

The Legacy of Rennyo Shōnin

Rennyo Shōnin Itoku-ki

Part I

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WITH REGARD TO the legacy of our Dharma teacher, Kenju Rennyo Shōnin, there are three points we shall relate briefly:

- 1) his role as the Restorer of Shinshū;
- 2) the wondrous events that occurred while he was alive;
- 3) how he benefited others even after his death.

First, as to his role as the Restorer of Shinshū, Rennyo was the tenth generation descendant and eighth generation heir to the lineage of Shinran Shōnin, the great founder of Shinshū. [Shinran] Shōnin who in his worldly relation [was a scion of the Fujiwara family]. The twenty-first descendant of Prince Amano Koyane [was the Grand Minister Kamatari], and after five generations there was Lord {Uchimaro},¹ of the first court rank, junior grade, who was General of the Imperial

* This is the first part of *Rennyo Shōnin itoku ki* (hereafter referred to as the *Legacy*). It was compiled and edited some years after Rennyo's death in 1499 by two of his sons, Rengo (1468–1543) and Jitsugo (1492–1583). The 1679 woodblock edition of this work spawned numerous other biographies, but it remained a favorite, and was among the representative Shin texts included in the *Shinshū kana shōgyō*, which was widely adopted by Shin followers even in the early part of this century. The edition used for translation is that in the 13-volume *Shinshū shiryō shūsei*, ed. Katada Osamu (Kyoto: 1977), II:791–802 (791–795). We wish to thank Kaji Yōichi for editing the translation. Notes have been provided by the translator.

¹ In-text notes are enclosed in wavy brackets and set in smaller point, reflecting the format of the original text.

Guards and a state minister [of Konoë province]; and six generations after him there was Lord Saishō Arikuni, Police General; and when five more generations passed there was Lord Arinori, who was a high court officer belonging to the service of the Empress Dowager of the time; and the Shōnin was born as son of this noble personage.² The province from which Rennyō's mother hailed is unknown, however, and the inquiries people made into her whereabouts turned up nothing.³

At any rate, Rennyō Shōnin was born in the capital [Kyoto] in the Ōtani, Higashiyama area, during the reign of emperor Shōkō {whose *imina*, or posthumous title, was Sanehito}, in Ōei 22 [1415] {a *kinoto no hitsuji* year}. With each passing day and year, it became apparent he was a precocious child, with a mind that set him apart from other children his age. Out of a deep affection for Dharma he constantly sought to impart the teachings to others, and it was this aspect of his character that ultimately prevailed when he set out to restore the lineage of Shinran Shōnin to the world.⁴ Even in Shinran's time, the core group that took it upon themselves to protect the teaching comprised a modest following of only five or six. Though true followers are ever rare, today our denomination is flourishing, with people literally flocking to the true faith of the universal Vow and its teaching of easy birth through other power. This has its source in Rennyō Shōnin's determination to restore Shinshū.

Beginning around the first year of Kanshō [1460], Rennyō—having reflected on the human condition⁵ of beings of this final age,⁶ examined

² *The Shōnin in his worldly relation . . . this noble personage* is a passage from the *Godenshō*, a biography of Shinran (1173–1262) written by Kakunyo (1270–1351), the second heir to the Honganji lineage. We have here adapted the 1911 translation by Sasaki Gesshō and D. T. Suzuki, *The Life of Shinran (Godenshō)*, compiled in D. T. Suzuki, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism* (Kyoto: Shinshū Ōtani-ha, 1972).

³ The absence of explicit mention of Rennyō's father, Zonnyō, might be construed as a subtle suggestion that this is not a Honganji document, but one produced by another faction, the Honsen-ji. On the other hand, the episode of how Rennyō lost his mother looms greatly in this account of Rennyō's life, indicating that the editors of the *Legacy* intended this work for a popular audience, the event being calculated to draw their sympathy.

⁴ *itten shikai*, literally, "one heaven, four seas."

⁵ *rekki*, literally, inferior ability. A term from the *Kuan ching*, or *Contemplation Sutra*, it alludes to the lowest of nine grades of being who are said to be the object of the Buddha's compassion. As their inability to rise above their suffering predestines

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the sutras and commentaries and the explanations of the masters and their disciples, and grasped the essential point for readily-attainable birth [in the Pure Land] for ignorant, ordinary people—wrote many important letters.⁷ They are a clear light for the ages to come and the sole guide for this defiled world.⁸

To take refuge in one moment [of focused practice and faith] (*ichi'nen kimyo*)⁹ is a veritable truth in which we have endeavored ever since the time of our Founder Shinran Shōnin, but it was not [until Rennyo] that it was couched in terms of our holding [to Amida] (*nenji no gi*)¹⁰ in that one moment. It is thus to the credit of our Master that the

them to endless rebirth in the cycle of suffering, they are not to be counted among the spiritually gifted who are suited to the rigors of monastic life. It is with this broad category of beings that Pure Land Buddhism is concerned.

⁶ *matsudai*, literally, last age. The term has two nuances, one hard and one soft, both of which appear in Rennyo's writings. (1) The hard reading is as a buddhological reference to *mappō*, the last dharma age; that is, the present age is one that has grown so far afield from the epic period when the Buddha lived in this world, that the influence of that time is no longer felt, nor are the beings of today as spiritually adept as they once were. These factors determine the kind of Buddhism that is possible now. (2) The soft reading is that of "the ages to come." Evidence for this in one of Rennyo's *wakas*: "I have written this down / as a guide / for future generations [*matsudai*]— / may these words on the dharma / be my memento" (Rogers & Rogers, p. 174). Rennyo in fact uses *matsudai* in both nuances, and in the passage quoted here we can see them virtually side by side.

⁷ The letters, or *Ofumi*, are thought to best represent Rennyo's message. The official collection has been translated in Minor L. Rogers & Ann T. Rogers, *Rennyo, the Second Founder* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1992). There is also an unofficial (*jōgai*) collection of an almost equal number, that is largely unstudied.

⁸ This paragraph is adapted from Rogers & Rogers, *Rennyo*, p. 263.

⁹ Rennyo clearly understood the importance of *ichi'nen* as a defining characteristic of Shinshū and often refers to it in his letters. In contrast to Shinran, however, Rennyo closely associated *ichi'nen* with *ki-hō ittai*, the unity of seeker and dharma, a notion from the *Anjinketsujōshō*. In *kihō ittai*, a state of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) prevails wherein seeker and Buddha exist in a mystical nonduality; here, uttering of the Name of the Buddha is merely symbolic of that unity. In this view, derived in large part from Tendai thought, faith precedes practice. If so, Rennyo's *ichi'nen* thus cannot fully explain Shinran's buddhology, the latter being based on the *Larger Sutra* and taking the contrasting view that practice necessarily precedes faith. Shin thinkers have yet to resolve the major doctrinal contradictions that Rennyo's fondness for the *Anjinketsujōshō* presents.

¹⁰ Despite the importance of this concept to Rennyo, *nenji no gi* is given scant atten-

ordinary people who had no knowledge of these matters were enlightened as to the meaning of holding to the faith as hard as diamond, and just as difficult to come by. Truly we owe our late teacher a debt of gratitude. Only his guidance could have slaked the [spiritual] thirst of the masses, and for this we must be deeply grateful.

On the 28th day of the twelfth month, Ōei 27 [1420], Rennyo's mother divulged to the six-year-old her never-revealed wish for his future: that he seek the revival of the lineage [to which he was rightful heir]. This she conveyed in the most tender of terms that left a deep impression on him. Shortly after this, she left the temple.¹¹ On that day someone reported seeing unusual cloud formations in every direction and the appearance of lotus flowers from the sky.¹² Rennyo never had another chance to see her again. As a result, Rennyo set aside the 28th of this month as a memorial day for his mother. In the last year of his life, there is a portrait that Rennyo had painted of himself at age six, with the inscription:

Hotei is my real name,
 Though I called myself Kōtei.
 Separated from my mother at age six,
 I shall pass away in Meio 8 [1499],

tion today. Kaneko Daiei cites this passage from the *Legacy* in his essay "Renshi no chūkō [Rennyo the Restorer]," Part 2, in *Shinshū no kyōgi to sono rekishi* [Shinshū doctrine and its history] (1917), compiled in supplementary volume 3:317–322 of his *Collected Works*; a translation of this section is to be found in the present issue of the *Eastern Buddhist* (xxx, 2, 1998). Soga Ryōjin also discusses *nenji no gi* in connection with *naikan*, the deep structure of faith; see his passing remarks in the closing pages of his *Hongan no naikan* [The deep structure of the Original Vow] (1935; SRS 10:219–401).

¹¹ Where Rennyo's mother might be going on this winter day at the end of the year is explained by the fact she was being turned out by the impending marriage of Zonnyo to a woman of social standing, which Rennyo's mother apparently was not. Rennyo later tried to find his mother's whereabouts, but to no avail. That he should remember this incident throughout his life, inscribing it late in life onto a picture portraying himself at age six, may go toward explaining his deep sympathy for the common people.

¹² The report of clouds and flowers is a Buddhist literary allusion to the occurrence of an auspicious event, usually the birth of an excellent being or, more likely in this case, their rebirth in the Pure Land.

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Having reached the age of eighty-five.¹³

Another report is that after leaving the temple, Rennyo's mother visited Rokkakudō. This marvelous fact tells us that Rennyo's mother was a manifestation of Kanzeon.¹⁴

It was in his fifteenth year that Rennyo first took the revival of the Shin school to heart. It grieved him to think how past generations had let the teaching waste away,¹⁵ and his thoughts dwelt constantly on

¹³ This passage in the 1679 woodblock edition of *Legacy* led to the production of many paintings of Rennyo at age six. One such example is that of the Chōshō-ji, where he is depicted standing barefoot wearing a light spotted kimono. For another such example, see the portrait of Rennyo used for the frontispiece of the present issue which includes the five lines of classical Chinese. Interestingly, Rennyo's mother is also said to have taken a sketch of her child with her when she left the temple, adding further confusion to claims as to which picture is which and which is genuine. In fact, the original painting seems no longer to exist.

¹⁴ There is another Rennyo biography called *Shūjin ki* by Jitsugo (1492–1583), editor of the present *Legacy*, that gives another, more rigorous historical account (see *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* II:599–610). Though we shall not repeat the *Shūjin ki* account here, based on it we can reconstruct a fairly convincing scenario of what happened. Rennyo's mother, distraught over the fact she had to leave her child behind, commissioned a painting of Rennyo prior to her leaving the temple as a keepsake. Some time after her departure, this painting was found hanging on the altar of the Kanzeon statue at Ishiyama-dera, an ancient temple in present Shiga prefecture. This gives rise to the speculation that Ishiyama-dera had a convent that accepted her on the condition she give up all her worldly possessions, including the painting. Although the name of Ishiyama-dera does not appear in the *Legacy* account, the editors may have thought it more convenient to link the story with Rokkaku-do, a temple in Kyoto, which was already associated with the dream vision of Kanzeon that prompted Shinran to marry; after all, one can only tax the reader's imagination so far. Here we see a possible instance of how the editors of the *Legacy* construed to make a true story a compelling one. Though informed of finer details as to what happened to their paternal grandmother, they preferred to set accuracy aside in favor of a good story-line the audience would respond to. How successful they were can be judged from the fact that almost all popular accounts of Rennyo's life adopt this legend of his mother being a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Kanzeon.

¹⁵ The charge that past generations had lapsed in their observation of Shinran's memorial day is true. Rennyo, however, was astute enough to realize the importance of this ceremony and revived the practice. Kaneko Daiei (1881–1976), in his account of Rennyo's life, points out that Rennyo's conducting a large-scale observance of Shinran's 200th year memorial in 1461 was one of the events that made him a target of critics on Mount Hiei; see Kaneko's "Rennyo the Restorer," Part I, in *Eastern Buddhist*

how he would in his lifetime bring the lineage of the Founder to the attention of people everywhere. It was in this way that he ultimately revived the school. In this he was like the original founder of the Pure Land [school], Genkū [Hōnen] Shōnin, who realized the truth of impermanence from the age of fifteen,¹⁶ and entered forthwith the path of religious seeking. Thus, he was shown to be a manifestation of Mahāsthāmaprāpta.¹⁷ Indeed, something mysterious happened to the Shōnin {Genkū} at age fifteen. Something mysterious happened also to Rennyo at age fifteen. Here we can see that the same mysterious event happened to both at age fifteen.¹⁸ Also, Rennyo should be seen as an embodiment of Shinran Shōnin.

31-1 (1998), pp. 1-15. Obviously, this statement has potentially volatile political ramifications, written as it is from the standpoint of the Honsen-ji lineage. This may be one reason why the *Legacy* is no longer included in the Honganji-oriented *Shinshū seiten* used by the followers today, despite its important historical role.

¹⁶ The date of "from age fifteen" is a ballpark figure, though this does not detract from the gist of the statement. According to the *Genkū shōnin shi-nikki* [The Diary of Genkū Shōnin], an early biography among the Hōnen-related documents compiled by Shinran in *Saihō shi'nan sho*, Hōnen ascended Mount Hiei at the age of thirteen, after losing his father to an assailant at the age of nine. (For a study and English translation, see Maya M. Hara, trans., *Japanese Religions*, 22-1 [1997]). Since the *Genkū shōnin shi-nikki* is an account compiled by Shinran, one would think it served as the accepted version for the authors of the *Legacy*. There is, however, another source that says Hōnen lost his father at age fifteen, two years after he ascended Mount Hiei; see Hirokawa Takatoshi's introduction to Hōnen, *Hōnen's Senchakushū*, in the Kuroda Institute series (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), p. 6. However, this does not confirm that the event being referred to here is the loss of his father at age fifteen. It could well be something more generally accepted such as the saying from the Confucian analects that at age fifteen one awakens to one's role in the world and begins to investigate things on one's own.

¹⁷ Allusions such as these abound in Japanese Buddhist literature, and was a way of expressing the exalted status in which a person was held. Mahāsthāmaprāpta, or Daiseishi, is the bodhisattva of wisdom who, along with Avalokiteshvara, or Kanzeon, the bodhisattva of compassion, flanks Amida Buddha in depictions of the Pure Land triad.

¹⁸ The parallel that the editors of the *Legacy* seek to draw between Rennyo and Hōnen may seem forced, but would have been accepted in its time, for Rennyo built up Shinshū into a nationwide network on a scale only Hōnen before him had achieved; here Rennyo succeeded where his venerable ancestor, Shinran, had not. In an essay by modern Shin thinker Soga Ryōjin (1875-1971), the claim is made that Rennyo restored not only Shinshū, but Buddhism as a whole (see his "Rennyo Shōnin noshintai")

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In Eikyō 3 [1431] {a *kanoto no i* year}, at age 17, our Master went to the Shōren-in headquarters¹⁹ [in Kyoto] where he received tonsure. This was how he got the name *chūnagon* Kenju, since the ceremony was attended by state minister *chūnagon* Kanezato of Hirohashi²⁰ who stood in as sponsor.²¹ From that time on he diligently absorbed himself in study, in which he was second to none. Enduring the heat and cold of the seasons, he learned from Che-yin to use a bagful of fireflies to study the classics by on short summer nights, and [from Sun-kang] to pile the snow to read the ancient works by on cold winter nights.²²

At that time, few understood our lineage and so it did not enjoy the reputation that other schools and teachers had.²³ This made Rennyō uneasy and inclined to shun the world. Even when reading the sacred

[1898], in his Collected Works, I). In more recent times, however, growing sectarianism prevents the strong identification of Rennyō with Hōnen, and even the fact of Rennyō's indebtedness to Hōnen is little discussed. (For dedicated studies on Rennyō and Hōnen, see the list of articles by Shin historian Kitanishi Hiromu in *Bulletin of the Research Institute of Bukkyō University*, No. 3, March 1996, pp. 12–15. We wish to thank Minor L. Rogers for pointing out this important though now politically controversial scholar.) This may be another reason why the *Legacy* has been relegated to obscurity.

¹⁹ A Tendai temple located at the foothill of Higashiyama, this is also where Shinran took tonsure. Rennyō's birthplace in Kyoto, Ōtani, is also only a short distance from here.

²⁰ While Kanezato is an obscure figure, Jitsugo's *Shūjin ki* again gives us a more historically accurate account, saying that Kanezato was from the Hino clan, as was Shinran, and providing other indications of his social status. It is likely, then, that Kanezato is a relative—a rich uncle, perhaps—of Rennyō's. *Chūnagon* Rennyō would have been a nickname.

²¹ The actual term is *yōfu*, or "stepfather," again suggesting that Kanezato was related to Rennyō.

²² A Chinese literary allusion to enduring the hardships of education: Che-yin of the Tsin dynasty studied by the light of fireflies in summer, Sun-kang studied in winter by the moonlight reflected by the snow. It is no coincidence that the same allusion appears in the thirteenth century work, *Saigyō monogatari*, a life of Saigyō (1118–1190?) with *waka* poems by the famous wandering monk. (For studies, see the work done by Laura Warantz Allen and, more recently, Gustav Heldt.) The work was a classic biography which Rennyō's biographers would have been familiar with, and there is even an edition done in Rennyō's lifetime, dated Bunmei 12 (1480) as well as one dated 1509.

²³ Jōdo Shinshū at this time was a minor branch of Pure Land Buddhism under the umbrella of the Tendai school. We may assume that the narrator is here referring to other schools of Pure Land Buddhism, as well as other schools of Buddhism in general.

teachings, he would do so furtively, away from the prying eyes of others. At times, just to examine a few pages, he would use the lantern light spilling through a crack in the wall; at other times, on clear nights when the moon had ascended the blue expanse of sky, he would open a manuscript and apply himself to the master's commentary.²⁴ Thus, when reading *Kyōgyōshō no monrui* or *Rokuyōshō*,²⁵ he would examine the explanations of the sacred works found in one and compare them with those in the other. These he had to hunt for extensively. Pondering them deeply, he sought the core of the statement to extract its pith. Yet he was always worried should someone discover him, and so he would invariably study these treatises and commentaries²⁶ only at night.

With so few members (*monpai*) calling on the temple (*zenkyoku*),²⁷

²⁴ From age twenty, Zonnyo permitted Rennyō to make copies of important Shinshū documents, such as Shinran's *Jōdo monrui jusho* [Passages on the Pure Land way].

²⁵ (1) *Kyōgyōshō no monrui* [Passages on Teaching, Practice, Realization], a work by Shinran, popularly known as *Kyōgyōshinshō*. It was partially translated by D. T. Suzuki as *Collected Passages on Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Realization* (1973). For a complete translation, see Dennis Hirota et al., trans., *Collected Works of Shinran* (1997). (2) *Rokuyōshō* [Essentials of the Six-Volume Work], an early commentary by Zonkaku on Shinran's work.

²⁶ *ronshaku*, or treatises and commentaries. This refers to the works related to Pure Land Buddhism. For Rennyō this was not an exclusively Shinshū category, as it has become today, but was broad enough to include Hōnen's writings as well as other, now-disputed works such as the *Anjinketsujōshō*. The latter work for Rennyō tied together loose ends in other writings, based as it is in a *hongaku*, or original enlightenment perspective typical of Tendai thought, and he makes frequent reference to it in his letters. In 1708, however, a Shinshū Ōtani-ha scholar named Ekū (1644–1721) discussed the work as belonging to the Seizan-ha, a branch of the Jōdo-shū, in his *Anjinketsujōshō yokuchū*. Since then, the *Anjinketsujōshō*, once a pillar of Shin theology, has been marginalized, creating a contradiction that remains unresolved. For a translation, see Dennis Hirota, "On Attaining the Settled Mind: *Anjinketsujōshō*," in *Eastern Buddhist* 23–2 (1990): 106–121, and 24–1 (1991): 81–96. Recently, a revised translation has been published by the same translator in a Japanese work: *Rennyō shōnin kenkyū: Kyōgi-hen II* [Rennyō shōnin research: Doctrine II] (Kyoto: Nagata Bunsho-do).

²⁷ *zenkyoku*, literally, meditation center. In-text notes will be used to show the variety of terms the editors of the *Legacy* used to refer to potentially dull words such as "temple." The opulent use of *kambun* is a lexical feature that lent interest to the *Legacy* and helped to make it a popular literary work.

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it was impossible to lay any plans to spread the teachings. Just then a true disciple named Dōsai {also known as Zenju} from Kanegamori in Ōmi province appeared on the scene.²⁸ Dōsai worked closely with the Master, and now and then they would discuss plans to spread the Buddha dharma. Inviting Rennyo to the Kanegamori *dōjō* by palanquin, Dōsai would gather members (*mon'yo*)²⁹ in numbers to listen to the Dharma talks. It was Dōsai who made all the arrangements for the services and who built up the congregation. From then on, until the next thirty-some years, he helped Rennyo to spread the Buddha dharma, and as its deeper meaning emerged in time, Rennyo was finally on the way to achieving his goal. This was like the flower buds receiving the first drops of misty rain; like the first rays of dawn rending the darkness of night.

In the first year of Hōtoku [1449] {when the Master was age 35}, he journeyed to the northern regions for the first time, sometimes staying the night at old temples (*rannya*),³⁰ sometimes spending the day at the houses of ordinary people. Thus he passed the days and months instructing rich and poor alike, ever intent on giving guidance to monk and lay.³¹ After this, he entered the country of Echigo.³² Echigo is a land filled with memories of Shinran Shōnin, and so he lingered there, making a pilgrimage to sites sacred to Shinran. At these sites he thought of how Shinran had converted people of every kind, and that also helped groups of followers to flourish; as a result, monk and lay

²⁸ Dōsai (1399–1488; also known as Zenju) was important in building the congregation and also, years later, in establishing the Yamashina Honganji. Ōmi province is the old name for present-day Shiga prefecture. Kanegamori (also read Kanagamori) is on the eastern shore of Lake Biwa. Rennyo also had strong followings on the western shore in Ōtsu.

²⁹ *mon'yo*, literally, “the leaves of the [Dharma] gate,” the imagery being that of a large tree (the temple) to which the leaves (the members) belong. The terms *monpai*, or bearers of the gate, and *monto*, or followers of the gate, are also used.

³⁰ An abbreviation of the Sanskrit *aranya*, meaning forest or wilderness, it originally may have referred to a secluded grove where monks and nuns could engage in the practice of the Buddhist way. In *Legacy* it is used as a synonym for a Buddhist temple. An immediate source for this term would be its occurrence in Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*.

³¹ *shi-so*; literally, “the black and the white,” referring to the color of their clothes.

³² Echigo is the old name for present-day Niigata, facing the Japan Sea. The land of Shinran's exile, it is here that the earliest Shin congregations were formed.

alike were able to convert to Shinshū.³³ Also, to reminisce the time when Shinran Shōnin was in the world, he proceeded to the Jōkō-ji temple of the Toyano-in in Kitayama,³⁴ where the experience of viewing the sacred sites was so overwhelming he was literally moved to tears. He rested for awhile longer in these rural areas before returning to the flowery capital [Kyoto].

In Chōroku 1 [1457] {a *hinoto no ushi* year}, on the 18th day of the sixth month, his venerable father, Hōin Enken, Zonnyo, then age 62, was approaching the end of his life.³⁵ Zonnyo sensed, however, that Kenju Shōnin [Rennyō] could be counted on as the leader for the next generation, judging from the zeal Rennyō put into spreading the Dharma, and so his passing was a peaceful one.³⁶ The entire household fell into mourning and all the attendants wept, drenching their sleeves with tears. But throughout the funeral, the nembutsu recited was one of genuine gratitude, the services brought out the true heart [in all], and even after the forty-ninth day of mourning³⁷ there was no sign of it slacking.

And then an altogether unexpected thing happened. The gist of it was that, although the doctrine of our lineage [as conceived by Shinran] was one that stood apart from the rest even from ancient times, little by little it had grown weak. The appearance of the Master in this world, though, was like the rain of Dharma pouring down to slake the thirst of the people; like the sunshine of the Buddha beaming

³³ *kifuku*, or *kifu*, literally, "to surrender" or "to submit." In the context, it would indicate that those from other sects were allowed to convert and become members of Rennyō's following.

³⁴ A temple in present-day Toyama prefecture founded by Shinran during the Kenpō period (1213–1219).

³⁵ *kakurin*; Ch. *huo-lin*, a term from the Confucian classics.

³⁶ Zonnyō's peaceful death had a turbulent wake. It was clearly in keeping with Zonnyō's will that Rennyō be the next leader of the Honganji lineage. The claim was contested by Rennyō's stepmother, however, who tried to install her own son in his place. This move was countered by Rennyō's uncle, Nyojō (1412–1460) of the Honsen-ji, who, speaking on behalf of the deceased, declared Rennyō the new eighth leader of the Honganji.

³⁷ Literally, on the fiftieth day. In Buddhist tradition, funeral services extend over a 49-day period, after which the soul is said reborn.

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down its rays on the whole wide world.³⁸ We may have wanted to keep it a secret from the world, but the time had come for our teaching³⁹ and those converted by it to spread beyond all past record.

As a result, the monastics who were studying on Mount Hiei hatched a nefarious plot. [The problem was that] the realization these various sects of the Path of Spiritual Perfection⁴⁰ promise is too difficult to come by. The human condition of the beings of this final age (*ma-tsudai*) being such, long before the moon [of enlightenment] from the integration of the Three Mystic Elements⁴¹ can arise, they slip into the reverie [of reciting the Name of Amida Buddha]; no wondrous principle appears in the window of the Three Truths⁴² for the basic seekers in today's world who are unable to implement [the Path of Spiritual Perfection in their daily lives]. And so, by ignoring what the basic seekers are capable of doing and propagating a teaching unsuited to the times, the principle they seek to teach is rapidly going into eclipse.

Begrudging our flourishing Pure Land school, they spread false rumors to burn down the Ōtani meditation hall in Higashiyama [in Kyoto].⁴³ However, Shinran's image was loaded onto a cart and removed to a place called Ōtsu in Shiga ward, Ōmi province, where it

³⁸ Literally, four seas of beings.

³⁹ The original term, *ji-ki sōdō*, means the accordance of the time (age) and the people. Here the teaching that has come of age is the Pure Land teaching that takes into consideration the human condition; in contrast, the teaching that not suitable for the people of the age is the monastic tradition that counts on the perfection of the human spirit. The character *ki* indicates the spiritual capacity of the seeker, and is used in the term *ki-hō ittai*, the unity of Dharma and seeker, in the *Anjinketsujōshō*, where the imperfect spirit is made whole by its union with the infinite.

⁴⁰ Literally, "holy path." Used in contrast to Pure Land way.

⁴¹ The integration of the three elements (*yōga sammitsu*) alludes to the esoteric Buddhist practice of integrating the three elements of body/hand, voice, and mind (*artha*). It is also referred to in the Tendai as *santai sōsoku*, or the identity of the Three Truths. Although the authors of the *Legacy* here criticize the Tendai, it should also be noted that the Pure Land schools of Hōnen and Shinran owe much to the Tendai for their doctrinal orientation.

⁴² A reference to the Tendai Buddhist idea of *enkyū*, or perfect teaching, in which the three truths of empty, relative, and middle are perfectly interrelated.

⁴³ This occurred on the tenth day of the first month of Kanshō 6 (1465), and is referred to as the *Kanshō no hō'nan*, or Dharma disturbance of the Kanshō period. For a different interpretation of the event, see Rogers and Rogers, p. 64 ff., and Kaneko Daiei, "Rennyō the Restorer," I.

was temporarily housed. The Master also moved to this location secretly, where he passed days and nights to no purpose hiding behind the closed doors of a thatched hut. Afterward, a small priest's quarters was set up in a place south of Ōtsu and Shinran's image was installed there. By the donations of his disciples, temporary living quarters with a temple (*zenshitsu*) were made where he could take up residence. It was in this fashion that he passed some years.

In Bunmei 3 [1471] {a *kanoto no u* year}, during the first days of early summer, Rennyō slipped out of his quarters in Ōtsu and secretly departed for the northern regions. Because he earned the deep respect of the men and women of those areas, people who held the [Shinshū] creed of abandoning wrong and taking refuge in the right were concentrated in these areas.

In bygone days, in the time of Genkū [Hōnen] Shōnin, followers from the various sects of the Holy Path started to take refuge in the true teaching [of the Pure Land]. As the movement spread, this incited the envy of monastics in the South and North [i.e., Nara and Kyoto], who drew up false allegations out of resentment and had the original founder⁴⁴ of the Pure Land [teaching], Kurodani Shōnin [Hōnen], banished to the distant region of the southern sea [Shikoku]. Our founder, Shinran Shōnin, was also banished at the same time to the rural area of the Hokuriku. In his own words he tells us:

And again, if my Great Teacher, the Venerable Genkū, were not sent away into a remote province by the authorities, how should I ever live a life of banishment? And if I did not live a life of banishment, how could I hope to have the opportunity to convert the people living far away from the centre of culture? This too must be ascribed to the virtue of my Venerable Teacher. (Sasaki & Suzuki, trans.)⁴⁵

From this we learn that there was a flourishing group of members largely concentrated in the northern lands. Indeed, it was Rennyō's depar-

⁴⁴ *gensō*. This introduces a set of three terms for the Founders: Hōnen, the original founder (*gensō*); Shinran, the founder of the Shinshū (*shūso*); and Rennyō, the middle founder (*chūso*).

⁴⁵ A passage from the *Godenshō* [Life of Shinran], by Zonkaku.

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ture for the northern regions in Bunmei 3 [1471] that particularly marks the starting point for the flourishing of Shinshū there in later years.⁴⁶

Once, while on pilgrimage to various points, Rennyō came to a place called Yoshizaki in the northern ward of Echizen province, and it occurred to him that this was where he would like to settle down. It was the 27th day of the seventh month of that same year [1471]. A residence had to be constructed. Members, both rich and poor, monk and lay, turned out to help in such numbers around the temple (*zenshitsu*) that they were impossible to count. From this time on, the school flourished. All people, regardless of previous sectarian affiliation, were allowed to convert and become a member of Rennyō's following; so great were their numbers they were like fields of grass moving in the wind.

Bunmei 7 [1475], while on pilgrimage to various sites and sight-seeing, Rennyō made it a point to stop by the old temples as he knew the importance of renewing acquaintances. He stopped at the pine gate (*shōhi*) of that familiar temple in Futamata,⁴⁷ just outside of Kahoku, in Kaga province.⁴⁸ He remained there for awhile to give his legs a rest, and for amusement had stones and trees rearranged into a garden. This site remains today and should be regarded as a memorial to Rennyō.

In the same year [1475], in the latter part of the eighth month, at age 61, Rennyō departed the temple (*zenshitsu*) at Yoshizaki and, unfurling the sails before the winds, went secretly to Obama in Wakasa province⁴⁹ by boat. And then, on foot, he went by way of steep moun-

⁴⁶ That is, it was because Rennyō was forced to leave what had been his home, that he was able to achieve his lifework of spreading the teaching.

⁴⁷ *Futamata no shōhi*, literally, "the pine gate of Futamata." Although not specifically named, this would have been the Honsen-ji, established by his uncle Nyojō, to whom he owed an immense debt of gratitude for the timely assistance he provided in 1457 when Rennyō's succession to Honganji leadership was challenged by his stepmother. Later, out of gratitude to his uncle, Rennyō would place his second son Renjō (1446–1504) and his seventh son Rengo (1468–1543), compiler of the *Legacy*, as successive resident priests of Honsen-ji.

⁴⁸ Kaga is the old name for present-day Ishikawa prefecture.

⁴⁹ The old name for present-day Fukui prefecture.

tain paths in Tamba province to Settsu province,⁵⁰ and on to Deguchi, a town in the Nakafuri district, Matsuda ward, Kawachi province.⁵¹ Three years passed after he began living there incognito.⁵²

In the tenth month⁵³ of Bunmei 9 [1477], Zenju⁵⁴ of Kanegamori met Rennyo at Deguchi, where he was living a quiet life. He told Rennyo that he had found a parcel of land in the eastern part of the Uji ward, Yamashiro province,⁵⁵ that was suitable for building new quarters. Rennyo replied he thought it his destiny to live out his life without ever having a single place to settle down. Zenju explained his thinking again, telling Rennyo, "Although you once lived in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto, you have to leave that idea behind. Think of the advantage of living in the Uji ward in terms of its potential to draw large numbers of followers, both monk and lay." [After listening to Zenju's ideas] Rennyo reconsidered, and was now enthusiastic about the plan and wanted to see the site as soon as possible.

In [Bunmei] 10 [1478], on the twenty-ninth day of the first month, the Master, age 64, departed from Deguchi, Matsuda ward, Kawachi province, for the capital, and arrived at the Ono manor in Uji ward, Yamashiro province. He then proceeded by palanquin via the west central road of Ono village in Yamashina, where he inspected the site for quite some time. Thinking that here at last was the place he should settle down, he first had a small cabin built. That year he lived in simple quarters in Chikamatsu, Ōmi, but, after the new year, in the third month of that following year [1479], at age 65, he made further plans to build. At this time, the Master was determined, in the life that remained to him, to build the Goei-dō (the Image Hall). Once he made his decision known, the project was participated in eagerly by the members of his following.

⁵⁰ Tamba and Settsu are parts of present-day Kyoto and Hyogo prefecture, respectively.

⁵¹ Kawachi is now part of present-day Osaka.

⁵² *yūsei*, to live away from one's homeland in quietude.

⁵³ *genritsu*. Interestingly, this term is no longer used in Japan, and is not possible to find in Japanese dictionaries. One would need to consult a large Chinese dictionary to find an entry.

⁵⁴ Earlier introduced as Dōsai.

⁵⁵ Yamashiro was located in a long valley, now called Yamashina, between Kyoto city and Lake Biwa.

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In Bunmei 12 [1480] {a kanoe ne year}, when Rennyō was age 66, from around the first ten days of the second month the construction work began and was continued until completion in mid-autumn of that year. The Master's heart experienced profound jubilation that his long-cherished wish had finally been realized. The satisfaction of this time and the tint of joy was everywhere one looked. Later, on the evening of the 18th day, eleventh month, a celebration was held for the installation of Shinran's image that had been in Ōtsu. After that the Hōon-kō service⁵⁶ was conducted with a ceremony of such unabated power as never before witnessed. The temple members, in expressing their gratitude [to Shinran], did so truly with renewed vigor; there was no stopping their ardent faith once they had so determined. Even disbelievers were brought to awaken minds of faith through the power of conviction, even the unorthodox threw over their false views and in no time at all were brought to true insight.

Reflecting on all that had transpired since that one incident,⁵⁷ and pondering variously what ought be done in this world, [Rennyō may have concluded]: to construct on this holy site a temple within the walls of which the Image of Shinran Shōnin could be enshrined and worshiped is the great joy of our faith; it is this that will bring happiness to the brow of the multitudes of members and disciples.

In spring of Bunmei 14 [1482] {when the Master was sixty-eight} he told us: "It is fortunate for us that this temple has been ours ever since the time emperors Kameyama and Fushimi bestowed us official permission to build it. It was not only *my* temple but *our* temple, and so when we lost the main hall it was a great shock to us all." But once Rennyō started to think in earnest about building, he raised the structure in a fortnight, and now, in the latter part of the sixth month we've completed construction.

After that dramatic reversal of fortune the Master suffered at a young age [that forced him to leave the capital], wherever he went in the urban or rural areas he devoted his energies to activities that would contribute ultimately to the restoration of our Dharma lineage. The

⁵⁶ Hōon-kō is held in November as a ceremony of thanksgiving to Shinran who died in this month.

⁵⁷ That is, the destruction of the Ōtani Honganji in 1465.

message he had was simple: in order that the leagues of followers from every province find peace of mind in themselves, he instructed them to recite the nembutsu. Rennyō was thus able to achieve his heart's desire. Shinran Shōnin's lineage spread to all sixty provinces of Japan, its followers filling them to the brim instantly. Thus was his long-cherished wish of spreading the Buddha dharma universally realized, and the very thought he dwelt in—to benefit living beings—fulfilled. Thus it is said that the late Master was not only a reincarnation of the Kurodani Shōnin [Hōnen], but also the later embodiment of [Shinran] Shōnin, the Founder of our school. Never thinking of himself no matter what difficulties befell him personally, Rennyō was like a lantern casting its light on all without exception, guiding the bewildered and spiritually ungifted through this dirty world of darkness and despair.

This ends the first part of Itoku ki.