regarding the Dharma. Even though difficult or unexpected questions might be asked, one is supposed to be able to give an appropriate reply. However, these days, the ceremony is conducted with the participants having previously agreed upon the contents of both the questions and the answers. Unlike the true Zen question-and-answer session, the ceremony today is like a preset performance of sword and spear techniques, rather than real combat.... Having gone through the clerical train-

1. The 1816 *Seji kenmonroku* by Buyō Inshi was compiled into seven volumes (volume three is on temples and shrines). Two versions of the original manuscript, held at Kyoto University, were put into printed form as BUYŌ 1994.

2. This would be Konchiin Sūden (1549–1633), the Rinzai Zen cleric who served as the key advisor to Ieyasu on *bakufu* regulations for Buddhist schools.

ing only in form, they can still become a fully-recognized cleric or a temple abbot without the twenty years of training and without the proper number of Dharma years, if they prepare a bribe of ten *ryō* 兩. These clerics take ten *ryō* to Kyoto (that is, the imperial household which was the official organ for recognizing clerical rank), while they hand over another five *ryō* to [one of] the head temples (Eiheiji 永平寺 or Sōjiji 総持寺). Then they file a false claim stating that twenty years (in Dharma age) have already passed and a letter of reference is awarded. Finally they take this letter to the Kajūji 勧修寺 (the Kyoto brokerage house for the imperial household), and if another five *ryō* is “donated,” Kajūji’s permission is granted with no objection. In this way, clerics acquire the status of a fully recognized cleric in the beginning and eventually they purchase the rank of a “great abbot” (*daioshō* 大和尚).

The head temple of this Sōtō school is Eiheiji of Echizen Province. These days, it is said that to become the abbot of this head temple, it is necessary to ready two thousand *ryō*. Out of this amount, one thousand *ryō* is spent on the various preparations for entering the temple itself, while the other thousand *ryō* is spent on gifts and other items when visiting the imperial household in Kyoto.... Always breaking the Buddhist law, clerics these days are sullied. Though they wear the red robe as abbots of large temples, they forget propriety and shame.

Regulating Legal Authority

Buyō Inshi’s complaints about the corruption of the Sōtō Zen clergy refer to “the rules set by the first [Tokugawa] Shogun Ieyasu.” These rules were among the first series of legal directives (*hatto* 法度 or *gohatto* 御法度) issued by Ieyasu 家康 (1542–1616) and the newly established Shōgunal government in the city of Edo. However, the process of establishing a new structure of governance that could exert authority over former rival warlords and their domains, the aristocracy and the imperial household in Kyoto, and religious institutions such as Buddhist temples could only gradually unfold as the new regime gained more control over the provinces.

The *bakufu* created a new legal framework with these directives to establish a new order in which potential rival sources of power and authority (local lords, the imperial court and aristocrats in Kyoto, and Buddhist institutions) would be awarded a certain level of autonomous decision-making authority, but only under the ultimate control of the regime. The first Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, followed the model established by earlier warlords (*sengoku daimyō* 戦国大名) who tried to unify the Japanese provinces under their control, such as Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1532–1582) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1536–1598). They had used a double-pronged strategy of, on the one hand, destroying or at least weakening any Buddhist institution that posed a potential threat to their control,

and on the other, providing patronage to Buddhist temples to help solidify their hegemony over this powerful institution (MCMULLIN 1985).

The first series of these directives (1602–1615) was issued by Tokugawa Ieyasu to sects that were securely under his control. Noticeably absent were the Jōdo Shin and Nichiren sects, which remained potential threats in the *bakufu's* eyes, and the Ji sect, which was hard to regulate because its head abbots often moved from place to place (*yūgyō shōnin* 遊行上人). The earliest directives were generally limited to a single temple (Kōyasan 高野山, Daijuji 大樹寺, Hieizan 比叡山, Jōbodai'in 成菩提院, Senmyōji 千妙寺) or a particular region (the Kantō-region directives for the Tendai sect and the two Shingon sect lineages). Indeed, it was not until 1615 that the *bakufu's* key advisors on religious affairs, such as Konchiin Sūden 金地院崇伝 (a Rinzaï Zen cleric, 1549–1633) and Tenkai 天海 (a Tendai cleric, 1536–1643), were able to issue more broad-based rules that covered all sects and regions of Japan (KATŌ 1977; TAMAMURO 1987, 6–25).

These directives primarily clarified the organizational structure of Buddhist institutions and the hierarchy of clerical ranks so that such institutional matters would come under the purview of the *bakufu*, rather than being left to the discretion of each sect. Although the specific details of the rules differed for each sect, general decrees that applied to each sect were as follows: a supreme head temple for Buddhist training (*honzan* 本山); a system of head and branch temple relations (*honmatsu seido* 本末制度) that enabled each head temple to have authority over its branch temples; a standard for clerical qualifications or regulations (for example, the length of training required to become a fully fledged cleric, robe colors for each rank, and standards of moral discipline); and prohibitions on warrior monks and the buying or selling of temple abbotships. These directives by the government were intended to curb the local Buddhist institutions' decision-making powers and to set up a framework for the government to prohibit certain practices and encourage others. In other words, the *bakufu* wanted to concentrate the power to control Buddhist activities in *bakufu*-approved head temples.

In the case of Sōtō Zen, the first Shogun issued three directives: the 1612 *Sōtōshū hatto* and the 1615 *Eiheiji shohatto* 永平寺諸法度 and *Sōjiji shohatto* 総持寺諸法度. The 1612 directive was initially dispatched to four temples (Daitōin 大洞院, Ryūonji 龍穩寺, Sōneiji 総寧寺, Kasuisai 可睡齋) that had ties to Tokugawa Ieyasu, several of which were later designated as official Sōtō Zen liaison temples in charge of communicating with the *bakufu*. The directive included the following five points:

Directive for the Sōtō Sect

Item: A cleric who has not completed thirty years of clerical training cannot become a resident temple abbot (*hōdō* 法堂).

Item: A cleric must have completed twenty years of clerical training before serving as a training retreat head (*gōkogashira* 江湖頭).

Item: Temples should not allow monks and nuns who were expelled from a different temple for committing transgressions to come into residence.

Item: To receive a colored robe (*ten'e* 転衣),³ a cleric must have spent five years from the time served as a training retreat head without having committed any offenses.

Item: All branch temples must obey the decisions and rules set out by their head temple.

Anyone who does not follow the above rules will be expelled from the temple grounds.

The twenty-eighth of the Fifth Month, Keichō 慶長17 (1612).⁴

Although this “law,” which applied to all Sōtō Zen temples, was quickly superseded by the 1615 *Eiheiji shohatto* and *Sōjiji shohatto* directives, these rules reflected regulations that had already been issued by local lords in the late sixteenth century,⁵ and they also served as the basis for the new 1615 directives that were issued to the two supreme head temples of the sect:

Regulations for Eiheiji (and all Branch Temples of Eiheiji)

Item: After one has undergone clerical training for twenty years and served as the training retreat head, if another five years goes by and one wishes to apply for a higher-ranking colored robe, one should bring to the mountain [Eiheiji] a letter of recommendation from one’s Dharma transmission master. Our temple will hand the request to the *Densō* 伝奏 [the office for requests to the imperial household] and an imperial order (*rinji* 綸旨) proclaiming the promotion and permission to wear the higher ranking colored robe will be announced if the application is successful. As a further note, to become a resident temple abbot, one must have had thirty years of clerical training.

Item: For the purposes of counting one’s years of training from the time of the promotion, the day on which the request was received (by the imperial household) should be regarded as the starting point.

Item: Only those who have received imperial permission to serve as the abbot of Eiheiji or Sōjiji may don a purple robe. Further, the purple robe may not be

3. A regular cleric could only have worn a black robe.

4. This can be found in KASUISAI SHIRYŌSHŪ HENSAN I’INKAI 1989, 70 and FUTABA 1990, 36.

5. Although there must have been earlier precedents, the first example of a feudal lord issuing directives for Sōtō Zen temples in his domain that can be comprehensively documented is Takeda Shingen’s 武田信玄 1569 directive for temples in Kai, Shinano, and Kōzuke Provinces. For discussion of the creation of these early directives, see HIROSE 1993, 248–55.

worn at any other temple than the two temples and should not be worn after one has been transferred to a different temple.

Item: On the founder's [Dōgen's] annual memorial day, [the abbots of] all branch temples in Echizen Province must, without exception, come and attend the ceremonies. [The abbots of] temples in more distant regions should also consider attending.

Item: All clerics in the Japanese Sōtō lineage must follow these rules in accordance with the traditions of this temple (Eiheiji).

Addendum: Finally, these regulations have not been strictly followed recently. There has been talk of clerics wearing purple and yellow robes without authorization. Violations of the Buddhist law like this leads to ridicule from the people and are an insult to the Dharma way. These regulations have been settled on to spread the Buddha Dharma and the sect. Any cleric breaking these rules will be sent into exile.

Seventh Month of Genna 元和 1 (1615), [Seal of Ieyasu]
(EIHEIJI HENSAN ʼINKAI 1982, 20)

The directive issued to Sōjiji, dated the same month in 1615, was virtually identical to the Eiheiji directive, except for the clause on Japanese Sōtō Zen clerics having to follow the traditions of Eiheiji, and the replacement of the requirement to visit the head temple on Dōgen's annual memorial day with Keizan 瑩山 and Gasan's 覺山 (the two main founders of Sōjiji) annual memorial days for branch temple abbots in Kaga, Noto, and Etchū Provinces (EIHEIJI HENSAN ʼINKAI 1982, 83).

These rules addressed the three main problems for the *bakufu* and the head temples in regulating the sect: the clarification of the authority structure of the sect, the standardization of the clergy's hierarchy, and the implementation of procedures to obtain imperial permission for clerical promotions. While the medieval period was characterized by a fairly flexible (and at times tumultuous) relationship between the established temples and the fast growing, more recently erected temples, the Tokugawa *bakufu* hoped to establish a stable system that gave the head temples absolute legal authority over the branch temples. Indeed, one can see in these directives attempts by both Eiheiji and Sōjiji to consolidate control over their branch temples by requiring attendance at their temple for their respective founder's memorial services. Yet, just as the head temple was supposed to have absolute jurisdiction over the branch temple's affairs, the *bakufu* wanted to assert *its* authority over the Sōtō Zen head temples. For example, the *bakufu* had the final authority to expel clerics from the clergy, although the temples themselves were the ones that had to monitor adherence to the regulations. The rules also standardized the clerical hierarchy, which, in the medieval period, tended to be determined according to factional (*monpa* 門派) traditions or regional customs. The basic career of a cleric can be laid out as follows:

The first twenty years of clerical training: The cleric was to diligently pursue Buddhist training, which would officially begin at the time he received the tonsure. This training involved participating in a number of summer and winter retreats, so that after twenty years, it would be possible to be the head retreat leader (*gōkogashira*).

The twenty-fifth year: The earliest possible time that the cleric could petition to be granted a higher rank in the clergy, which involved a change in the color of the clerical robe (*ten'e*). This request would only be considered if the cleric had done nothing improper for five years following a term as a head retreat leader.

The thirtieth year: The earliest possible time the cleric could obtain permission to become a resident abbot (*hōdō*) of a Sōtō Zen temple. The cleric would, in some sense, “own” the rights of abbotship to that temple and have the right to take on disciples, so such a privilege came only thirty years after receiving the tonsure.

This government-regulated standard career path of a Sōtō Zen cleric from novice to temple abbot meant that even if a cleric was ordained at age thirteen (which was the earliest one could receive the tonsure) and everything went smoothly, the youngest age that a cleric could become a temple abbot was forty-three. Indeed, Buyō Inshi's criticism of under-qualified abbots (under the age of forty-three) was based on this official regulation. While this effort to standardize the career steps of Sōtō Zen clerics crossed factional and regional boundaries, loopholes and other ways to evade the actual steps required for clerical advancement, such as bribery, became routine. This is not particularly surprising given that there were over seventeen thousand Sōtō Zen temples that needed clerics to serve them; if every cleric actually followed the regulations before serving as abbot, it would have been impossible to maintain the sect's temples. However, these first directives issued by the *bakufu* did represent an initial attempt by the new regime, with the help of cooperative head temples, to institute a new early modern form of Sōtō Zen Buddhism based on the *bakufu*'s authority structures.

Though at first glance these regulations might seem like a one-sided set of government-mandated rules, they were, in fact, carefully negotiated by leading clerics of the Sōtō Zen sect and the *bakufu*'s chief advisor on religious affairs, Konchiin Sūden 金地院崇伝. Not only were various clerics in contact with Tokugawa Ieyasu at Sunpu and Edo Castles, but they also drew up proposals for the directives (EIHEIJI HENSAN I'INKAI 1982, 550). For example, two months prior to the 1612 *Sōtōshū hatto*, Konchiin Sūden recorded in his diary (*Honkō kokushi nikki* 本光国師日記) one such proposal from the abbots of the Daitōin, Sōneiji, and Ryūonji temples with exactly the same wording as appeared in the 1612 *Sōtōshū hatto*. In this sense, these early attempts by the government to assert control over Buddhist institutions was accompanied by efforts within each sect to influence legislation and curry favor with the new regime. Sōtō Zen clerics

skillfully allied themselves with both the central and local-level authorities as one strategy to maintain the growth of the sect. Unlike other sects that also had popular appeal, such as the Jōdo Shin and Nichiren schools, which found themselves at times in antagonistic positions with either the central or local authorities, Sōtō Zen Buddhists were able to create an institution that simultaneously supported the new regime (and thus found patronage among the *daimyō* and lower-level members of the *samurai* class) and appealed to the peasant farmers who constituted the vast majority of their membership.

However, the ideal political and religious order that the *bakufu* envisioned was implemented only gradually, and in many respects, it never quite fully came into being due to local political realities. Nevertheless, one indicator of the *bakufu*'s growing powers over religious institutions in the early 1600s was its new regulations on the procurement of colored robes at the time of clerical promotion.

Clerical Ranks and the Purple Robe Incident

In Kan'ei 寛永 4 (1627), the *bakufu* stripped the imperially awarded ranks, titles, and purple robes of over seventy Rinzaï Zen, fifty Jōdo, and thirty-four Sōtō Zen clerics. This was the beginning of the so-called “purple robe incident” (*shie chokkyo jiken* 紫衣勅許事件).⁶ During the medieval period, the bestowal of imperial titles and the permission to wear the purple robe (a color associated with the imperial household) was a matter between the imperial household and the abbots of major temples. During the Muromachi period (1392–1573), the two types of imperially bestowed titles (*chokushigō* 勅賜号), “National Master” (*kokushi* 国司) and “Zen Master” (*zenji* 禪師), were awarded primarily to abbots of the large “five mountains” (*gozan* 五山) temples of the Rinzaï Zen sect, located in Kyoto and Kamakura. Although the Muromachi *bakufu* could nominate candidates to receive such titles and thus the privilege of wearing a purple robe, the ultimate authority to confer these ranks was vested in the imperial household. The significance of the 1627 “purple robe incident” was that the new Tokugawa *bakufu* in Edo overrode the authority of the imperial household in Kyoto by stripping over one hundred and fifty clerics of their robes and titles. This dramatic act marked a shift in the balance of religious authority power from the Kyoto court to the Edo *bakufu*, and ultimately prompted the abdication of Emperor Gomizuno-o 後水尾 (r. 1611–1629).

The *bakufu* made this decision because the earlier directives they had issued to limit the ability of the imperial household to award robes and titles at will were being ignored. In 1613, Tokugawa Ieyasu had issued the “Regulations on

6. For more on the “purple robe incident,” see KATŌ 1977; MURAI 1999; TAMAMURO 1994. I am indebted to these scholars for much of the discussion that follows.

the Imperially-Awarded Purple Robe” (*Chokkyo shie hatto* 勅許紫衣法度), which targeted seven Rinzaï Zen temples to obtain the Edo *bakufu*’s permission before approaching the imperial household for purple robes and titles. Not only did Ieyasu hope to influence the choice of abbots at those major temples (a practice that he and other *daimyō* had previously performed in their own domains), but more importantly, he wanted to reduce the authority and wealth of the imperial household and the Kyoto aristocratic households (*densō*) who had traditionally served as intermediaries between imperial power and Buddhist institutions. By proclaiming the Edo *bakufu* to be the initial checkpoint, the number of purple robes, and consequently the money that was paid for them, could be controlled.

Two years after the initial directive, the *bakufu* laid down further regulations. The 1615 *Kinchū narabi kuge gohatto* 禁中並公家御法度 was issued primarily to regulate the conduct of the aristocratic families. The text included a section lamenting the number of recently awarded purple robes and declaring that such robes be awarded to only those with truly exceptional abilities. The 1615 Rinzaï Zen directive, *Gozan jissatsu shozan shohattō* 五山十刹諸山諸法度, also prohibited the practice of awarding purple robes to those who served as abbots only in name (or in an honorary fashion) except under extraordinary circumstances. Further, the directive required that color distinctions should be made according to the rank of the temple: deep purple for abbots of Nanzenji 南禪寺, light purple for abbots of Tenryūji 天龍寺, and yellow for abbots of the other Kyoto and Kamakura “five mountains” temples.

But the temples, the Kyoto aristocratic houses, and the imperial household ignored these regulations and continued to award purple robes without *bakufu* permission. The rescinding of the award of these robes and titles in 1627 affected Sōtō Zen and Jōdo sect clerics as well, but the Rinzaï Zen clerics from Daitokuji 大徳寺 (Takuan 沢庵 and Gyokushitsu 玉室) and Myōshinji 妙心寺 (Tōgen 東源 and Tanden 丹田) were the ones who reacted most forcefully to the *bakufu* decision. They argued that this particular decision was not only wrong, but that the basic directive regulating the Rinzaï Zen sect was poorly conceived. For example, the requirement of thirty years of clerical training and the completion of a 1,700 Zen *kōan* study program to become a resident abbot overlooked the fact that enlightenment might come at a young age and by understanding a single *kōan*. The *bakufu* reply to this type of argumentation was swift and unsympathetic. Konchiin Sūden was particularly furious, especially with Gyokushitsu, with whom he had consulted in the preparations of the Rinzaï Zen regulations, and wanted to administer severe punishment to all involved. With the other *bakufu* councilors (*rōju* 老中) and Tenkai (the other main *bakufu* advisor on religious affairs) seeking a more lenient solution, this incident finally came to its conclusion in 1629 when Tōgen was exiled to Tsugaru, Tanden and Takuan to Dewa, and Gyokushitsu to Mutsu (all areas in the remote northern provinces).

Emperor Gomizuno-o, embarrassed at the loss of imperial prestige, abdicated the throne and passed on the position to his daughter, Empress Meishō 明正 (r. 1630–1643) (TSUJI 1955, 81–102).

With this incident, the *bakufu* firmly established its official position as the prime mediator in the conferring of all imperial titles, though, as BUYŌ Inshi suggested in his essay, the unofficial practice of falsifying documents maintained the illegal circulation of titles and robes in plentiful numbers.⁷ The reason that purple, red, and yellow robes continued to hold immense appeal to Sōtō Zen clerics was that they served as proof of a high standard of training, and thus other clerics were required to ask colored-robed clerics to lead certain rituals that were prohibited to those with only black robes. Furthermore, colored robes not only helped Sōtō Zen clerics gather temple parishioners by impressing upon the parishioners their elevated status, but the fees that were charged for funeral and memorial rites increased in accordance with a higher-ranked robe. Thus, at the local level, the demand for colored robes, which began in the late medieval period, continued unabated during the Edo period despite new governmental regulations.

In practice, however, the ability of the *bakufu* to control the awarding of colored robes within the Sōtō Zen sect was limited to the exalted purple robe. The 1615 directive (*Eiheiji shohatto* and *Sōjiji shohatto*) issued by the *bakufu* decried the unauthorized circulation of these robes and made a point of limiting ownership to those who had “received imperial permission to serve as the abbot of Eiheiji or Sōjiji.” Furthermore, the missive stated that robes “should not be worn after one has been transferred to a different temple.” The rule against wearing the robe if and when a cleric moved to a different temple was based on a practice that began in the late medieval period (and dramatically increased in the Edo period) wherein a cleric could serve as temporary and honorary abbot of the supreme head temple (*zuise* 瑞世). In other words, while there would be an abbot who actually presided on a daily basis, other “abbots” could come temporarily to fill in (at times for only a single night, *ichiya jūshoku* 一夜住職, and at times, not actually in person at all). Such temporary abbots thereby received an imperially sanctioned title as an “ex-abbot of Eiheiji (or Sōjiji).” Many abbots continued to wear the purple robe when they returned to their temples, prompting the ban on such practices.⁸

7. Broad-ranging studies of the history, ritual, symbolism, and types of Zen and other sect’s robes (*koromo*) and surplices (*kesa*) in China and Japan include: FAURE 1995; KAWAGUCHI 1984; KYŪMA 1967).

8. Hirose Ryōkō has compiled a list of such *zuise* abbots, see EIHEIJISHI HENSAN IINKAI 1982, 609–13. Through this extensive list, Hirose has pointed out a marked growth in the practice of temporary abbotship from the medieval period into the Edo period, until the Genna 元和 era (1615–23), when a drop is seen (which he attributes to the impact of the 1615 directive). Though abbots could formerly receive these titles without having to actually visit the head temples, the

With the purple robe, at least, the *bakufu* seemed to have succeeded in implementing its authority over the robe's bestowal. According to a newly discovered and catalogued cache of manuscripts, the *Dōshōan monjo* 道正庵文書,⁹ the process for obtaining the purple robe and imperial appointment for new abbots to Eiheiiji included a visit to Edo Castle for shogunal approval before an abbot could seek approval from Kyoto for imperial authorization.¹⁰ A typical itinerary for a candidate for the abbot of Eiheiiji, for example, consisted of:

- 1) An initial trip to Edo Castle to receive the *bakufu*'s letter of recommendation for the abbotship upon handing in a letter from the current abbot declaring an intention to step down. At this time, nearly two hundred clerics, lay supporters, and servants accompanied the candidate. It took two months to ready all the documents and visit *bakufu* officials for pre-meeting consultations.
- 2) A fifteen- to twenty-day journey to reach Eiheiiji (Echizen Province) using the Tōkaidō, Nakasendō, and Hokuridō routes. Funds for the remaining part of the trip would be collected at this point.
- 3) Another fifteen- to twenty-day journey to reach Kyoto from Eiheiiji, traveling with over fifty attendants.
- 4) Once in Kyoto, lodgings were by custom at Dōshōan 道正庵 (a special broker for the Sōtō Zen school). Before visiting the imperial palace, meetings were held at an aristocrat's house, which served as the imperial intermediary (Kajūji 勧修寺). These meetings and the distribution of payments took time; roughly one-and-a-half months passed before imperial permission was finally bestowed.
- 5) The newly appointed abbot would take an ox-drawn carriage back to Eiheiiji, drawing large crowds of onlookers.¹¹

Edo period increase in the practice was tempered by this requirement. For further discussion on this topic, see EIHEIJISHI HENSAN IINKAI 1982, 613. Tamamuro Fumio has estimated that an average of 476 Edo-period clerics annually visited either Eiheiiji or Sōjiji for this ritual procedure and estimates that the head temples gained an extra 2,618 *ryō* as annual income from this practice. See TAMAMURO 1999, 138.

9. The *Dōshōan monjo* is a collection of manuscripts donated by the Dōshōan to Eiheiiji during the Meiji period. Until recently, this valuable resource was housed uncatalogued at Chōkokuji, the Eiheiiji branch temple in Tokyo. Now housed at the Sanshokai Collection of Eiheiiji, the manuscripts were first catalogued by Tamamuro Fumio and further classified by Hirose Ryōkō. Though these manuscripts have not yet been made available to researchers, I have had the privilege of examining and copying selected portions of the collection with permission from Kumagai Chūkō, Tamamuro Fumio, and Hirose Ryōkō.

10. The purple robe was not actually bestowed by the emperor. Instead, an authorization certificate was received which allowed the abbots to order the robe from a designated robe maker. See TAMAMURO 1995, 29.

11. Financial accounting records of Eiheiiji abbots reveal that this lengthy trip to the five main points of authority—Edo Castle (the *bakufu*), Eiheiiji (the supreme head temple), Dōshōan,

While the *bakufu* was able to establish a new process for the administration of the process of awarding the purple robe, the increasingly commercial culture of the Edo period allowed for leading Sōtō Zen clerics to bypass the aspects of the new regulatory regime. For example, although Buyō Inshi could have exaggerated his claims that to secure the abbotship of Eihei-ji, “it is necessary to ready 2,000 *ryō*,” in fact, according to Tamamuro Fumio’s analysis of the accounting books, the figure was even higher. In the case of Daikō Myōgaku 大晃明覚 (the sixtieth abbot of Eihei-ji, appointed in 1848), just to meet the Shogun in Edo to receive the official appointment letter required over 78 *ryō*, which, if converted to rice bushels at the market price that year, were equivalent to roughly 49 *koku* 石 (rice yield measurement), more than the amount Eihei-ji could produce annually in its own rice fields (which varied from 30–35 *koku* of rice per year).¹² In fact, the total amount of money spent by Daikō Myōgaku and his retinue on travel, lodging, bribes, and servants, among other expenses for the entire trip from Edo to Eihei-ji, to Kyoto and back to Eihei-ji, was 2,200 *ryō*. The financial records of Tenrin Kōchō 天臨高長 (the fifty-fifth Eihei-ji abbot, appointed in 1822) also totals over 2,270 *ryō* (TAMAMURO 1999, 92). Both figures exceeded Buyō Inshi’s estimate and Eihei-ji’s yearly income from its rice fields. It therefore appears that aspiring abbots, however spiritually inclined, must have also been skillful fund-raisers.

The *bakufu* had less control over the more ordinary clerics who were installed as “temporary abbots” at either Eihei-ji or Sōjiji temples before returning to their rural temples as fully-fledged abbots.¹³ The vast majority of Edo-period Sōtō Zen clerics were able to upgrade their robe color (*ten’è*) without having complied with the *bakufu* regulations regarding years of training. This was accomplished, as Buyō Inshi claimed, by preparing a “bribe” (as he put it), or a “processing fee” (as the recipients of the money likely viewed it), of 10 *ryō* for the imperial household, 5 *ryō* for the supreme head temple, and 5 *ryō* for the Kajūji (the

Kajūji (a broker to the imperial household that also served the Higashi Honganji (Jōdo Shin), Rinzaï Gozan (Zen), and Ji schools), and the Kyoto Palace (the imperial household)—required substantial amounts of money. See TAMAMURO 1999, 90–135.

12. These include the financial accounting of the sixtieth Eihei-ji abbot, Daikō Myōgaku, in *Dōshōan monjo* 2184806099.

13. The initial regulation of the practice of requiring temporary abbotship was issued prior to the Edo period—in 1590 (for Sōjiji) and 1592 (for Eihei-ji)—which permitted elderly clerics unable to endure the lengthy traveling to receive imperial sanction from the supreme head temple, without having to go to Kyoto. However, under the Tokugawa regime, a tightening of the rules (from 1620) required the head temples to take responsibility for ensuring that all clerics made the journey to Kyoto to receive proper authorization. This requirement of visiting both the head temple and the imperial household in Kyoto can be confirmed at least until Meiji 4 (1871). For full documentation of the development of temporary abbotship, see EIHEIJISHI HENSAN YINKAI 1982, 586–632.

Kyoto brokerage house to the imperial household) for a total of 20 *ryō*. Recently though, Tamamuro Fumio has calculated the actual figure at closer to 40 *ryō*.¹⁴ Whatever the monetary figure, the basic system for recognizing and promoting regular Sōtō Zen clerics had become standardized by the early 1700s.

A 1801 letter of clarification from the Sōtō Zen sect to the Edo *bakufu*'s Office of Temple and Shrines explained the procedure:

A Memorandum on the Promotion and Ranks of Sōtō Clerics

[The candidate for the change in robe color] must have twenty-five years of clerical training [lit. *hōrō*, Dharma age]. They must go to either Eiheiiji or Sōjiji to serve as a formal abbot of the head temple with a letter of recommendation from their Dharma transmission master, their head temple, or their regional liaison temple (*sōroku* 僧録). After this, they must go to Kyoto, and using Kajūji as their broker, receive permission [from the imperial household]. Only after this can they become chief abbot of a temple. Regarding the Dharma rank of the promoted, this is determined according to the date on which the permission form has been submitted. Those who receive approval should make public, in front of a gathering at the temple, their intentions to serve as temple abbot.... As for the robe, aside from the purple robe, any colored robe is permitted to be worn.¹⁵

This official Sōtō Zen position reinforced the government regulation that required twenty-five years of clerical training. Recent research by Japanese scholars has demonstrated that although this length of clerical training was seldom adhered to, clerics almost universally adhered to the following basic steps for obtaining the license to serve as a regular Sōtō Zen temple abbot by the late seventeenth century:

Ordinary Clerical Candidate for Temple Abbotship is Recommended Locally

(whether or not twenty-five years of clerical training is actually completed)

Eiheiiji or Sōjiji Temporary Abbotship

(actual stay at temple required, even if only for one night)

Kyoto Dōshōan

(the Sōtō Zen sect's special lodgings and broker to the imperial household)

14. While Buyō Inshi (1816) estimated a cost of 20 *ryō* for the awarding of the abbotship permission, Hirose Ryōkō, has argued that a little over 18 *ryō* was raised and spent by the new temple abbot in 1639, most of which went to Eiheiiji, Dōshōan, Kajūji, and the robe maker. See EIHEIJI SHI HENSAN I'INKAI 1982, 628–32. However, analyzing more cases, Tamamuro Fumio has convincingly argued that over the course of the Edo period, an average temple abbot spent 35–36 *ryō* in Kyoto and 5 *ryō* at the supreme head temple, thus a total of roughly 40 *ryō* (TAMAMURO 1999, 85).

15. *Sōtōshū shusse kaikyū kakiage* 曹洞宗出世階級書上 (1801) by the Kansansetsu 関三利.

Kyoto Kajūji

(aristocrat's house that served as the broker to put in the request for imperial sanction)

Kyoto Buke Densō

(Hirohashi or Kajūji, that gave final approval before submission of the request)

Kyoto Palace (Gosho)

(the imperial household gave permission to change robe color and serve as abbot)

Return to Local Temple

(the cleric makes an announcement of abbotship approval at a public meeting of his parishioners)

Although Eiheiji and Sōjiji had relations with the imperial household through other aristocratic families prior to the mid-1600s, with Dōshōan's intervention, the Kajūji became the sole clearinghouse for all matters requiring imperial sanction throughout the rest of the Edo period. With the exception of the Tendai, Hossō, and Kogi Shingon schools, which traditionally drew clerics from the imperial family and court nobles to their *monzeki* 門跡 temples, all other Buddhist sects seeking imperial sanction required the mediation of either the intermediary for *bakufu* affairs (*buke densō* 武家伝奏, most often, the Kajūji) and/or one of the many aristocratic houses that served as brokers.¹⁶ By requiring Sōtō Zen clerics to go through both Dōshōan and the Kajūji in Kyoto, the head temples, the Kyoto imperial and aristocratic houses, and the *bakufu* all hoped to control the clergy. The various intermediaries gave Eiheiji and Sōjiji temples, for example, a level of standardization of clerical training (which varied greatly according to region) that could be demanded of regular clerics. The authority of the head temples was also made clear through this procedure, especially when a visit and monetary donations were required. For the Kyoto imperial household, such intermediaries served as buffers to an institution they hoped would be viewed as a religio-political source of sanction, and also helped raise desperately needed funds.

As for the *bakufu*, since the procedure for ordinary clerics also required a final check with a *bakufu*-affiliated institution (*buke densō*), it was able to insert

16. In these sects, their respective head temples could certain high ranks without imperial household involvement. With their affiliation to the Tendai and Shingon schools, the Honzan and Tōzan branches of the Shugen sect also were able to bypass aristocratic household intermediaries. Though the Jōdo Shin Honganji was officially ranked as *jun-monzeki*, one rank below a *monzeki* temple, they still required intermediaries. For further discussion of these issues, see HAYASHI 1994; TAKANO 1989.

itself into the approval process regarding Sōtō Zen clerical training and advancement.¹⁷ In this fashion, especially after the 1627 Purple Robe Incident, the Tokugawa government was, to a certain degree, able to fundamentally reshape the administration of Buddhist institutions.

Conclusion

During the first half of the Edo period, the *bakufu* transformed the medieval structures and practices of the Sōtō Zen sect with new political imperatives that provided an early modern pyramidal structure of authority that gave a legal framework within which Sōtō Zen could function as a unified sect transcending regional and lineage boundaries, encompassing the whole of Japan. From Tokugawa Ieyasu's early directives to ongoing negotiations regarding the awarding of purple robes, Sōtō Zen was an organization largely shaped by the state. Regulations on everything from the number of years required for clerical training to temple hierarchy were part of an attempt by the new regime to rule by directives. This was intended in part to clarify temple authority over parishioners, as well as head temple authority over branch temples, and, most importantly, *bakufu* authority over all institutions. Indeed, especially after the purple-robe incident, the *bakufu* tried to insert itself into the decision-making process of Buddhist institutions to a degree not seen in earlier periods.

At the same time, Buyō Inshi's *Seji kenmonroku* critique of Sōtō Zen did not exaggerate the blatant flouting of *bakufu* regulations. As evidenced by the various acts he criticized—buying clerical ranks and titles or the amount of money spent by Eiheiiji and Sōjiji abbots to pay off brokers—such regulations were never completely implemented. Indeed, the involvement of Sōtō Zen clerics in writing the draft of the *Sōtōshū hatto* reveals that the formation and implementation of religious policy by the emergent early modern Buddhist order under the new regulatory regime instituted by the Tokugawa *bakufu* was never one-sided. So while the role and ability of the Tokugawa state in shaping religion is more than evident, close examination of particular sects, localities, and practices such as the awarding of high-ranking robes suggests a dynamic process of interventions by multiple parties in forming the early modern Buddhist order.

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17. Up until 1714, there were cases of clerics attempting to bypass this step, but firm control over the process was established after this date, see TAKANO 1989, 155.

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