

A Study of the Status of Priests in the Honganji During the Early Modern Period

Kenshi KUSANO

The aim of the present paper is to clarify the principle underlying the structure of the Honganji during the early modern period by analyzing the status of priests (*bozu*) of this religious organization. The main source of my study is the *Midoshu joshu zaron no koto*, which describes the conflict between two groups of priests, the *midoshu* and *joshu*, over the question of which group should receive precedence in seating. Through this study I plan to clarify the characteristics of early modern Honganji ecclesiastic organization. It is hoped that such approach will shed light on how the early modern Honganji differs from the medieval Honganji organization and how this change came about.

First, in chapter one, I present the goals of my paper, and in chapter two, I present a critical edition of the *Midoshu joshu zaron no koto*. In chapter three, I outline the contents of this text and discuss the historical circumstances behind this violent conflict between the *midoshu* and *joshu*.

Then in chapter four, I discuss the status system of the priests of the Honganji during the Sengoku period, a topic which has been subject to much investigation in the past. I show that the *midoshu* and *joshu* were originally two different groups of priests, and conclude that there was considerable potential for their conflict to erupt. I then point out that it is possible to

clarify the characteristics of the status system of Honganji priests by considering the causes of the conflict.

In chapter 5, I analyze the duties and functions of the *midoshu* and *joshu* during the early modern period. Compared with the Sengoku period, the importance of the latter within the Honganji decreased whereas the importance of the former increased. This was one of the causes of the conflict between them. Moreover, the change in importance attached to the duties and functions of the respective groups mirrors the change in the organizing principle of the Honganji from the Sengoku to the early modern period.

Chapter six takes up the reasons behind this change in the relative importance of the *midoshu* and *joshu*, and argues that it was due to a change in Honganji's method of organizing branch temples from the customary method of the Sengoku period to the bureaucratic method of the early modern period.

Finally in chapter seven, I point out that the change in Honganji's organizing principle stemmed from problems arising from changes in temple organization and changes in the social consciousness of the people of that period.