

The Significance of the Nembutsu Selected by the Original Vow

JŌSHIN EGAMI

While it is true that the writing of the *Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu-shū* by Hōnen meant the declaration of independence on the part of the Jōdo Sect, the independence of the Jōdo Sect must be said to have been the most epoch-making event throughout the long history of Buddhism, one revolutionizing the old Buddhist tradition. Although it was the declaration of Tao-cho who had reached the profound existential awareness that of the two paths of Buddhism, the Path of the Holy was hard to tread and the Path of the Pure Land alone was easy to enter, it was not until the appearance of Hōnen that the Path of the Pure Land was established as an independent sect.

The central motif running through the entire volume of the *Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu-shū* is, of course, none other than the Nembutsu, which is clearly expressed in its title and subtitle: “*Namu Amida-butsu*: as for the practice of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land, Nembutsu is basic.” Besides there being no text throughout its entire contents unrelated to the Nembutsu, it was Hōnen’s contention that not only the Three Pure Land Sutras, but all Buddhist doctrinal systems and their practices are reducible to the Nembutsu practice, and Nembutsu is the only soteriological method and conclusion of the whole Buddhist doctrine. What was the reason Hōnen emphasised the significance of Nembutsu to such an

extent?

According to him, Nembutsu is the only practice especially selected and adopted by Amida Buddha's Original Vow for all sentient beings as the right practice for rebirth in the Pure Land. In other words, Hōnen's faith that the Nembutsu is all that matters is solely based upon Amida's Original Vow of Selection. It is therefore due to the fact that the Nembutsu was especially selected by Amida's Original Vow that throughout the entire volume of the *Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu-shū* the significance of the Nembutsu is consistently emphasized. Hence the title of "*Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu-shū*," as well as his statements such as "Thus Śākya-muni Buddha, Amida and all the Buddhas countless in number residing in the ten directions with one mind selected the only practice of Nembutsu," and "Recitation of Nembutsu is sure to secure rebirth in the Pure Land because of its being in accordance with Amida Buddha's Original Vow."

In this paper, I have tried to evaluate the significance of Nembutsu as selected by the Original Vow while examining the critical spirit pervading the *Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu-shū*.