

Domestic Religion in Late Edo-Period Sermons for Temple Wives

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There are various paths to learning the Buddhist teachings and entering enlightenment. For women, in order to open the way to enlightenment, the usual way is to cut off their hair and shave their heads, wear the robes and take on the shape of a nun, observing the precepts. However, without becoming a nun, but instead getting married and having a husband, without observing the Buddhist precepts but still living in a marvelous temple and serving at the Buddha's side, being respected by people as a *bōmori-sama*, being blessed with the Buddha's gifts such as food and clothing, of course, but even adornments such as a comb or pearl brush, living a life of complete freedom, and beyond all this, in the next world being able to be born in the Pure Land and become a Buddha—for this path, there is none other than the teachings of the founder Shinran.

Sōboku 僧僕 (1719–1762), *Bōmori saisoku no hōgo* 坊守催促の法語

ALTHOUGH the unique brand of Shin Buddhist cleric, who is “neither a monk nor layman,” is well known to the scholarly world, his wife, the *bōmori* 坊守 (literally, “temple guardian”) is not. Today *bōmori* enjoy considerably more recognition and status than do wives in other Buddhist sects, where clerical marriage has only been openly recognized since the late Meiji period (1868–1912).¹ However, written sources regarding *bōmori*

THE AUTHOR would like to thank Matsukane Naomi and Nasu Eishō for their assistance in locating and interpreting sources, and Matthew Mitchell, Barbara Ambros, and the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on this article.

¹ For a discussion of the debate about clerical marriage in modern Japanese Buddhism, see Pham 2011 and Jaffe 2001. For an account of the problematic status of priests' wives in the Sōtō school, see Kawahashi 1995.

before the modern period are scarce, which may account for her relative absence from scholarly view.²

This paper presents selections from a genre of sermons aimed at *bōmori* from the early modern period in order to better understand the wife's role at Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 temples at that time. I examine in detail two sermons for *bōmori* by the late Edo-period (1603–1868) scholar-priests Sōboku and Tokuryū 徳龍 (1772–1858) of the Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 and Higashi Honganji 東本願寺 organizations, respectively. These texts inspired similar sermons by successive generations of prominent priests, and remained authoritative staples of the educational literature for *bōmori* until just a few decades ago.

Previous scholarship on these sermons has emphasized their polemical function in the discourse of male priests regarding the codification of ideals for Shin temple wives. For instance, in his 2001 book on clerical marriage, Richard Jaffe showed that as Shin priests came under critical fire in the Edo period for their exceptional practices of meat-eating and marriage, they were motivated to publicly codify the role of temple wife.³ Shin Buddhist scholar Ikeda Gyōshin and historian Endō Hajime have observed that although the earliest Shin congregations associated with Bukkōji temple appear to have been run cooperatively by a husband and wife pair, known as the *bōzu* 坊主 (male priest) and the *bōmori*, the term *bōmori* was not used in Honganji discourse until the Edo period.⁴ As it emerged in this period, however, the term accrued domestic connotations in line with the contemporary norms for upper-class wives. For instance, Genchi 玄智

² Endō Hajime (1989, 2000, and 2002) has begun uncovering the pre-modern history of the *bōmori* with his examination of early congregations affiliated with the Bukkōji 仏光寺. However, his data from the Honganji 本願寺 context primarily concerns the aristocratic wives of Honganji abbots rather than congregational priests' wives, and his analysis is limited to the medieval period. The sole exception to the dearth of literature on *bōmori* in Western languages is the work of Simone Heidegger (2006, 2010), which examines the problem of gender discrimination in the Jōdo Shinshū from its inception through the contemporary debate.

³ Jaffe 2001, p. 53.

⁴ Early Honganji congregations may also have been led by husband and wife pairs, but the sources that point to the *bōmori*'s existence in the case of early Bukkōji communities, such as portrait lineages and salvation registries, were pointedly rejected as propagation tools by the Honganji's leader Kakunyo 覚如 (1270–1351). See Chiba 2002, p. 7, and Kakunyo's *Gaijashō* 改邪鈔, *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書 (hereafter, *SSZ*), vol. 3, p. 66. The first source to mention priests' wives in the Honganji context are two letters penned by the eighth abbot, Rennyo 蓮如 (1415–1499), but these use a secular term for wife, *naihō* 内方.

(1734–1794) includes a brief definition of the term in his 1774 *Kōshinroku* 考信録, explaining that, “Just as the wife in the secular world is said to guard the home (*rusui* 留守居), in the same sense *bōmori* means to watch over the temple.”⁵ Ikeda and Endō emphasize that descriptions such as this one indicate a shift from medieval descriptions of *bōmori* as the congregational proprietress (*dōjō no aruji* 道場の主 or *yanushi* 家主)—in other words, the co-leader of the congregation along with her husband—to the more domesticated role of the stay-at-home (*rusui*). This role presumably resembled that of wives in secular society, particularly those of the samurai class.⁶

I shall argue, however, that even as samurai ideals for wives as the inside help (*naijo* 内助) of their husbands and Confucian principles of female obedience were woven into the normative portrayal of *bōmori*, the sense of her as distinct from the laity and enjoying a special karmic predisposition remained strong. Indeed, her domestic duties were imbued with religious significance, and were conceived as important forms of propagation. The *bōmori* is described as the economist of the Buddha’s gifts, the custodian of the material space for worship, and a hostess capable of facilitating connections between Amida 阿彌陀 and his adherents. My examination of the social and soteriological depiction of *bōmori* in these sermons will illuminate the place of the priest’s wife precisely at the intersection of Shin religiosity and domesticity.

HISTORICAL AND DOCTRINAL BACKGROUND FOR *BŌMORI* SERMONS

Possibilities for a Domestic Religion in Shin Buddhism

The rather significant religious role for the *bōmori* described in these documents springs from the unique emphasis in Shin Buddhist teachings on other power (*tariki* 他力, the workings of Amida), and the resulting redefinition of the function of the religious specialist in this tradition. The religious practice prescribed by Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), the founder of Shin Buddhism, is not based on calculated efforts to attain enlightenment or generate merit as may be recommended in other Buddhist traditions, but rather is grounded in the gratitude one feels toward Amida for his gift of salvation. Through the experience of one’s own faith (*shinjin* 信心),

⁵ *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* 真宗史料集成 (hereafter, SSS), vol. 4, p. 499.

⁶ Ikeda 2002, p. 363, and Endō and Mochizuki 1997, p. 35.

one naturally desires to cause others to have faith. Together, this two-part phenomenon is referred to as *jishin kyōninshin* 自信教人信 (“having faith oneself and causing others to have faith”).⁷ The operations of gratitude for one’s debt to Amida (known as *hōon* 報恩 or *butsuon hōsha* 仏恩報謝) by one who has attained faith are the foundation of religious practice in Shin Buddhism.

The religious function of priests in such a doctrinal context is revolutionized. Specifically, Shinran’s emphasis on other power means that rituals conducted by religious professionals are no longer understood to produce any kind of external benefit. Although rituals are of course still performed by Shin Buddhist clerics, their purpose falls within the sphere of *jishin kyōninshin*, rather than the more conventional Buddhist explanations of rituals as effecting a transfer of merit.⁸ While the reading of religious texts in a ritualized environment provides an important opportunity for the teachings to be taught and heard and for celebrating the virtue of the Buddha (*butoku sandan* 仏徳讃嘆), it ranks alongside other religious practices as *jishin kyōninshin*. As a result, Shin priests have no privileged capacity to affect the salvation of their parishioners. Instead, they are religious professionals in the sense that, unlike the laity, their primary vocation is to devote their efforts to the grateful repayment of their debt to Amida by expanding the religious community.

The most obvious effect of such a doctrinal stance is to “secularize” the sphere of what has previously been religiously privileged (such as ritual practices, meditation, and monastic renunciation). However, it also introduces the possibility of radicalizing even apparently mundane encounters. Any encounter between Amida, the *nenbutsu* 念仏,⁹ the Shin teachings, and the temple, could be an occasion (*en* 縁 or *kien* 機縁) for one’s faith to arise, according to Amida’s mysterious compassion. In the case of a temple resi-

⁷ Shinran’s account of *jishin kyōninshin* is found in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証 (for instance, *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 77), and is discussed in Dobbins 2002, p. 30. Minor and Ann Rogers also discuss Shinshū piety as a practice of gratitude containing the dual dimensions of uncalculated action and the fulfillment of social obligations (1991, pp. 291–307).

⁸ The interpretation of Shin rituals is of course far from univocal, and Mark Blum (2000) has examined the tension between orthodox understandings of ritual and the persistent practice of mortuary and memorial rites by Shin Buddhist priests.

⁹ The *nenbutsu* refers to the Pure Land Buddhist devotional practice of meditating on or uttering the Buddha’s name through the phrase, *Namu Amida Butsu* 南無阿彌陀仏, literally, “I take refuge in the Buddha Amida.” Shinran understood the “true *nenbutsu*” as being uttered with a mind of absolute faith and without volition, as it was bestowed upon the believer by Amida.

dent, then, sharing tea and snacks with parishioners who stop by the temple, raising one's children (who will someday grow up to spread the teachings to others), and other similarly domestic activities all are explained as *butsuon hōsha*, or grateful striving in repayment of one's debt to the Buddha. As I outline the role prescribed in these sermons for temple wives in relation to the laity, the Buddha, and the Shin teachings, I will highlight the notions of domestic religion implicit in Sōboku's and Tokuryū's explanations.

The Authors and the Genre

Prior to the Edo period, the vast majority of local Shin groups had existed as confraternities (*kō* 講) or congregations (*dōjō* 道場), but in the seventeenth century these congregations steadily transitioned to formal temple status.¹⁰ This was part of an increasing centralization of the Shin organization at the administrative centers in Kyoto, Nishi and Higashi Honganji, coinciding with the Tokugawa government's exertion of control over Buddhist institutions and networks. As Shin temples and clerics came into the purview of the regulatory structures of the *mibunsei* 身分制 or status system, the government recognized Shin clerics as monks (*sōryo* 僧侶) while exempting them from the prohibitions on meat-eating and marriage that applied to the other Buddhist sects.¹¹ As a result, ordination standards for local Shin priests became more formalized at this time; however, we still know relatively little about the concrete activities and level of religious education of their wives. Indeed, the situation of the Shinshū in the Edo period outside of the Kyoto doctrinal academies is only recently being taken up as a subject of scholarly inquiry, and the question of the role of temple wives has scarcely been broached.¹²

Regional propagation in the Shinshū since the time of Rennyō had been carried out by priests from the head temple, who would travel to different areas to relay the writings (*gosho* 御書 or *shōsoku* 消息) of Honganji's abbot, who was referred to as the *zenchishiki* 善知識 or "good teacher." During the Edo period, priestly labor at Nishi and Higashi Honganji became increasingly segregated so that some priests were allocated primarily administrative or fund-raising roles, and those trained in doctrinal

¹⁰ Dobbins 2002, p. 151; SSS, vol. 9, pp. 18–19.

¹¹ This exception was made in a 1665 regulation (*hatto* 法度) which allowed for meat-eating and marriage by priests only in the Buddhist sects "in which it was customary" (SSS, vol. 9, pp. 21–22).

¹² See Sawa 2008b, Sawa and Takano 2008, and Ueba 1999.

studies (scholar-priests or *gakusō* 学僧) would travel into the provinces themselves to give dharma-talks at temples or confraternities, sometimes staying at individual members' homes.¹³ The sermons for temple wives I examine here were part of the efforts of these scholar-priests to explain the teachings to adherents in local areas. Analogous sermons were either aimed at a general audience or specific categories of adherents such as laywomen and children or priests (*bōzu*).

The quotation at the beginning of this paper is from Sōboku's sermon entitled *Bōmori saisoku no hōgo*.¹⁴ Sōboku was the head scholar (*nōke* 能化) of Nishi Honganji's Gakurin 学林 doctrinal academy, and in his brief career, produced several important doctrinal works and many prominent disciples. He also traveled widely for proselytization, and it is said that Sōboku's interest in speaking to the religious condition of a wide range of practitioners was both innovative and influential.¹⁵ The other sermon I examine here, entitled *Bōmori kyōkai kikigaki* 坊守教誡聞書, was authored by Tokuryū, a scholar of the highest rank in the Higashi Honganji organization.¹⁶ Tokuryū, also known as Kōjuin 香樹院, was originally from Echigo (modern-day Niigata prefecture) and studied with Jinrei 深励 (1749–1817) at the latter's academy. Like Sōboku, he was an active propagator in the provinces.¹⁷ Both Tokuryū's and Sōboku's texts inspired similar sermons by their disciples at the Shin doctrinal academies, and were likely the basis for propagation by regional and local priests as well.

Scholar-priests such as Sōboku and Tokuryū, responding to the concerns and level of doctrinal understanding of their lay audiences, articulated what has been distinguished as “teachings” (*oshie* 教え), rather than the “doctrine” (*kyōgi* 教義) that would have been propounded at the Shin academies.¹⁸

¹³ Ueba 1999, pp. 79–80. See Harrison 1992 for a literary study of early modern Shin Buddhist sermons.

¹⁴ Ryukoku University Library, Call No. 024.3/511/1. This manuscript is a copy made by Saitō Riuemon 齋藤利右衛門 in 1775 in present-day Yamagata prefecture. An additional copy extant at Ryukoku University is titled *Bōmori hōgo* 坊守法語, and is coupled with a companion sermon for temple priests called *Bōzu seikai* 坊主制戒 (Call No. 105.1/94/1).

¹⁵ Nihon Bukkyō Jinmei Jiten Hensan Iinkai 1992, p. 456; Shinshū Shinjiten Hensankai 1983, p. 333; Tatsuguchi 2009.

¹⁶ This sermon is extant as an 1891 printing through the press of Nishimura Kurōemon 西村九朗右衛門 of a manuscript from Myōrakuji 妙楽寺 temple in Shiga prefecture (Tokuryū 1891, Otani University Library, Call No. 小 158.1).

¹⁷ Sawa 2008b, pp. 275–304; Ueba 1999, pp. 78–81; Shinshū Shinjiten Hensankai 1983, p. 376.

¹⁸ Sawa 2008b, pp. 276–77.

Sermons of this period are characterized by frequent references to Buddhist hells and how to avoid them, and to the necessity of following civil laws and Confucian morality (*ōbō jingi* 王法仁義, literally, “kingly law and humane duty”) while also keeping in mind the ultimate concerns of Buddhism, namely, the Buddhist teachings (*buppō* 仏法) and the great matter of the next life (*goshō no ichidaiji* 後生の一大事).¹⁹ As these sermonizers instructed priests’ wives on matters of everyday morality, they encouraged *bōmori* to embody those virtues espoused for wives in the broader society.

Traditionally, both Western and Japanese scholars have been most concerned with the writings of elite scholar-monks as indicative of the dominant doctrinal understanding of the Buddhist tradition. Recently, however, the scholastic focus has been decentered to some degree to include more popular understandings of Buddhist teachings.²⁰ In the context of the Jōdo Shinshū, Takano Toshihiko and Sawa Hirokatsu have tried to shed light on the religious knowledge (*chi* 知) of ordinary laypeople in the Shinshū by analyzing sermons and records of exchanges between laity and scholar-priests.²¹ As such popular teachings come into the scholarly purview, a careful analysis of them can provide a window into the position of religious practitioners who might otherwise remain invisible. My aim here is to gain insight into the special duties and identity of the Shin temple family, particularly as regards the feminized forms of religious labor that are solicited from the *bōmori*.

THE *BŌMORI* AS WIFE OF THE RELIGIOUS HOUSEHOLD

In the quotation from Sōboku cited at the outset of this paper, the *bōmori* is depicted as enjoying a unique existence in the Buddhist world. Residing precisely on the boundary between lay and cleric, the *bōmori* is described as a religious professional who need not renounce her gender. Although she may keep her hair long, adorn herself with accessories, get married, and raise children, she is still able to live in a beautiful temple whose altar is a reproduction of the Pure Land and cohabit with a priest who can teach

¹⁹ The concern with establishing the complementarity of Shin teachings with worldly power structures was prevalent in the early modern period, but certainly did not originate in this period. See, for example, Yamazaki 1997, and Rogers and Rogers 2002, especially pp. 307–15.

²⁰ See, for example, Lori Meeks’s discussion of the problem of “locating the dominant discourse” in pre-modern Buddhism (2010, p. 14), and James Dobbins’s 2004 study of the letters of Shinran’s wife Eshinni 恵信尼 (1182–1268?).

²¹ Sawa and Nakano 2008.

the dharma to her. Sōboku emphasizes that this life is the only such opportunity available to women in this world.

As a priest's wife, the *bōmori*'s relationship to her husband is both like and unlike that of a secular wife. Sōboku characterizes the couple's relationship not only as a marital one, but also as a relationship between a female disciple and her master:

Bōmori must not think of their husbands just as any other man in the world. You should revere him as the one who will go before you and lead you into the Pure Land from this world of suffering. . . . It is said of a woman who looks down on a priest: in this world she will be punished by laws, and in the next she will fall into hell. But a *bōmori* exchanges marital vows with a priest in this world, and in the next she is reborn in the Pure Land so she can enjoy it together with him. She should thus intone the *nen-butsu* without neglect.²²

The *bōmori* is instructed to consider her husband not as an ordinary husband, but as a teacher who will lead her to salvation. Sōboku also implies that the couple's karma is interlinked in such a way that they will be reborn together in the next life, the Pure Land.

Here, as in other places in the sermons, we are reminded of the tension between rigorous doctrinal descriptions of the nature of Amida and the Pure Land and the understandings commonly expressed in popular teachings. Specifically, the idea that a husband and wife will be reborn together in recognizable form in the Pure Land contradicts statements in the *Wuliangshoujing* 無量壽經 (Jp. *Muryōjūkyō*; Skt. *Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra*, hereafter *Larger Pure Land Sutra*) that everyone reborn in Amida's paradise will do so in the body of a man.²³ Indeed, elsewhere in the same sermon women's bodies are said to be burdened with karmic obstructions (*goshō* 五障) that will make it impossible for them to become enlightened or be reborn in the Pure Land as women.²⁴ James Dobbins identified a similar tension in his study of the letters of Shinran's wife Eshinni, in which she assures her daughter that they will meet again after death in the Pure Land, presumably in recognizable form, despite the orthodox teaching—affirmed by her own husband—that

²² Sōboku 1775.

²³ Inagaki 1995, pp. 246–47.

²⁴ I discuss the sermons' presentation of women's soteriology in more detail in the final section of this article.

women would have to surrender their sex in order to enter the Pure Land.²⁵ The implicit sense that family structures, and thus sexual identity, will remain intact in the Pure Land is quite common in popular Pure Land literature and in colloquial teachings such as these sermons.²⁶

Although in places Sōboku emphasizes the husband's identity as priest and teacher to his wife, in other respects their relationship is similar to that of secular husbands and wives. The Confucian ideal of the wife as the moral compass for the family applies to the *bōmori* as well, and recommends her gentle counseling of her husband if he should exhibit moral laxness. Her husband, even though he has previously been described as a religious teacher who will lead her into the Pure Land, is also human and thus prone to transgression. In such cases, she is entreated to offer him gentle moral guidance whenever he goes astray:

Even though your husband is a priest, he can leap out of those priestly robes and fall into an endless hell. . . . Even if your husband has an immoral heart, do not condemn him. Instead, you should soften your expression and gently remonstrate him using words. If those words truly emerge from your heart, no matter how hardhearted your husband is, he will certainly amend himself.²⁷

Descriptions such as these of the proper behavior of temple wives are Confucian tropes aligned with the discourse in society at large concerning women's virtue, as found in popular educational books for women.²⁸ Wives in upper-class and samurai homes in particular were to be in charge of the moral cultivation of the entire household (which also included servants and extended family members).²⁹ Sōboku's instructions for *bōmori* here are consistent with such norms. Indeed, he explicitly refers to contemporary

²⁵ Dobbins 2004, pp. 104–5.

²⁶ Galen Amstutz notes that one can identify four different modes of understanding the Pure Land, ranging from vernacular to technical doctrinal, that would help to explain this seeming inconsistency (2008, pp. 38–39).

²⁷ Sōboku 1775.

²⁸ For examples of non-Shinshū morality literature for women of this period, see Tucker 2006, Lindsey 2005, Tocco 2003, and Emori 1994. Keeping in mind the potentially polemical function of these sermons that Jaffe and others have emphasized, we should recall that at least part of the aim of the sermonizers may have been to publicly represent the *bōmori*'s role as conforming to accepted societal norms for wives in order to stave off criticism concerning the depravity of Shin clerical marriage.

²⁹ Tocco 2003, p. 211.

Confucian morality tracts: “For the edification of women in general,” he writes, “nowadays there are published many writings by wise Chinese or Japanese sages for the training of women, and it is good to read these and do as they say.” But in fact he does so to distinguish the *bōmori* from her secular counterparts. Sōboku notes that while the qualities espoused for *bōmori* may resemble those that all women are expected to cultivate, he points to an underlying religious dimension to both her humility and her domestic duties.

This dimension comes through most clearly in Sōboku’s account of the *bōmori*’s responsibilities as a mother. Just as the moral guidance of her husband is more significant for the *bōmori* whose husband is a Buddhist priest, her child-rearing duties have particular gravity since her children represent the temple and, presumably, will someday become priests and *bōmori* themselves.

When raising your child or grandchild, dressing them in gorgeous clothes and living in luxury is a wasteful consumption of the Buddha’s goods, and the child could become spoiled and be misjudged by people. Particularly with male children, this child will someday be tonsured, so you should take care not to dress him in patterned, red, or purple kimono. Further, activities that are careless or in jest are utterly meritless, as he must be educated with care. Especially when you are pregnant, taking care of your womb is very important. After five months, the fetus has taken the shape of a human, so in the child’s stead you should frequently pray to the Buddha in order to form a bond with him.³⁰

Her duty as a temple mother includes taking care in raising both her male and female children, but particularly her boys. While the child is still in her womb, she should take care of herself physically, and spiritually she should forge a karmic connection, or *en*, between the baby and Amida by praying to the Buddha on its behalf.³¹ As the child grows up, he should not be spoiled or dressed in overly decorative clothing, lest people should get the wrong idea about him. The implication is that temple children, although they are not yet priests themselves, are representatives of the temple, and should be made to observe thrift and simplicity.

³⁰ Sōboku 1775.

³¹ This suggestion is consistent with the prevailing eighteenth-century medical and moral discourse on pregnancy, particularly concerning the importance of the mother’s state of mind in “fetal education.” See Burns 2002, especially pp. 187–88.

Tokuryū similarly devotes several pages to the matter of child-rearing, presenting it as a religious activity to be distinguished from the equivalent efforts of the laity:

Bringing up temple children is truly a great role [of temple residents] that exceeds that of the laity. In particular, their sense of right and wrong is determined by their mother's power of thought rather than their father's. If we speak in terms of great sin (*daizai* 大罪), then it is a greater sin [to fail at this] than that of all other people. . . . The repayment of gratitude (*hōsha* 報謝) of child-rearing is even more than that of recommending the Buddhist teachings to just one parishioner,³² and more than that of amassing a great fortune and donating it to someone for the construction of a temple. Further, if your own child becomes someone who can send one hundred, or two hundred of the temple's parishioners to the Pure Land, then [having reared him this way] is to grasp the Buddhist teachings more than one who repays their gratitude to the Buddha with all the treasures that fill the three thousand worlds.³³

In Tokuryū's presentation, the *bōmori*'s labor in rearing her children is none other than Shin religious practice, an activity of grateful repayment of her debt to the Buddha. In the *bōmori*'s domestic obligation to raise her children to be good practitioners and good priests, she may make greater strides toward repaying her debt to Amida than a layperson is likely to achieve in an entire lifetime. Conversely, her failure to do this well is certainly, Tokuryū warns, an egregious sin.

THE *BŌMORI*'S RELIGIOUS ROLES

Temple Hostess

Just as the *bōmori*'s domestic identity as a wife and mother is imbued with religious significance due to her residence in a temple, so too do her religious

³² The Shin term for a parishioner is *monto* 門徒 rather than *danka* 檀家, as is used in other schools. The term *monto* implies a different mode of religious affiliation than that of lay and monastic, with adherents instead forming an egalitarian community of believers. However, accompanying the implementation of the Tokugawa temple-registration system (*terauke seido* 寺請制度), the legal, ancestral, and ritual relationship of Shin parishioners to the temple to which they belonged came to resemble that of other Buddhist schools ever more closely (SSS, vol. 9, p. 21).

³³ Tokuryū 1891, pp. 14–15.

duties have a distinctly domestic emphasis. Above all, in the absence of any other disciple or clerical assistant to her husband, the wife must stay at the temple when her husband is out, standing guard and remaining available to welcome the laity and “serve the Buddha.”

Concretely, such service often includes providing the food and adornments for the Buddha’s altar. Sōboku describes the *bōmori*’s daily tasks of maintaining the altar as follows:

In a small temple, there are no assistant priests or disciples in residence, and so when the resident priest is out, the *bōmori* must [remain to] serve the Buddha. She must provide for him morning and night with a sincere heart, everything from the Buddha’s lantern and incense, to the flowers on the altar. It is particularly disgraceful if the plates used to serve the Buddha’s rice are soiled, and it is a result of the *bōmori*’s lack of faith.³⁴

Sōboku implies that the *bōmori*’s duties stem from her identity as a co-cleric to her husband: in a family-run temple, she is the de facto assistant priest. As personnel of the temple, her domestic work in tending to the altar is an example of *jishin kyōninshin*, work that is done out of gratitude to the Buddha and in order to “pay forward” the gift of faith. In this sense, her domestic labor is in fact a disclosure or performance of her faith; to do this work poorly or shoddily, Sōboku suggests, is evidence that her faith is lacking.

Tokuryū expands on the particular privilege enjoyed by temple residents as devotees whose sole occupation is performing grateful service to the Buddha. Even if the laity wished to devote themselves to the work of repaying their debt to the Buddha, he writes, they have to spend most of their time earning their subsistence, and so their religious life must remain secondary. For temple residents, however, the opportunities to perform service to the Buddha are unending, and extend even to seemingly mundane activities such as offering tea to a guest.

As for temple people, consider that we wake up in the morning and begin serving the Buddha [his morning rice]. The hall itself is not all that the temple is, however. Today the Buddha’s place of practice (*dōjō*) is everything inside of the temple gates. This is the place for continuing the Buddhist teachings. When we do things such as sharing our food and drink with the parishioners

³⁴ Sōboku 1775.

who come to visit, we do so because all of this is the work of the Buddha and Shinran. In particular, Rennyō has said that lay followers are the most honored guests of the founder Shinran.³⁵ Nowhere among the people of the world is there a guest so fine as this; we must treat our laity just this honorably. . . . For example, even if there is a parishioner who dislikes the Buddhist teachings, if first of all the *bōmori* thinks of him as the most treasured guest and treats him as such, he will from his own volition feel friendly toward the temple and want to come. . . . The first priority of the *bōmori*'s service to the Buddha and Shinran is to make the parishioner's visit to the temple into an opportunity to hear the Buddhist teachings—this is of the essence, and she must rush to do it.³⁶

Tokuryū notes that by simply attracting laity to the temple with her hospitality and openness, the *bōmori* could naturally create “opportunities for them to hear the teachings” (*buppō o kiku ki* 仏法を聞く機).³⁷ Particularly when the priest is absent, it is assumed that the *bōmori* shall stay at home and provide a warm and inviting presence. Further citing Rennyō, Tokuryū goes on to compare the *bōmori*'s hospitable work in drawing people to the temple with acts such as offering guests a drink to the Buddha's own skillful means.

This is why Rennyō said, “If we consider that even giving a person *sake*, even giving him a single thing, his feeling of gratitude will be hastened, and it may allow him to hear the Buddhist teachings, and allow him to attain faith, then I think of all of these things as our grateful repayment of our debt to the Buddha.”³⁸

The priest himself is also capable of such a ministry of hospitality, of course, but serving tea to guests, as opposed to giving formal lectures or performing rituals, is a distinctly feminized activity. As I noted at the outset of this paper, in the Shin doctrinal context the work of hospitality is legitimately understood as both religious practice and as the propagative work of a religious professional.

³⁵ From Rennyō's recorded sayings in *Goichidaiki kikigaki* 御一代記聞書 (SSZ, vol. 3, p. 607).

³⁶ Tokuryū 1891, pp. 9–10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Rennyō's words are quoted from *Goichidaiki kikigaki* (SSZ, vol. 3, p. 584).

Teacher for the Female Laity

Although the *bōmori* was primarily expected to indirectly contribute to propagation by maintaining the temple as an inviting space and attracting followers to its premises with her hospitality, it is also suggested that she should help the female laity to understand and embrace the teachings in a more direct sense. For example, Tokuryū explicitly warns his *bōmori* listeners that they will have no excuse before Amida if any of their female followers were to fall into hell.

Because women in particular have various misunderstandings, even if they want to listen to the teachings they have many obstructions. Thus, it is the *bōmori*'s job to take this on and make them listen to the teachings. Although there is no distinction between male and female parishioners, in particular if a [male] parishioner's wife or daughter were to fall into hell, then the *bōmori* certainly would have no excuse for the Buddha.³⁹

The *bōmori* is envisioned as being in an ideal position to connect with the temple's female parishioners, whether because of female followers' karmic barriers to understanding Buddhism, which the *bōmori* as a woman presumably shares, or the practical difficulty the male priest may have in communicating with women.

In a sense, the *bōmori*'s imagined ability to help female followers understand the teachings and attain faith in Amida is a mystery. As there were no doctrinal academies or ordination opportunities for women in the Shinshū at this time, we are left to wonder where she was to obtain the necessary expertise for such feminized propagation. Was her authority grounded in mere association with the temple rather than actual knowledge of doctrine and scriptures? It was presumably expected that she would learn what she needed to know about doctrine from her own father growing up, or from her husband after marriage.

However, we can also deduce from Tokuryū's text that *bōmori* may have listened to sermons such as these alongside a number of her peers who had gathered from nearby temples. "Beyond what is contained in this sermon," Tokuryū's last line reads, "I have already given instructions to the resident priest, so when you get back to your temple, please ask him."⁴⁰ Young temple wives presumably could leave their home temple to attend his lecture

³⁹ Tokuryū 1891, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

(contradicting Tokuryū's suggestion elsewhere in the same sermon that they were never to leave "the Buddha's side") because of the presence of mothers or mothers-in-law, who could stay at home and look after the temple's domestic matters.⁴¹ While this particular gathering for doctrinal study was not as formalized, local chapters of a central female confraternity known as Saishōkō 最勝講 ("Association of the Most Excellent") had begun to be established by Nishi Honganji in the late Edo period, and in at least one case *bōmori* were specifically mentioned as invited participants in the correspondence from the head temple.⁴²

The suggestion that *bōmori* would bear a special responsibility with regards to the salvation of their female parishioners brings our attention to another function of these sermons. If the sermonizers expected temple wives to be able to transmit the Buddhist teachings to the female laity in a meaningful way, they presumably sought to provide *bōmori* with enough familiarity with doctrine to equip them for this role. Though the sermons touch upon important concepts, they contain relatively few scriptural references, and instead are characterized by vernacular language and colorful parables relating to filial piety and child-rearing likely to be familiar to young wives and mothers. Such simple and accessible presentations of the teachings would presumably make it easier for *bōmori* to effectively communicate Shin messages to female laity.⁴³

To what extent they actually did serve as teachers is unclear from the available sources. It is difficult to imagine *bōmori* acting as formal lecturers at meetings of female confraternities or study groups. However, as adult temple residents with a status distinct from that of lay followers, their words and behavior in less formal settings would have carried a particular kind of weight, and perhaps even authority. Thus, the *bōmori*'s propagation likely took place in fairly colloquial venues, such as over tea while hosting laity for informal visits to the temple or in encounters about town.

⁴¹ Although Anne Walthall has noted that wealthy farming women during the Edo period were more likely to be able to travel in their "retirement" (in other words, after the addition of a daughter-in-law to their household), various anecdotes in Tokuryū's sermon suggest that his audience was composed of younger *bōmori* (Walthall 1991, pp. 66–67).

⁴² Chiba 2002, p. 72. Indeed, all-female gatherings for religious study and discussion were mentioned in Rennyō's letters from the fifteenth century (Oguri 1987, p. 127; Matsumura 2006, p. 67), so it is easy to imagine that informal, perhaps sporadic, meetings of *bōmori* may have gone unregistered at various local temples or congregations in the intervening centuries.

⁴³ See Sawa's analysis in 2008a, p. 123.

THE RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF *BŌMORI*

Tokuryū and Sōboku's purpose in presenting teachings on women's salvation was likely twofold: first, to prepare *bōmori* to explain the teachings in simple terms to their female parishioners, and second, to inform and strengthen the faith of *bōmori* themselves. These two sermonizers' presentation of the religious condition of *bōmori* in particular is linked both to the broader Buddhist discourse on women's obstructions and to the Shin Buddhist understanding of the distinctive privilege—and potential for transgression—of temple residents.

Shin Buddhist Teachings on Women's Rebirth (Nyonin Ōjō 女人往生)

Pre-modern Shin Buddhist teachings on women's salvation were rooted in the classical Mahayana Buddhist view that women's bodies possessed five obstacles (*goshō*) that would prevent them from being directly born into five different states of being, one of which was a Buddha. Despite such karmic limitations, the Pure Land Buddhist tradition since Shandao 善導 (Jp. Zendo, 613–681) had held that women's bodies would be transformed into male ones as they were reborn in the Pure Land, a mechanism called *henjō nanshi* 變成男子.⁴⁴ This was derived from the thirty-fifth vow of the bodhisattva Dharmākara (who was to become the Buddha Amida) in the *Larger Pure Land Sutra*, in which the bodhisattva specifically promises rebirth in the Pure Land to women who hear the *nenbutsu*, have faith, aspire to enlightenment and despise their female bodies—thus tying his own enlightenment to the provision of women's salvation. Although Shinran did not emphasize the distinctive nature of women's salvation, he did allude to the thirty-fifth vow and women's five obstacles in two of his *wasan* 和讃 or hymns. Thus, he appears to have embraced the prevailing view that women were unable to be reborn in the Pure Land as women, but he believed that Amida's infinite compassion had provided a mechanism for women's salvation through their transformation into men.⁴⁵

Shin Buddhist teachings for women were further developed by Zonkaku 存覚 (1290–1373), a descendant of Shinran who provided significant doctrinal and organizational leadership in the early Shin movement. Zonkaku applied Shinran's idea that flawed people were the primary object of Amida's

⁴⁴ Dobbins 2004, pp. 97–98.

⁴⁵ See *Jōdo wasan* 浄土和讃 (SSZ, vol. 2, p. 493) and *Kōsō wasan* 高僧和讃 (SSZ, vol. 2, p. 508). For more on medieval Pure Land Buddhist views of women, see Dobbins 2004, pp. 93–102, and Kasahara 1975, pp. 128–76, 220–301.

vow (a teaching known as *akunin shōki* 悪人正機) especially to women, opening the way for understanding women—with their particularly burdensome karmic obstructions—as the primary object of the vow (*nyonin shōki* 女人正機).⁴⁶ Zonkaku's explanation of the special relationship between women and Amida's compassion became the staple of Shin teachings for women, influencing medieval and early modern popular teachings (for instance, *dangibon* 談義本) and the writings of Rennyo, the "second founder" of the Shinshū.

Rennyo penned two letters of instruction specifically for temple wives, which contain the underpinnings of the modern and early modern discourse on *bōmori*, and are directly cited in the sermons by Tokuryū and Sōboku. In these letters, Rennyo earnestly reminded *bōmori* of their karmic hindrances as women, which made them especially in need of the easy path provided by the Buddha Amida and the teachings of the Jōdo Shinshū. Echoing Zonkaku, he pointed out that after establishing the eighteenth vow, which was to apply to all unenlightened beings, Dharmākara had gone out of his way to establish the thirty-fifth vow for women. Thus, women should be especially grateful for Amida's suffering in establishing the Pure Land for their benefit. With regards to *bōmori* in particular, Rennyo speculated that those women who became the wives of priests were particularly fortunate in their karmic conditions (*shukuen* 宿縁) and must have enjoyed a deep connection with Amida to have been born or married into a temple.⁴⁷

Our early modern sermonizers follow Zonkaku and Rennyo in asserting women's spiritual weakness primarily to support the idea that their only course to salvation is to follow the Shin teachings, as the desire of women to attain Buddhist liberation had been ignored for eons by all of the various Buddhas until Amida. The sermons' emphasis was thus on the special consideration given to women by Amida in his establishment of the thirty-fifth vow providing for women's rebirth in the Pure Land. The relationship between this special consideration and the weighty spiritual obligation borne by women—and especially *bōmori*—is a complex one, as I explore below.

Tokuryū begins his sermon by lamenting the unfortunate karmic condition of women in general:

⁴⁶ Zonkaku's teachings for women are found in his *Nyonin ōjō kikigaki* 女人往生聞書 (SSZ, vol. 3, pp. 104–18) and the *Zonkaku hōgo* 存覚法語 (SSZ, vol. 3, pp. 353–74). This analysis is shared by Kasahara (1975, pp. 243–44) and Chiba (2002, pp. 6–7).

⁴⁷ These letters are known as *Tayashū naihō no kyōke* 多屋衆内方の教化 (SSZ, vol. 3, pp. 415–17) and *Osarae* おさらへ (SSZ, vol. 3, pp. 424–26). More extensive analyses of Rennyo's view of women can be found in Kasahara 1975, Okumoto 1996, Bloom 1998, Matsu-mura 2006, and Heidegger 2006.

First, because of the five obstacles and three obediences (*goshō sanshō* 五障三従), it is said that a woman's body is more deeply sinful than that of a man. As she has these obstructions, during the time in which she is wandering lost, she will never have a body that is free and happy in its karmic fruition. Further, she cannot attain the body of a Buddha. This is also preached in the Lotus Sutra. Thus it is often said that even though [men and women] may appear to have the same physical measurements, if one gathered the ignorance of the men of all the three thousand worlds, it would be the same as the karmic obstructions of a single woman. . . . This unconscious and yet grave sin is like a devil: when it attaches to a person, it will stick to her like glue or lacquer and will not leave. When her heart vacillates, all her kindness and obligations are lost. Her envy and jealousy are unceasing. The root of this is that her body is not free, and this is a result of past karma.⁴⁸

Tokuryū reiterates the medieval Buddhist orthodoxy that female bodies bore unique karmic hindrances that would prevent their being reborn directly into five different states of being, among which was a Buddha. Like many teachers before him, Tokuryū linked these karmic obstructions to the social behavior and condition of women in their present lifetime. Their heavier karmic burdens would destine them to be capricious, jealous, and unkind despite their best efforts. This moral inferiority resulted in women's subordinate position in society and within the family. Tokuryū's reference to the three obediences refers to the Confucian adage that women were required to follow their fathers in youth, their husbands in adulthood, and finally their sons in old age.

Tokuryū then explains the special debt owed to Amida by all women as being magnified in the case of the *bōmori*, due to her constant physical presence at "Amida's side":

If [the *bōmori*] listens to the teachings, even in her helpless [woman's] body, she can truly and well understand Amida's primal vow. As it is said, "more so than a saintly person, an evil one," more so than a man, a woman.⁴⁹ Thus, as deep as is her female sin, she will be this deeply blessed by Amida's great compassion. Is it not a sign of Amida's special pity and compassion for her that she

⁴⁸ Tokuryū 1891, p. 3.

⁴⁹ This is a reference to chapter 3 of the *Tannishō* (English translation at Unno 1996, p. 6).

has been pulled aside and placed into a body that shall never stray from the side of the Buddhas and patriarchs? In the case of a layperson, even if they set up a Buddhist altar [in their home], they cannot worship the images of the abbot and the seven patriarchs.⁵⁰ Further, even the resident priest occasionally must leave the Buddha's side and be absent from the temple, for instance to engage in studies for his work at the temple. Only the *bōmori* never strays from the Buddha's side. Her position is morning and night to be pulled in by the compassionate pity of the five Buddhas,⁵¹ and to be in the care of their blessings. We can clearly see that her connection to the Buddha, the founder, and the abbot of the Honganji is deep, and her blessings from them profound.⁵²

For Tokuryū, the special blessing of the *bōmori*'s position is evidenced in part by her constant proximity to the temple's altar. Although from an orthodox perspective, the Buddha and Shinran (usually referred to by the single expression *nyorai shōnin* 如来聖人) do not physically reside in their images, the act of showing gratitude and reverence through offerings to the Buddhist image is an important religious activity in the Shinshū, and expressions such as “the home of the Buddha” or “serving at the Buddha's side,” in which the Buddhist altar is used metonymically for Amida and Shinran themselves, are quite common in these colloquial teachings. Tokuryū implies that the *bōmori* is a religious personage who enjoys a special intimacy with the Buddha. This intimacy arises from both the special care Amida has taken in directing her karmic path despite her considerable obstructions, and the physical intimacy that results from her living in the Buddha's “home.”

On the other hand, he also describes the *bōmori* as being karmically among the worst off of all sentient beings, with the most plentiful opportunity and inclination to sin. Specifically, he goes to great lengths to describe the special sins that temple residents are in danger of committing related to the misuse of the laity's donations or a manipulation of their faith in order to obtain material wealth. He then reminds *bōmori* that they bear the burden

⁵⁰ The components of a temple's altar, arranged to the right and left of the main image of Amida, respectively. The abbot is usually represented by an image of Rennyo, the eighth abbot and the “restorer” of the Shin tradition; however, it may also be an image of the most recently deceased abbot of Honganji.

⁵¹ That is, Amida, Shinran, the abbot of Honganji (see previous note), Prince Shōtoku 聖德 (574–622), and the seven patriarchs.

⁵² Tokuryū 1891, pp. 5–6.

of those sins which are peculiar to clerics as well as the usual transgressions to which all women are inclined:

The *bōmori*'s body is one in which two great sins—a sin greater than a man and a sin greater than a layperson—are carried as one burden. Thus, her position may lead many people in the secular world to revere her as the temple's *bōmori*, but if we carefully examine the Buddhist teachings, we see that the heavy obstructions of a *bōmori*'s existence derive from sins even more burdensome than those of a priest, who is said to be a more sinful being than the guilty person who is strung to a pole and disemboweled.⁵³

The *bōmori*'s position as a temple resident renders her liable to commit sins against Buddhism greater than those the laity are capable of. The same is true for a priest, of course, but with her woman's body the *bōmori* is doubly burdened.

Although he does not rely as heavily on the language of sin, Sōboku shares Tokuryū's vision that, beyond just her spiritual debt as a woman who had been compassionately delivered from the five obstacles by Amida's grace, as a resident of the temple, the *bōmori* also carried a rather onerous material debt to Amida. Everything that she wore or consumed throughout her entire life was not actually hers, but rather "gifts from the Buddha." The parishioners' desire to contribute rice or money to the temple arose from their gratitude to Amida's teachings, and by Amida's great compassion the *bōmori* has been allowed to subsist on these material goods from the cradle to the grave. According to Sōboku,

Particularly for *bōmori*, who were born in a temple and married into a temple, from the time when they were in the womb they have had a connection with the Buddha. Everything, beginning with the toys they received when they were young children, could only be bought thanks to the Buddha. Because you are a body who was brought up in this way by the Buddha, you must tirelessly offer the *nenbutsu* of gratitude for these blessings. . . . However, the wasteful consumption of the Buddha's goods by donning ostentatious clothes or decorations is positively despicable, resulting from a lack of faith and a failure to think about the deep blessings of the Buddha. . . . As for the things that you receive from the laity, commenting on whether it is ample or meager, or whether

⁵³ Tokuryū 1891, p. 5.

it is good or bad, means that you do not understand that these are gifts received from the Buddha. Everything that you receive, you should receive it and use it while intoning the *nenbutsu*.⁵⁴

The *bōmori* would live her entire life sustained by the generous donations given by the parishioners to Amida. (Ideally, such contributions were given out of the laity's gratitude to Amida, but in return they also received membership at the temple, and opportunities to hear and discuss the teachings and participate in rituals.) In this regard, Sōboku describes the *bōmori* as an economist of the Buddha's own gifts. Secular morality literature for women of the time also emphasized the virtue of thrift and simplicity. For instance, the widely circulated *Onna daigaku* 女大学 ("Great Learning for Women") by Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714) entreated women: "In everything she must avoid extravagance, and in regard to both food and clothes, she must act according to her station in life and never give in to luxury and pride."⁵⁵ But the *bōmori*'s waste, or her being too discriminating about what she receives, are cited by Sōboku specifically as evidence of her lack of faith.

Tokuryū's sermon describes the *bōmori*'s special debt even more explicitly: amidst her wretched condition as both a woman and a potentially sinful recipient of the faithful offerings of the laity ("a body in which two great sins—a sin greater than a man and a sin greater than a layperson—are carried as one burden"), Amida has not only offered her a path to Buddhahood, but in allowing her to become a *bōmori* in this life he has gone so far as to place her at his own side, from which she was not expected to have much occasion to stray. In both sermons, the description of the *bōmori*'s special dependence on Amida for material sustenance is followed immediately by an exhortation for her to display gratitude, and to engage tirelessly in the activities of repaying her debt to the Buddha. Through the outward impetus of *jishin kyōninshin*, the *bōmori*'s reception of Amida's grace is linked directly back to her duty to serve him, completing a circuit of suffering, faith, gratitude, and service, which leads in turn to the realization of faith by others.

The Distinction and Obligation of Temple Residents in the Shinshū

In many ways the religio-economic lessons of these sermons apply broadly to every resident of the temple, and offer valuable insights into the relationship between laity and clerics in the Jōdo Shinshū, which is frequently

⁵⁴ Sōboku 1775.

⁵⁵ Tucker 2006, p. 233.

described as a lay Buddhist tradition. An important dimension of these sermons is their function of codifying the proper behavior and status of temple families, which were at this point unique in the Buddhist world. Indeed, these sermons can be situated within a broader category of sermons for the codification of norms for temple residents, as both Sōboku and Tokuryū also penned equivalent sermons for *bōzu* (temple priests), which similarly address the clerical sin of mishandling the gifts of the laity, or seeking contributions for impure reasons.⁵⁶

In addition to the more legalistic regulations that were handed down by the abbot during this period, such sermons represented a practical means of educating local priests and their families in what was expected of them, advancing ideals of thrift, equanimity, and above all reverence with regards to the “Buddha’s goods,” the material contributions made in good faith by the laity. What sets Shin temple family residents apart from the laity is not, as in other sects, a ritual distinction, but rather a material, spatial, and economic one. Just like clerics in other Buddhist traditions, however, it is their full-time occupation to attend to the spiritual concerns of themselves and the laity—in Shin terms, “the great matter of the next life” (*goshō no ichidaiji*).

Situating the *bōmori* within the Buddhist world and the broader secular society, Tokuryū emphasizes her economic privilege as a temple resident:

As for the body of *bōmori* . . . in other sects it would be considered a grave sin for her, as a result of her karmic conditions, to become the wife of a priest. But in the Shinshū, considering that priests in the latter age of the dharma cannot truly practice, the practice of priests’ eating meat and taking wives just like laypeople is permitted. Although this is different than in other sects, [Shin priests] have no profession as a warrior, farmer, craftsman, or merchant like those in lay households do. Instead, they have the status of priest (*sōryō*), whose duty is to serve the Buddhas and the patriarchs and to work for the sake of the laity’s great concern in the next life; in so doing, they should remember that they receive all of their clothing and food from that which is given to the Buddha.⁵⁷

This passage refers to the organization of Edo society according to one’s profession, with an eye to which Tokuryū (and the abbot of Higashi Honganji whom he represents) is careful to remind temple residents of their

⁵⁶ See Sōboku’s *Bōzu seikai* and Tokuryū’s *Sōbun kyōkai sanzai roku* 僧分教誡三罪録 (Kashiwahara and Fujii 1995, pp. 98–103).

⁵⁷ Tokuryū 1891, pp. 3–4.

special exemption from contributing any other than spiritual labor to society. Shin temple family members are urged to grasp their unique position as householders whose sole occupation is serving the Buddhas and the patriarchs and spreading the Buddhist teachings. Beyond that, it is their distinctive material privilege to subsist on the generosity of the laity, without having to “earn” their subsistence in the same way that members of other sectors of the workforce must.

Although in some sense these lessons can be generalized to all temple residents, some aspects of the temple wife’s position were unique to her gender. As a woman, her constant presence at the temple provided her with a unique capacity for service, and was linked to Amida’s compassionate solution of her distinctly female soteriological problem. Further, it was in her more casual capacity of hostess that it was imagined she could connect with visitors to the temple—particularly female ones—by turning even social encounters into occasions for hearing the teachings.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have endeavored to shed some light on the early modern formulation of the role of the *bōmori*, or priest’s wife, in the Jōdo Shinshū tradition. Accounts of her religious role highlight the importance of the economic relationship between temple family and laity, and how this putatively lay Buddhist tradition assigns special significance to residents of its temple—not as ritually privileged specialists, but as caretakers of a religious space and servants to the Buddha and the founders.

I have shown that in the Shin doctrinal context, the domestic venue for propagation is potentially as significant as the sphere traditionally belonging to male priests, such as the study of academic doctrine and the performance of rituals. The temple wife is described as the custodian of the material elements of the altar where Amida is worshipped, daily providing rice and flowers with a care that is linked to her own faith. As it is expected that she will remain in the temple while her husband is out and provide a constant welcoming presence, her hospitable encounters with laity are imagined to provide important opportunities for propagation of the teachings and the formation of connections between Amida and parishioners. Even her child-rearing is linked to Buddhist propagation in that her children will someday grow up to spread the teachings themselves; thus, her inculcation of Buddhist faith in her children is envisioned as yet another example of religious service.

We have no indication, however, of how *bōmori* received these sermons, either as female practitioners being informed of their karmic inferiority, or

as temple professionals being told of their religious duties. In particular, it is problematic to assume that the female listeners fully internalized, or even recognized, their male teachers' insistence on women's hindrances. These sermons provide an important opportunity to ponder the potential gap not only between doctrinal understandings of scholarly elites, temple wives, and laity in the Shinshū, but also of prescriptions for gender norms at the temple and the reality of wives' roles in practice.

In certain cases it is likely that temple wives' religious responsibilities far exceeded those explicitly described in the documents. In the Shinshū, women (even priests' wives and daughters) were not able to become formally ordained until the early Shōwa period (1926–1989). Nonetheless, in some important regional temples, there is evidence of wives or daughters taking over as head of the temple in between male successors.⁵⁸ In such cases, the widow was known as the resident caretaker (*jūji* 住持) of the temple. The sermons examined above contain only vague suggestions about the *bōmori*'s significance as the temple resident who must continue the worship of the Buddhas in her husband's absence, and their emphasis remains firmly on the *bōmori*'s domestic duties as her husband's "inside help" (*naijo*). However, the wife of the local temple priest in the early modern period may have possessed a practical authority as a temple resident that allowed her to perform priestly duties in her husband's absence beyond those spelled out in the normative sources. Martha Tocco has pointed out that samurai wives, whose activities are described in the prescriptive literature as being confined to the domestic sphere, in fact were able to manage even the more public or political duties of the household in their husbands' absence, whether due to illness or premature death.⁵⁹ Anne Walthall has similarly noted that in the case of farming women, whose situations must have also resembled those of temple wives in important ways, daughters or widows were assigned

⁵⁸ One example is the case of Jōgūji 上宮寺 temple, located in present-day Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture, where the widow and daughter of the deceased abbot Nyokō 如光 (n.d.–1468) managed the temple for some twenty years beginning in 1468 (Endō 2000, pp. 84–85). A further example is the case of Shōnyoni 勝如尼 (1428–1495), the widow of Nyojō 如乘 (also Sen'yū 宣祐, 1412–1460, Rennyo's uncle and the founder of Honsenji 本泉寺 temple in Kanazawa). She is recorded as having gone on to found two different temples on her own, Matsuobō 松尾坊 in Kaga and Tsuchiyamabō 土山坊 (later Shōkōji 勝興寺) in Etchū, after her husband's death. Her achievements are mentioned in the writings of Rennyo's son Jitsugo 実悟 (1492–1583). See *SSS*, vol. 7, p. 537; Shinshū Shinjiten Hensankai 1983, p. 283; and Tsang 2005, p. 55.

⁵⁹ Tocco 2003, pp. 210–11.

civic rights or named as household heads to a surprising degree based on their “structural position within the family” rather than on customary gender roles.⁶⁰ Although sources regarding the sacerdotal and managerial activities by small-temple *bōmori* in their husbands’ absence have not yet been found, we can assume that they also possessed the authority of de facto clerics in such cases.

While limited in their ability to illuminate female practitioners’ actual worlds of faith and practice, these sermons importantly call our attention to the intersection of Shin religiosity and materiality and to the special distinction of Shin clerics as custodians of the religious space of the temple and recipients of the laity’s faithful offerings. They give us a rare glimpse of popular understandings of Shin religiosity during the late Edo period, and in particular, they open our eyes to the significance of the domestic forms of Shin Buddhist ministry to which wives of local Shin temples were especially well suited.

ABBREVIATIONS

- SSS *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* 真宗史料集成. 13 vols. Ed. Ishida Mitsuyuki 石田充之, Chiba Jōryū 千葉乘隆, Katata Osamu 堅田修, Hiramatsu Reizō 平松令三, Fukuma Kōchō 福間光超, Sasaki Kōshō 佐々木孝正, Hayashima Yūki 早島有毅, Kashiwahara Yūsen 柏原祐泉, Hosokawa Gyōshin 細川行信, Mori Ryūkichī 森龍吉. 2nd ed. Kyoto: Dōbōsha. 2003.
- SSZ *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書. 5 vols. Ed. Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho Hensanjo 真宗聖教全書編纂所. Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō. 1941.

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