

Shin Buddhist Attitudes Towards the Kami

From Shinran to Rennyo

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ONE OF THE most fascinating topics in the study of Japanese religions is the complex history of the interaction between Buddhism and the native Japanese religion, Shintō.¹ After the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the sixth century, attempts were made to unite Buddhism with the indigenous religion, a phenomenon often referred to as *shinbutsu-shūgō* 神仏習合, or “unification of the kami (the native Japanese gods) and buddhas.” This attempt at unification was advantageous to both sides. Shintō priests could increase their status by allying themselves with the prestigious foreign religion, while Buddhists realized that their authority and influence over the populace could be readily enhanced by incorporating the worship of the local kami into their religion.

As Kuroda Toshio has noted, this Buddhist-Shintō unification proceeded by absorbing the worship of the kami into Buddhism. Between the late eighth and the eleventh centuries, a number of theories were developed to explain the relationship between the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Buddhist pantheon with the native Japanese kami. Kuroda explains:

As is already well known, between the late eighth century and the eleventh century Shintō and Buddhism gradually coalesced with one another . . . or, more precisely, veneration of the kami was absorbed into Buddhism through a variety

¹ Important works in Japanese include Murayama 1957 and 1974. The standard work in English is Matsunaga 1969.

of doctrinal innovations and new religious forms. Among the doctrinal explanations of the kami were the following: 1) the kami realize that they themselves are trapped in this world of samsāra and transmigration and they also seek liberation through the Buddhist teachings; 2) the kami are benevolent deities who protect Buddhism; 3) the kami are the transformations of the buddhas manifested in Japan to save all sentient beings (*honji-suijaku*); and 4) the kami are the pure spirits of the buddhas (*hongaku*).²

Kuroda further notes that during the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the first two theories—that is to say, the theories that (1) the kami are unenlightened beings who need to seek liberation from the cycle of birth-and-death through the practice of the Buddhist teachings, and (2) the kami are protectors of the Buddhist teachings—were dominant.³ However, from the mid-ninth century, the third theory—that the kami are the Japanese manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas—came to hold an increasingly important place in the Japanese view of the kami.⁴ This *honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹 theory, or the theory that the kami are “traces” (*jaku*) which the buddhas and bodhisattvas (*honji* or the “original ground”) manifested (*sui*) in Japan to save the beings of this nation, became the most influential theory during the medieval period. By the twelfth century, the major kami had been correlated to the central figures of the Buddhist pantheon.⁵

To repeat, by the end of the Heian period, the *honji-suijaku* theory that the Japanese kami are the local manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas became widely accepted by Japanese Buddhists, and the worship of various kami had become an integral part of Buddhist practice. However, during the Kamakura period, important Pure Land figures, most notably Shinran (1173–1262), rejected the worship of the kami, arguing that the sole source of salvation during the age of the Latter Dharma is Amida Buddha. Although recognizing that the kami often serve as protectors of Buddhism, these Pure Land thinkers did not

² Kuroda 1981:9.

³ Kuroda 1981:9.

⁴ Matsunaga 1969:227–28.

⁵ Matsunaga 1969:231–59.

interpret them as being manifestations of the buddhas. This position represents a break with the earlier syncretic tendency of Japanese Buddhism and marks an important epoch in the history of the Buddhist-Shintō interaction in Japan.

However, after Shinran's time, Shin Buddhist thinkers began to incorporate the *honji-suijaku* theory into their discussion of the Japanese kami, resulting in an important modification of Shinran's original interpretation. This was the result of the need to temper the radical Shin Buddhist emphasis on exclusive reliance on Amida Buddha in order to make its teachings socially more acceptable. In the following pages, I will trace the development of Shin Buddhist attitudes towards the kami, focusing on the four figures: Shinran, Kakunyo, Zonkaku and Rennyo. But before considering them, it will be necessary to outline briefly the view of Hōnen, Shinran's master.

Hōnen's Attitude towards the Kami

Although the *honji-suijaku* theory had become widely accepted in the Heian period, during the succeeding Kamakura period there arose a Buddhist movement in Kyoto which claimed that the worship of the kami did not lead to salvation. This was the exclusive nembutsu (*senju nembutsu* 専修念仏) movement led by Hōnen (1133–1212).⁶ According to Hōnen, the world was in the midst of the degenerate age of the Latter Dharma (*mappō* 末法) in which the spiritual capacities of humans had decreased to the point where it was impossible for them to achieve liberation from the cycle of birth-and-death by their own efforts. The only hope for salvation during this age, he preached, lay in attaining birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land (called *Sukhāvatī* in Sanskrit or *Gokuraku* 極樂 [Land of Utmost Bliss] in Japanese) where one could achieve Buddhahood quickly. Hōnen emphasized that the sole practice which leads to birth in the Pure Land is the recitation of the nembutsu. This was because he considered the nembutsu recitation to be the practice specifically chosen by Amida Buddha in his Original Vow as the universal practice for effecting the birth of all beings into his Pure Land.

⁶ On Hōnen's Pure Land Buddhism, see Andrews 1987. Hōnen's views concerning the kami are discussed in Asai 1980 and Kakehashi 1986.

Hōnen's position that salvation is possible through sole reliance on the nembutsu was a revolutionary one in the history of Japanese Buddhism. For him, the recitation of the nembutsu was sufficient in itself to ensure birth in Amida's Land. All other practices, including such basic Buddhist practices as arousing the aspiration for enlightenment, keeping the precepts and meditation exercises, were rejected as unnecessary for salvation. Although he nowhere states it explicitly, this implies that Hōnen rejected the worship of the Japanese kami as having any salvific efficacy. However, Hōnen does not deny that the kami exist. In fact, on the basis of such texts as Shan-tao's *Kuan nien fa men* 觀念法門 (*Dharma Gate of Contemplation*) Hōnen argues that nembutsu practitioners are protected, not only by all the various buddhas, but also by the kami as well.⁷

However, while denying the kami's power to effect salvation, Hōnen does not condemn visits to shrines by nembutsu practitioners. In fact, he even declares that prayers may be addressed to the kami as long as they concern worldly matters and are not prayers for birth in the Pure Land. For example, the following exchange is found in the *Ippyaku-shijūgo kajō mondō* 一百四十五箇条問答 (*Question and Answer in One Hundred Forty-five Articles*).

Question: What do you think of visits to shrines by those who make the nembutsu their practice?

Answer: It may be allowed.⁸

⁷ Hōnen makes this argument in chapter 15, "Passages on How the Buddhas of the Six Directions Protect Nembutsu Practitioners," of his major work, the *Senjaku hongan nembutsushū* 選択本願念仏集 (*Selection of the Nembutsu of the Original Vow*). The passage reads: "Further, the *Dharma Gate of Contemplation* . . . says: 'Further, as is taught in the section on practice of the *Sutra of the Samadhi Wherein All the Buddhas are Present*, 'The Buddha declared that if anyone wholeheartedly practices the Samadhi of meditating on Amida Buddha, then all of the many heavenly beings, including the great guardian kings of the four directions and the eight kinds of guardians of Buddhism, such as dragons and devas, will, as his protector, always follow him as closely as his own shadow and joyfully watch over him. Neither devils nor evil spirits nor misfortunes and obstacles nor disasters will come unexpectedly to confuse him . . . ' " (Kondo and Augustine 1987:114). The original passage is found in Ishii 1955:346. Although the passage here refers only to heavenly beings (*t'ien* 天), they include the Japanese kami as well; see Asai 1980:43 and Kakehashi 1986:387.

⁸ Ishii 1955:660. Cited in Asai 1980:55 and Kakehashi 1986:389.

In his letter to Tsudo no Saburō 津戸の三郎, Hōnen states:

It is all right to say prayers concerning matters of this world to both buddhas and kami. As for birth in the Pure Land after death, to engage in any practice other than the nembutsu is wrong, since it obstructs the nembutsu. It is all right to say prayers to buddhas and kami for worldly matters, since it does not concern birth in the Pure Land.⁹

In other words, the power of the nembutsu to effect salvation is not compromised even if the nembutsu practitioner visits shrines or prays to the kami for worldly benefits. In his view, the all-embracing salvific power of the nembutsu assures birth in the Pure Land of all people without exception.

In conclusion, Hōnen's exclusive nembutsu denied several fundamental presuppositions concerning orthodox practice and ways to salvation held by the established Buddhist sects. First, Hōnen rejected the efficacy of the various soteriological paths advocated by these older sects, claiming that only the nembutsu can result in liberation from the cycle of transmigration during the age of the Latter Dharma. Moreover, although he accepted the Buddhist cosmology, which recognized the existence of numerous buddhas, bodhisattvas and kami within the universe, he dismissed the efficacy of worshipping any other deity besides Amida Buddha as a means to achieving liberation. According to Hōnen, reliance on Amida and his Vow is the only way to salvation, and it is ineffective, indeed detrimental, to seek liberation by trusting in any other buddha or deity besides Amida.

Attacks on Hōnen's Pure Land Movement

Hōnen's ideas were in direct opposition to those held by the established sects of his day. As Hōnen's movement grew in popularity, the older sects repeatedly petitioned the court to ban it. First the Tendai sect in 1204, and then Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213) on behalf of the Hossō sect in 1205, presented memorials to outlaw Hōnen's teaching. A number of other attempts to eradicate the exclusive nembutsu movement followed.¹⁰

⁹ Ishii 1955:504. Cited in Asai 1980:51 and Kakehashi 1986:390.

Many of these memorials focused on the allegation that Pure Land followers refused to worship the kami, citing it as proof that the new nembutsu movement was a potential source of serious social and political disruption. The denial of the kami by Hōnen's followers could quickly turn into the disavowal of the legitimacy of the various religious and political institutions which appealed to these kami for their authority. Hōnen's Pure Land movement, the proponents of the established Buddhist schools argued, is therefore subversive and must be banned.

Jōkei's petition, known as the *Kōfukuji sōjō* 興福寺奏状 (*Kōfukuji Petition*),¹¹ led to the first suppression of Hōnen's nembutsu movement in 1207. This memorial consists of nine articles listing the faults of Hōnen's teachings. Among them, article five, entitled "The Error of Rejecting Spirits and Kami," explicitly attacked Hōnen for rejecting the need to worship the Japanese kami. This article states:

The nembutsu followers have long been estranged from the deities (*jinmyō* 神明). They pay their respects at the great shrines and imperial sanctuaries, whether it be those of the true (deities) or provisional manifestations. They make such statements as that if one puts one's trust in the deities, one will surely fall into hell. I will put aside the true spirits (*kijin* 鬼神) for the time being and refrain from discussing them. (But) the trace manifestations (*suijaku*) who assume provisional forms are actually the great (Buddhist) Holy Ones, revered by all the eminent priests of antiquity. . . . Priests in this Latter Age respect the secular authorities; how much more so should they venerate the holy deities. . . . Such abuse as this (turning one's back on the holy gods of Shintō by the followers of Hōnen) should be stopped.¹²

Here Jōkei argues on the basis of the *honji-suijaku* theory that, since the kami are Japanese manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, they must be respected by all Buddhists. Hōnen's nembutsu, which de-

¹⁰ According to Hisano Yoshiko, there were thirteen attempts to outlaw or destroy the new Pure Land movement during Shinran's lifetime (Hisano 1988:109).

¹¹ The *Kōfukuji sōjō* is translated in Morrell 1983.

¹² Morrell 1983:25-26; slightly amended.

nies the necessity of worshipping the kami, must therefore be banned.

As a result of this petition, several of Hōnen's leading disciples were executed, Hōnen himself was exiled to Tosa, and other disciples (including Shinran) were banished to the provinces.¹³ However, Hōnen's Pure Land movement was not eradicated, and attempts to outlaw it continued. In 1224, monks of the Tendai sect once again issued a memorial urging the suppression of the exclusive nembutsu movement. Its second article states:

Our country is a nation of the kami. It is the duty of the nation to revere the way of the kami (Shintō 神道). When we respectfully inquire after the origin of the hundred kami, there is none which is not the trace of the buddhas. Ise Daijingu, Shōhachimangū, Kamo, Matsuo, Hie, Kasuga, etc., are all manifestations of Śākyamuni, Bhaiṣajyarāja (Yakushi), Amida, Avalokiteśvara (Kannon), etc. . . . However, at present, followers of exclusive (nembutsu) attribute everything to the nembutsu and long refuse to respect the deities. Since they have lost the rites of the nation, how can they not be censured by the kami? It should be known that the divinities (*jingi* 神祇) will surely send demonic spirits (*kihaku* 鬼魄) to vanquish them.

Also, when we look into the expositions of the *Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*, etc., the Buddha entrusted his scripture in its entirety to the holy deities of the ten directions. They received the Buddha's edict and (have since then) protected the Dharma treasure. Therefore, if you receive and uphold the sūtras and teachings, (these deities) will surely guard you. But if you should slander them, they will surely cause you torment. Those who revile the Dharma should remember (that they will receive) this retribution.

In particular, (this is what) I hear of the actions of the evil followers (of the exclusive nembutsu:) they eat meat and engage in sexual intercourse by the shrine fence. After coming into contact with pollution, they visit the shrine of the trace manifestations. (Yet they say) even those who commit the ten

¹³ On the 1207 suppression, see Dobbins 1989:14–18.

evils and five grave offenses will be led the Pure Land by Amida. How can the deities and the way of the kami obstruct birth in the Pure Land? [And so forth.] Sensible people should feel admonished by these words. How can those who break the laws of the kami's land escape the king's punishment?¹⁴

Like Jōkei's petition above, the argument presented here is based on the *honji-suijaku* theory. It argues that since the kami are manifestations of the buddhas, nembutsu practitioners who commit outrage against the kami are guilty of insulting the buddhas and must be outlawed. But this theme is further amplified by invoking the notion that Japan is a divine land. Since Japan is the sacred abode of the kami, the nation as a whole has the duty to venerate the kami, and the government has the obligation to suppress those movements which are disrespectful to them.

Although he did not call for its suppression, Mujū Ichien 無住一円 (1226–1312), too, was deeply critical of the exclusive nembutsu movement. Although Mujū belongs to a slightly later age than Hōnen and Shinran, it may be instructive to consider his views here. In his *Shasekishū* 砂石集 (*Collection of Sand and Pebbles*), he states:

The nembutsu sects are an important gateway to salvation appropriate to this defiled world and provide the common person with a direct route to release from birth-and-death. But though they are indeed most excellent, there are those who pass judgement on other practices, other ways of acquiring merit. They go so far as to make light of other buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities, and to ridicule the various teachings of the Mahāyāna. These commonplace people have a way of thinking which does not admit that other disciplines also lead to the Pure Land; understanding nothing outside their own beliefs, they disparage the other buddhas and bodhisattvas. . . . Thus, while respecting and relying solely on Amida's Vow and diligently seeking benefit from the nembutsu, we should not disparage other disciplines nor make light of other bud-

¹⁴ Takeuchi 1973:271–72. Cited in Miyazaki 1971:51.

dhas, bodhisattvas and deities.¹⁵

Mujū contends here that all the buddhas, bodhisattvas and heavenly beings in the Buddhist pantheon (including the Japanese kami who had by now been fully incorporated into the Buddhist spiritual cosmology) are authentic sources of salvation and must be treated with respect. However, the followers of the exclusive nembutsu preach reliance solely on Amida Buddha and neglect to honor other buddhas and divinities. This is a serious affront to these other spiritual beings. For Mujū who recognized the existence of a number of different, and equally valid, paths to liberation, Hōnen's insistence on Amida Buddha as the sole source of salvation during the age of the Latter Dharma was unacceptable dogmatism.

Shinran's Rejection of Kami Worship

Hōnen's disciple Shinran was an innovative thinker who extended and deepened the Pure Land teachings he received from his master. On the question of the efficacy of worshipping the kami, Shinran was deeply influenced by Hōnen.¹⁶ However, Shinran went even further than his master in totally rejecting all forms of kami worship.

Concerning the kami, Shinran makes the following two points: (1) Pure Land believers are not to worship the kami, and (2) the kami protect nembutsu practitioners. Shinran's most detailed treatment of the former point is found in the Chapter on Transformed Buddha and Land 化身土巻 (*Keshindo no maki*) of his major work, the *Kyōgyō-shinshō* 教行信証 (*Teaching, Practice, Faith and Realization*). In this chapter Shinran criticizes what he sees as the corrupt forms of Buddhism prevalent in his age. As part of his argument, he quotes over thirty passages from Buddhist and Confucian texts denouncing the worship of heavenly beings.¹⁷ In these texts, "heavenly beings" originally referred to Indian deities which had been absorbed into Buddhism. But

¹⁵ Morrell 1985:99–100; slightly amended.

¹⁶ An excellent outline of Shinran's attitude towards the kami is found in Dobbins 1989:57–60. There are also a number of studies in Japanese on this topic: Kashiwabara 1961, Miyazaki 1971, Hayashi 1986, and Hosokawa 1987.

¹⁷ Miyazaki 1971:53.

as Miyazaki Enjun has pointed out, Shinran interpreted the heavenly beings in these passages as including the Japanese kami.¹⁸ Shinran begins part two (*matsu* 末) of the Chapter on Transformed Buddha and Land with the following words: "Here, based on the sūtras, the true and the false are determined and people are cautioned against the wrong, false, and misleading opinions of non-Buddhist teachings."¹⁹ Immediately following these words, Shinran continues:

The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* states: "If one has taken refuge in the Buddha one must not further take refuge in various heavenly gods." The *Sūrangama Sūtra* states: "Those among lay women who hear this samādhi and seek to learn it: . . . Take refuge in the Buddha yourself, take refuge in the dharma, take refuge in the saṅgha. Do not serve other teachings, do not worship heavenly beings, do not enshrine spirits (*kijin* 鬼神), do not heed any days considered lucky." Further, it states: "Lay women who wish to learn this samādhi . . . must not worship devas or enshrine spirits."²⁰

These passages are followed by a series of over thirty quotations, some quite lengthy, denouncing the worship of heavenly beings. However, Shinran's clearest statement rejecting the worship of the kami is found in a passage from the *Analects*, which he intentionally misquotes:

The *Analects* states: "Chi-lu asked, 'Should one serve spirits?' Confucius said, 'One should not serve spirits. Why should people serve spirits?'"²¹

The original *Analects* passage states:

Chi-lu asked, "Should one serve spirits?" The Master said, "Until you have learned to serve people, how can you serve spirits?"²²

¹⁸ Miyazaki 1971:59.

¹⁹ Ueda 1985:555, slightly amended. The original passage is found in Shinran shōnin zenshū kankōkai 1969: Vol. 1, 327.

²⁰ Ueda 1985: Vol. 4, 555–56, slightly amended. For the original see Shinran shōnin zenshū kankōkai 1969: Vol. 1, 327.

²¹ Ueda 1985: Vol. 4, 612. For the original see Shinran shōnin zenshū kankōkai 1969: Vol. 1, 380.

²² Yoshikawa 1978:31. For an alternate English translation, see Waley 1938:155.

This passage shows that Shinran unambiguously rejected worship of the kami by nembutsu practitioners. Shinran makes the same point in the following verses from his *Shōzōmatsu wasan* 正像末和讃 (*Hymns on the Last Age*).

Lamentable it is that people, whether of the Way or of the world

Choose auspicious times and lucky dates,
Worship heavenly kami and earthly spirits,
And are absorbed in divinations and rituals.

Lamentable it is that these days
All in Japan, whether of the Way or of the world,
While performing the rites and rituals of Buddhism,
Worship the spirits of heaven and earth.²³

The second point which Shinran makes is that the kami protect and look after the welfare of nembutsu practitioners. As we saw above, this point was also emphasized by Hōnen. Shinran expresses this idea in a number of his writings. For example, in the Chapter on Faith 信巻 (*Shin no maki*) of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, he lists ten benefits gained by those who recite the nembutsu, the first of which is that they are “protected and sustained by unseen powers,” i.e., the kami.²⁴ In the Chapter on Transformed Buddha and Land of the same work, Shinran quotes the following lines from the *Kuan ting ching* 灌頂經 (*Sūtra of Ritual Sprinkling*).

Without revealing themselves, the thirty-six spirit-kings,
together with their followings of spirits numerous as the
sands of the Ganges ten billionfold, will take turns protecting
those who receive the three refuges.²⁵

And in the *Jōdo wasan* 浄土和讃 (*Hymns on the Pure Land*), he states:

All the heavenly kami and earthly spirits,
Are called good spirits.

²³ Ryukoku University Translation Center 1980:101–104; slightly amended.

²⁴ Ueda 1985: Vol. 2, 257. For the original see Shinran shōnin zenshū kankōkai 1969: Vol. 1, 138.

²⁵ Ueda 1985: Vol. 4, 586. Shinran shōnin zenshū kankōkai 1969: Vol. 1, 356.

These good gods, each and all,
Protect the followers of the nembutsu.²⁶

These quotations all show that Shinran, like Hōnen, maintained that the kami protect all nembutsu practitioners.

Shinran's admonition not to worship the kami derives from his conviction of the need for undivided reliance on Amida Buddha's Vow. As Kuroda has noted, Shinran (like Hōnen) was not advocating the notion that the kami do not exist. Like all other people of his age, he accepted the medieval cosmology which recognized the existence of many spiritual beings in the universe.²⁷ But he emphatically rejected (again like Hōnen) the idea that they could be of any help in achieving liberation. However, unlike Hōnen, who condoned worship at shrines and even prayers addressed to the kami, Shinran states unequivocally that Pure Land believers must not worship them.

It appears that Shinran's repudiation of kami worship was frequently the source of friction between Shinran's followers and the political authorities. This is suggested by a letter from Shinran to his son Zenran and other nembutsu practitioners in the Kantō.²⁸ In this letter, Shinran declares:

To scorn buddhas and bodhisattvas and to denigrate the divinities and spirits of the nether world (*myōdō* 冥道) is something that should never be. . . . The kami of heaven and earth watch over people who have a profound faith in the Buddhist teachings, accompanying them as if they took the form of their shadow. Therefore, if people have faith in the nembutsu, they should never entertain thoughts of disclaiming the kami of heaven and earth. If the divinities are not to be discarded, then how much less should they speak ill of or look down on buddhas and bodhisattvas. If people speak ill of buddhas and bodhisattvas, then they are individuals who utter

²⁶ Fujimoto et al. 1965:140; slightly amended.

²⁷ Kuroda 1975:192.

²⁸ On this letter, see Akamatsu 1961:293-95. An analysis of this letter from the standpoint of Shin Buddhist doctrines is found in Tashiro 1987.

Amida's name without having faith in the nembutsu. . . .

In short, it is only to be expected that lords, constables, and overseers in the area, speaking falsehoods and inclined towards error, should now take measures to suppress the nembutsu aimed at nembutsu followers. . . . Nonetheless, you should not say things against them. Rather, people who practice the nembutsu should have compassion and feel pity for those who would pose obstructions, and they should say the nembutsu fervently hoping that Amida will save even those posing these obstructions. . . .²⁹

This letter shows that the nembutsu followers' refusal to pay respect to the kami was used as a pretext for persecuting them in the Kantō. Shinran begins this letter by denying that he ever preached disrespect towards the kami. The kami, he argues, protect and look after all nembutsu believers. Thus it is wrong to revile or ignore them. If nembutsu practitioners persist in committing outrages against the kami, it will lead to their suppression by the local authorities. To prevent such attacks, Shinran concludes that one must not be disrespectful to the kami, even if one does not worship them.³⁰

As Hisano Yoshiko has noted, Hōnen and Shinran lived during an age in which political power passed from the hands of the court nobility to the warrior clans. Although these warrior clans were originally formed on the basis of consanguinity, they gradually developed into regional organizations worshipping the same local kami. The heads of these clans consciously fostered the worship of one kami by the entire warrior band in order to strengthen its solidarity. Moreover, the clan heads also required the common people of the region to worship the same kami as a means of showing their loyalty to him and his clan.³¹ Under such circumstances, the nembutsu followers' refusal to worship the local kami was often seen as a politically subversive act and led to their persecution. It was the need to forestall such persecution that

²⁹ Dobbins 1989:58–59; slightly amended. The original passage is found in Nabata et al. 1964:157–58.

³⁰ Kashiwabara 1961:324–26.

³¹ Hisano 1988:113.

made Shinran warn his followers to refrain from offending the kami.

Developments under Kakunyo

A new and important phase in the development of Shin Buddhist interpretation of the Japanese kami begins with Kakunyo 覚如 (1270–1351), Zonkaku 存覚 (1290–1373) and their adoption of the *honji-suijaku* theory.³² Neither Hōnen nor Shinran employed the *honji-suijaku* theory to explain the status of the kami in their writings. But changing circumstances led Kakunyo and Zonkaku to make use of this theory. As Fugen Kōju notes, the age in which they lived was marked by the gradual spread of Shin Buddhist teachings. As the teachings were accepted by more people, opportunities for conflict between nem-butsum practitioners and the rest of society over the former's refusal to worship the kami increased. Thus they were faced with the need to reconcile the Shin Buddhist refusal to worship the kami with the attitude of the society at large.³³ The key to their solution lay in their use of the *honji-suijaku* theory.

It was Kakunyo who first incorporated the *honji-suijaku* theory into Shin Buddhist interpretation of the kami. This theory provides the framework for the story of Heitarō and Kumano Gongen (the "provisional manifestation" [*gongen* 権現] of Amida Buddha at the sacred mountain of Kumano) found in the *Godenshō* 御傳鈔, Kakunyo's biography of Shinran. According to this story, Heitarō, a devout follower of Shinran's teaching, was obliged to make a visit to Kumano Shrine. Before leaving on the journey, Heitarō consulted Shinran on the propriety of visiting the shrine. To Heitarō's question, Shinran answered as follows. Kumano Gongen, the kami of Kumano, is a manifestation of Amida Buddha. His goal is to awaken the people of Japan to Amida's Vow and lead them to liberation. Because true nem-butsum practitioners are free from all calculating thoughts, it is permissible for them "in conformity to their public duties or to their master's instructions . . . (to) tread on the grounds of a kami to pay homage to

³² On Kakunyo, Zonkaku and their place in Shin Buddhist history, see Dobbins 1989:79–98. Studies on the interpretation of the kami found in the works of Kakunyo and Zonkaku include Kiriyaama 1971, Kashiwabara 1976, and Hayashi 1988.

³³ Fugen 1978:42.

his shrine or temple.”³⁴ Just go to Kumano with faith in Amida Buddha, the “original ground” of the Gongen, counsels Shinran. There is no need to observe the special rites of purification incumbent on pilgrims to Kumano.

Instructed in this way, Heitarō traveled to Kumano without undertaking any special rituals to purify himself. The night he arrived, Heitarō had a dream in which Kumano Gongen appeared to him, reproaching him for defiling the shrine precincts by coming without undertaking the necessary purification. At this point, Shinran himself in the dream appeared and explained to the kami that Heitarō was a devout follower of the nembutsu who was simply following his instruction. Thereupon Kumano Gongen bowed deeply to Shinran and said nothing more to Heitarō.³⁵

In this story, Kakunyo makes explicit use of the *honji-suijaku* theory to argue that Kumano Gongen is the manifestation of Amida Buddha who appeared in Japan to awaken the people to the nembutsu faith. Since Amida and Kumano Gongen are ultimately identical, Kakunyo concludes that, as long as one’s faith in Amida remains firm, there is no need to abstain from visiting Kumano. If required in the course of one’s duties or profession, one may indeed go to shrines and even participate in their rituals. The important thing is not outward behavior, but whether or not one has faith in Amida.

In this way, Kakunyo utilized the *honji-suijaku* theory to reconcile exclusive reliance on Amida Buddha with the pressure exerted on many nembutsu practitioners to participate in the worship of the kami. By removing a major source of tension between his followers and those who advocated kami worship by all, Kakunyo helped make Shin Buddhist teachings acceptable to the society at large. Needless to say, it also greatly facilitated the spread of Shin Buddhism.

It may also be noted here that Kakunyo invokes the authority of Hakone Gongen, considered to be the “provisional appearance” of the buddha at Hakone,³⁶ as part of his agenda to consolidate the Shin Bud-

³⁴ Suzuki 1973:180; slightly amended.

³⁵ This story is found in Suzuki 1973:179–80.

³⁶ The *Shojin hongaiishū* states that Hakone Gongen consists of three deities: its dharma substance (*hottai* 法体) is a manifestation of Manjuśrī; its relative substance (*zokutai* 俗体) is Maitreya; and its female substance (*nyotai* 女体) is Avalokiteśvara (Kannon). See Ōsumi 1977:189.

dhist community under his control. When in 1310 Kakunyo became the custodian of Shinran's mausoleum at Ōtani (later to become the Honganji), he resolved to use his position to unite all Shin Buddhist followers who were dispersed throughout Japan in independent congregations under the Ōtani chapel and his leadership.³⁷ As a part of his campaign, Kakunyo wrote the *Godenshō*, in which he tried to create an image of Shinran cloaked in traditional symbols of religious authority. In this biography, Kakunyo emphasized Shinran's aristocratic background, his vision of Avalokiteśvara (Kannon) at the Rokkakudō, his close relationship with Hōnen, etc., all of which served to aggrandize Shinran. He even goes so far as to call Shinran the incarnation of Amida Buddha.³⁸ Kakunyo's purpose in increasing Shinran's prestige in this way was, of course, to enhance his own authority (which derived from his role as the custodian of Shinran's mausoleum) in his struggle for leadership of the Shin Buddhist community.

The story found in the *Godenshō* about Shinran and Hakone Gongen must also be understood as part of Kakunyo's strategy to provide Shinran with a supernatural aura. Once, when Shinran was crossing the mountain pass at Hakone, he was greeted by an inhabitant of the village there. The villager told him how Hakone Gongen appeared to him in a dream and delivered to him the following message: A monk that I hold in high regard will be passing by soon; make sure you treat him with reverence! Immediately after receiving this message, the villager saw Shinran and recognized him as the monk whom Hakone Gongen had spoken about.

This story clearly betrays Kakunyo's attempt to elevate Shinran's authority by associating it with Hakone Gongen. Hakone Gongen appears here as the supernatural witness to Shinran's extraordinary spiritual stature. Kakunyo appropriated the prestige of Hakone Gongen to increase Shinran's religious authority and thus strengthen his own position.

In these ways, Kakunyo introduced the *honji-suijaku* theory into his treatment of the kami. However, it was his son Zonkaku who systematized the Shin Buddhist interpretation of the kami on the basis of the *honji-suijaku* theory.

³⁷ Dobbins 1989:83–84.

³⁸ Dobbins 1989:82.

Zonkaku and the *Shojin hongai*

The classic Shin Buddhist analysis of the kami is found in Zonkaku's *Shojin hongai* 諸神本懷集 (*On the Original Intention of the Various Kami*) written in 1324.³⁹ Zonkaku is famous as the person who laid the foundation of Shin Buddhist "theology." He wrote many influential works on Shin doctrine, including the *Rokuyōshō* 六要鈔 (*Summary of the Essentials of the Six [Chapters of the Kyōgyōshinshō]*), the oldest commentary on the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. The problem of the proper interpretation of the kami was an important one with which he had to struggle in order to create a systematic Shin Buddhology.

According to its colophon, Zonkaku wrote the *Shojin hongai* for Ryōgen 了源 (1295–1336), who belonged to the Bukkōji 仏光寺 subsect of Shin Buddhism.⁴⁰ The colophon also states that Zonkaku modeled this work on a certain earlier work on the same subject. Since Zonkaku does not mention the name of this earlier work, scholars have speculated at length over its identity. But recently Kitanishi Hiromu discovered a text entitled *Kami no honji no koto* 神本地之事 (*On the Matter of the Original Ground of the Kami*) at the Kōgenji 向源寺 in Nagano prefecture and determined that this was the source of the *Shojin hongai*.⁴¹

Zonkaku makes two closely related claims in the *Shojin hongai*: (1) the major kami are all manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and (2) all buddhas and bodhisattvas are manifestations of Amida Buddha. On the basis of this "two-tiered" *honji-suijaku* cosmology, he argues that the proper object of worship is not the kami, but Amida Buddha who lies at the source of all the kami.⁴² In fact, he concludes that the original intention (*hongai*) of the kami is to

³⁹ An annotated text of the *Shojin hongai* is found in Ōsumi 1977:182–207. Important studies on the *Shojin hongai* include Fugen 1978, Miyazaki 1988, and Imahori 1978, 1990.

⁴⁰ Miyazaki 1988:420–21.

⁴¹ Kitanishi 1966. Kitanishi's article contains the text of the *Kami no honji no koto*. It may also be noted that Miyazaki Enjun sees the *Shojin hongai* as being closely associated with Ippen's Ji sect of Pure Land Buddhism. See Miyazaki 1988:429–32.

⁴² On the "two-tiered" (*nijū* 二重) structure of Zonkaku's analysis of Amida Buddha and the kami, see Fugen 1978:40.

lead all beings out of the cycle of transmigration by teaching them the Pure Land nembutsu practice.

Zonkaku begins by dividing all the kami into two categories: (1) holy kami of provisional shrines (*gonsha no ryōjin* 権社ノ靈神) and (2) false kami of real shrines (*jissha no jajin* 実社ノ邪神).⁴³ The former refer to the kami who are manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Although Zonkaku does not consider them proper objects of worship for nembutsu practitioners, he sees them as having value in leading people to the true Buddhist path. On the other hand, the false kami of real shrines refer to various spirits of living or dead people (including ancestral spirits) who haunt and place curses on living beings.⁴⁴ Zonkaku emphatically rejects any form of worship towards them.

Zonkaku's analysis centers on the former holy deities of provisional shrines. At the beginning of the *Shojin hongaiishū* he declares:

Now, the buddhas are the original ground of the kami, and the kami are the trace manifestations of the buddhas. If it were not for the ground, it would be impossible to manifest the traces, and if it were not for the traces, it would be impossible to reveal the source. The kami and buddhas in turn become the front and the reverse, and together grant benefits (to sentient beings). The original ground and trace manifestations become in turn the provisional and the true, and together save (all beings).⁴⁵

Here Zonkaku presents an analysis of the relationship between the kami and the buddhas using fully developed *honji-suijaku* rhetoric. In his view, the provisional kami and their *honji* buddhas and bodhisattvas are two sides of the same coin, working together to effect the salvation of sentient beings. The bulk of Zonkaku's discussion of the provisional kami is taken up with detailed explanations concerning which figure in the Buddhist pantheon is the original ground of the major kami of Japan. A brief list of the major kami and their Buddhist counterparts found in the *Shojin hongaiishū* is as follows.

1. Kashima daimyōjin Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara

⁴³ Ōsumi 1977:182.

⁴⁴ Ōsumi 1977:190-91.

⁴⁵ Ōsumi 1977:182.

SHIN BUDDHIST ATTITUDES TOWARDS KAMI

2. Amaterasu Ōmikami	Avalokiteśvara
3. Susanoo no mikoto	Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Seishi)
4. Mishima daimyōjin	Bhaiṣajyarāja
5. Gion Shrine	Bhaiṣajyarāja
6. Inari	Cintā-maṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara (Nyoirin Kannon)
7. Hakusan	Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara
8. Atsuta Shrine	Acalanātha (Fudō myōō)

Furthermore, Zonkaku explains that the kami of the three shrines of Kumano correspond to Amida, Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara and Bhaiṣajyarāja; the kami of the three shrines at Hakone are manifestations of Manjuśrī, Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara; the three kami which constitute Hachiman correspond to Amida, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta; and the kami of the seven shrines of Hie are manifestations of Śākyamuni, Bhaiṣajyarāja, Amida, Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, Kṣitigarbha (Jizō) and Samantabhadra (Fugen).⁴⁶

However, it is not Zonkaku's intention to use the *honji-suijaku* theory to plead for equal worship of the kami and the buddhas. His point, rather, is that because the kami are merely manifestations of the buddhas one should revere the buddhas and not the kami. Zonkaku writes:

However, those who deeply venerate the original ground necessarily take refuge in the trace manifestations. This is because the traces are manifested from the origin. One who solely venerates the trace manifestations cannot be said to have taken refuge in the original ground. This is because the origin is not made manifest from the traces. Therefore if one wishes to take refuge in the trace manifestation kami, one should only take refuge in the buddhas who are their original grounds.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This list is based on Fugen 1978:43–44. A complete chart of the *Shojin hongai-shū*'s kami and their corresponding buddhas is found in Hisano 1988:117. For the discussion of this topic in the *Shojin hongai-shū* itself, see Ōsumi 1977:185–89.

⁴⁷ Ōsumi 1977:182.

Here, Zonkaku argues that when one worships a kami, this does not mean that one simultaneously worships the buddha who is its original ground. On the other hand, when one worships a buddha, this necessarily includes worship of the kami who are its trace manifestations. Thus, concludes Zonkaku, it is more advantageous to worship the original ground buddha since it includes the worship of its trace manifestation kami also.

Zonkaku's argument here—that since the kami are manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, one should worship the latter instead of the former—represents the first level of the dual structure of his analysis of the relationship between the kami, buddhas and Amida. Next, turning to the second level of his analysis, Zonkaku continues that Amida Buddha is the fundamental buddha, and the original mission of all buddhas (and their kami manifestations) is to preach birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land.

In the first place, when we inquire into the original ground of the deities of our nation, we find that many of them are Śākyamuni, Amida, Bhaiṣajyarāja, Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī, Kṣitigarbha, Nāgārjuna, etc. These buddhas and bodhisattvas teach us to reflect on Amida and urge us to intently seek birth in the Western Direction (Amida's Pure Land). Because the original intentions of the trace manifestations are identical (to those of their original ground buddhas), which spiritual being would defy it (i.e., the buddhas' wish to preach birth in the Pure Land)?⁴⁸

In this way, Zonkaku claims that all buddhas preach faith in Amida Buddha and birth in his Pure Land. But that is not all. He further continues that Amida Buddha is the source and original ground of all other buddhas and bodhisattvas. For this reason, Zonkaku argues that if one takes refuge in Amida, this is identical to taking refuge in all buddhas and bodhisattvas and, by extension, their kami manifestations.

Moreover, the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sūtra* preaches, "The buddhas of the three periods of time (past, present and

⁴⁸ Ōsumi 1977:199.

future) all attain enlightenment through the samādhi of meditating on Amida Buddha." Thus it appears that Amida is the original master of the buddhas. If we reflect upon their original master, we can conform to the wishes of the buddhas.

Further, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* states: "The buddhas and bodhisattvas of the lands of the ten directions have all appeared from the Realm of Utmost Bliss of the Buddha of Eternal Life (Amida Buddha)." This may be understood to mean that the buddhas are all discrete manifestations (*funshin* 分身) of Amida. If this is so, the principle that people who take refuge in Amida, the original buddha, also take refuge in the discrete manifestation buddhas is clear and needs no explanation.

Therefore, if one wants to conform to the wishes of the trace manifestations, one should arouse faith in the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the original ground. If one wants to conform to the wishes of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the original ground, one should take refuge in Amida, the original buddha. If one takes refuge in Amida, the buddhas of the three periods of time will rejoice and protect him; the bodhisattvas of the ten directions will smile and constantly stand by her. If one is guarded by the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the original ground, then one will be looked after by the trace manifestation kami.⁴⁹ Therefore, the deities of various places, etc., will protect nembutsu practitioners, and there are many instances of their seeking the merits of the nembutsu.⁵⁰

Citing the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sūtra* and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* as his authorities, Zonkaku claims that Amida Buddha is the original source of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore he argues that once one takes refuge in Amida, there is no need to worship other buddhas

⁴⁹ The text here reads "buddhas" instead of "kami." However, this appears clearly to be a mistake, and I have followed the emendation suggested by the late Muromachi period manuscript of the *Shojin hongai-shū* kept at the Ryūkyō University library. On this emendation, see Ōsumi 1977:202, headnote on "shobutsu 諸仏."

⁵⁰ Ōsumi 1977:201-202.

or kami. Amida Buddha contains them all; if one takes refuge in Amida, one automatically takes refuge in all buddhas, bodhisattvas and kami. He states:

Although their (the kami's) original grounds are various, there is none which cannot be contained within the wisdom of the one buddha, Amida. Therefore, if one takes refuge in Amida, it follows that one takes refuge in the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Since it is thus, it accords with reason to say that, even though one does not specifically attend on the kami who are their trace manifestations, one naturally takes refuge in them (too, once one takes refuge in Amida Buddha).⁵¹

The reason why many people worship the kami is that they wish to partake of the material benefits these kami are thought to bestow. But, according to Zonkaku, the kami's desire to bestow such blessings on the worshippers is just their preliminary goal. The ultimate goal is to lead all beings to the Pure Land and make them escape from the cycle of birth-and-death.⁵² This, in fact, was the original reason for the appearance of the kami in Japan. As Zonkaku emphatically states: "Therefore, when we reflect over and over again on the original intention of the deities, (we see that it was to) make karmic connections with sentient beings, gradually make them take refuge in the Buddha Dharma, and finally deliver them to the Pure Land in the western direction."⁵³ Thus the kami rejoice in seeing the worshippers recite the nembutsu and look after the welfare of nembutsu practitioners. The closing sentence of the *Shojin hongaiishū* summarizes Zonkaku's views concerning the kami most succinctly:

Those who wish to gain the protection of the buddhas and conform to the wishes of the kami should respectfully seek birth (in the Pure Land) and bodhi, and exclusively recite Amida's Name.⁵⁴

In conclusion, Zonkaku presents a two-tiered *honji-suijaku* spiritual

⁵¹ Ōsumi 1977:190.

⁵² Ōsumi 1977:192-93.

⁵³ Ōsumi 1977:205.

⁵⁴ Ōsumi 1977:206-207.

cosmology in order to argue that all buddhas, bodhisattvas and kami of provisional shrines derive from Amida Buddha. The point of his argument is that, since the kami are all manifestations of Amida Buddha, it is Amida Buddha, and not the kami themselves, who is the proper object of veneration. Indeed, he claims that the original wish of all the kami is to awaken beings to the Pure Land teachings. In this way Zonkaku attempts to reconcile the Shin Buddhist position with the worship of the kami by arguing that the ultimate source of the kami, and hence the sole true object of faith, is Amida Buddha. Zonkaku's scheme succeeded in giving a place to the kami within the Shin Buddhist spiritual universe while simultaneously repudiating them as proper objects of veneration.

Zonkaku's conciliatory attitude towards the kami is closely related to his belief that Japan is a divine nation. The idea that Japan is a divine land can be found in some of the oldest documents this country possesses.⁵⁵ It was current in Shinran's day, too, as the Tendai memorial of 1224 seeking the suppression of the exclusive nembutsu movement reveals. However, it became especially strong with the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281.⁵⁶ With the defeat of these invasions, the notion that Japan was a land ruled by the kami became widespread. Zonkaku was born just eight years after the second Mongol invasion, and the *Shojin hongaiishū* was written in 1324. Thus, Zonkaku lived during an age when the Japanese perception of their land as being under divine suzerainty became widely accepted. In the *Shojin hongaiishū*, he states:

Above all, this great Japanese nation is originally a divine land and it is replete with spiritual powers. The honorable progeny of the Sun Goddess were gracious enough to become lords of this land, and the descendants of Amatsukoyane-no-mikoto (the Fujiwara clan) long helped with government at court. From the reign of Emperor Suinin (when Ise Shrine was established), the deities were especially revered, and during the time of Emperor Kimmei, Buddhism was propagated

⁵⁵ Tamura 1959:309-37.

⁵⁶ On the impact of the Mongol invasions on the idea of Japan's divinity, see Kuroda 1975:270-75.

for the first time. From that time on, the affairs of state were conducted by venerating the kami, and worldly activities were conducted by taking refuge in the buddha. For these reasons, the (nation's ability to) interact (with the divinity) excelled that of other countries, and the dignity of the court surpassed that of foreign courts. However, (this is the result of) the buddhas' protection and the deities' virtuous powers. Therefore there are 13,700-odd shrines where the spiritual beings are venerated within the sixty-six provinces of Japan. There are 3,132 shrines listed in the Engi registry of deities.⁵⁷

As these words reveal, Zonkaku stresses that Japan is a divine land. In making this claim, he was following the popular opinion of his day. But this belief contributed greatly to his attempt to reconcile Shin Buddhism with the Japanese kami.

Rennyo's View of the Kami

The influence of the *Shojin hongaiishū* on the subsequent development of the Shin Buddhist interpretation of the kami was enormous. The analysis of the kami found in this work was adopted by Rennyo (1415–1499) and, as presented in his collection of pastoral letters, the *Ofumi* 御文 (*Letters*), has continued to dominate Shin Buddhist thinking concerning the kami until recent times.

In their excellent study, *Rennyo: The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism* (1991), Minor L. Rogers and Ann T. Rogers have shown how Rennyo's understanding of the kami was developed within the context of the serious political and social turmoil in the Hokuriku district where he resided from 1471 to 1475.⁵⁸ Rennyo's letters from this period reveal that he adopted the major points which Zonkaku makes concerning the kami in the *Shojin hongaiishū*. Like Zonkaku (and Shinran before him), Rennyo admonishes nembutsu practitioners to "entrust yourselves single-heartedly and steadfastly to Amida, and, without con-

⁵⁷ Ōsumi 1977:183–84.

⁵⁸ Rogers and Rogers 1991:88–91. My short synopsis of Rennyo's attitude towards the kami is based primarily on this book; readers who wish a fuller treatment of Rennyo's views are referred to this volume.

cerning yourself with other buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the various kami, take refuge exclusively in Amida. . . ."⁵⁹ In this way, Rennyo follows the traditional Shin Buddhist position in rejecting the worship of the kami.

At the same time, however, he cautions, "outwardly take the laws of the state as fundamental and do not hold any of the kami, buddhas, or bodhisattvas in contempt. . . ."⁶⁰ Rennyo's emphasis here on outward conformity to the political order and the deities of the established religious institutions derives from the precarious position of the Hokuriku Shin Buddhist community. During this time, Shin Buddhists were being increasingly drawn into the warfare between rival warrior groups there.⁶¹ Rennyo's injunction was aimed at preserving the neutrality of the Shin Buddhist organization by ensuring that Shin followers would not provoke powerful local religious bodies and political leaders.

Also like Zonkaku, Rennyo employs the *honji-suijaku* theory to argue that the kami are manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. These kami, he continues, protect and look after nembutsu practitioners.

Therefore, sentient beings of the present time (should realize that) if they rely on Amida and, undergoing a decisive settling of faith, repeat the nembutsu and are born in the Land of Utmost Bliss, kami (in their various) manifestations, recognizing this as (the fulfilment of) their own fundamental purpose, will rejoice and protect nembutsu practitioners.⁶²

Moreover Rennyo continues that "buddhas and bodhisattvas are discrete manifestations of Amida" and moreover that Amida is their "original teacher and original Buddha."⁶³ Thus, like Zonkaku, Rennyo concludes that Amida Buddha is ultimately the source of the kami and explains that the kami are all encompassed in Amida Buddha's six character Name: *Namu Amida Butsu*.⁶⁴ As these examples show, Ren-

⁵⁹ Rogers and Rogers 1991:161.

⁶⁰ Rogers and Rogers 1991:215.

⁶¹ For details, see Rogers and Rogers 1991:72-77.

⁶² Rogers and Rogers 1991:176.

⁶³ Rogers and Rogers 1991:177.

⁶⁴ Rogers and Rogers 1991:180.

nyo relied heavily on Zonkaku in formulating his theory of the kami.

Conclusion

In the pages above we have outlined how Shin Buddhism, which began by rejecting the worship of the kami, was gradually forced to seek accommodation with them. Shinran's position forbidding the worship of the kami was a natural outgrowth of his emphasis on exclusive reliance on Amida Buddha's Original Vow. However, such a radical and uncompromising position could not be sustained over time, and Shinran's descendants had to find a way of making peace with the kami—without, however, surrendering their fundamental religious standpoint. The attempts by Kakunyo, Zonkaku and Rennyo to find a place for the Japanese kami within Shin Buddhism was an indispensable part of their struggle to institutionalize the Shin faith.

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