The *Danka* System

by KENNETH A. MARCURE

WESTERN literature on the *danka seido* 檀家制度, or affiliation system of temples and households in Japan, is rare, and for the most part is confined to a few sentences in works dealing with the religion, sociology, and history of the Tokugawa period. Yet properly studied, the *danka* system can add new insights into our understanding of Japanese society and prove both a valid tool to gauge social change as well as a comparative basis to study the structure of Buddhism in other Asian countries.

In early times, the terms *dan'otsu* 檀越 or *danna* 檀那 were used instead of *danka* (or *danto* 檀徒), and appear in *Sandai Jitsuroku* 三代実録[1], 858-887. *Danka* is etymologically related to the Sanskrit term *dana*,[2] meaning patron or supporter, and is usually translated into English as 'a supporter of a temple'. The precise meaning of 'patron' or 'supporter', however, depends on the type of affiliation with a temple. For example, a patron may have originally established the temple, or may have freely chosen temple membership, or perhaps was obliged to become a member owing to political, social, or economic reasons. In pre-Tokugawa times a patron was often a member of the aristocratic or military class and could use his influence to protect the temple. To a lesser degree a wealthy farmer also became a patron when he either founded a temple or permitted it to be established within the area of his influence. All such patrons helped to fund temples, although their support obviously varied according to economic resources.

The notion of patron or supporter implies only an individual. This may have been true when a particular temple was founded, but it is incorrect to assume that affiliation was necessarily on an individual-to-temple basis, for the relationship was primarily one of temple-household (*dannadera-danka*). *Danka* may also be translated as 'a parishioner household of a temple'.[3] While this

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[1] Kōmoto Mitsugi 孝本貢, '*Jiin to Danka no Soshiki*' 寺院と檀家の組織, in *Nihon no Minzoku* 日本の民俗, *Shūkyō* 宗教 5, Kobundō, 1980, p. 100.

[2] Wada Kenju 和田謙寿, '*Nihon Bukkyō ni okeru Danto-sei no Kenkyū*' 日本仏教における檀徒制の研究, in *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 印度学仏教学研究, 8, 1950, p. 520.

[3] Tadashi Fukutake, *Japanese Rural Society*, Cornell U.P., 1972, p. 107.

definition avoids the difficulty of employing the term 'patron', 'parishioner' carries with it the inappropriate connotation of Christian church organization. Therefore *danka* may be best defined as 'a household (or households) affiliated to a temple'.

Japanese scholars have rightly stressed the need to understand the concept of *danka* from the different viewpoints of history, sociology, and anthropology, for otherwise the more accurate and dynamic nature of the concept cannot be properly grasped.[4] But detailed studies of the *danka* system are usually confined to regional research on local documents and customs of temples of a given sect, and seldom do they advance beyond this narrowly focused approach to conceptualize what is common to the various manifestations of the *danka* system in general.[5]

Field research and a study of scholarly descriptions of the system reveal that there appear to be four principal components of the *danka* system: (1) household, (2) ancestor worship (or veneration), (3) temples, and (4) the prevailing system of land tenure of each historical period. These four elements have existed in a dynamic relationship throughout most of Japanese history, and as the content of each changed in relation to the others at different rates, times, and places, the axis of the temple-household (*dannadera-danka*) relationship shifted and the form of the *danka* system was altered accordingly.

Origins of the Danka System

The *danka* system can be traced back to the Heian period, when there were essentially two types of *danka*: the 'administrative *danka*' located on autonomous temple lands, and the 'religious *danka*' established by warriors. The latter were family temples, or *bodaiji* 菩提寺, founded for ancester veneration; by the end of the fifteenth century, they were also widely initiated by commoners through collective family temples, or *shūgō bodaiji* 集合菩提寺.[6] These two basic features of the *danka* system solidified in the Tokugawa period and underwent further changes in the Meiji period.

The *danka* on temple lands were often organized as part of the *shōen* 荘園 system. As imperial influence weakened in the provinces and the tendency to exempt lands and labor services from taxation spread, monasteries and temples came into possession of 'territories under private proprietorship in which the

[4] Kōmoto, p. 100.

[5] Noguchi Takenori 野口武徳, *Han-Dankasei* 半檀家制 (Koza Nihon Minzoku Shūkyō 5), Kobundō, 1980; Morioka Kiyomi 森岡清美, *Shinshū Kyōdan ni okeru: Ie no Kōzō* 家の構造, Ochanomizu Shobō, 1978; Hikita Seishun 疋田精俊, '*Toshi ni okeru Danto Sōdai no Kaisō to Shūkyō Ishiki ni tsuite*' 都市における檀徒総代の階層と宗教意識について, in *Chizan Gakuhō* 智山学報, 17, 1969; Serikawa Hiromichi 芹川博道, '*Toshika to Jidan Kankei*' 都市化と地檀関係, in *Shukutoku Tanki Daigaku Gakuhō* 淑徳短期大学学報, 10, 1971.

[6] Kōmoto, p. 100. Also, interview with Professor Itō Yuishin 伊藤唯真, Professor of Religious History, Bukkyō Daigaku, Kyoto, on 23 February 1982.

proprietor assumed most of the duties of governance as well as all of the fiscal rights which had once belonged to the central government.'[7] As a result of strong governmental and aristocratic support of Buddhism after the introduction of the religion into Japan in the sixth century, Buddhist institutions received income from the taxes on lands under their jurisdiction. In addition, religious bodies held their lands on a tax-free basis; as a result there were many cases of people contributing land to temples or building temples of their own volition in order to claim tax exemption.[8] In both the administrative and religious *danka* systems, those farmers' households which needed some sort of protection would commend a portion of their *shiki* 職 (rights and obligations pertaining to land) to a local powerful temple or family, thereby obligating themselves to hand over a percentage of their crops; the recipient would, in turn, deliver a portion of this *shiki* to superiors. This system, then, took the form of a hierarchical pyramid within which each position had its own rights and obligations.

Buddhism was closely connected with the court and aristocracy in its early history in Japan, but during the period from the Heiji conflict of 1160 until Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 destroyed the military power of many sects in the 1570s, powerful temples and monasteries were able to confront the challenge of the rising provincial military. Such institutions assembled large numbers of men from their *shōen* to protect their property and at times interfered in the affairs of the court. In the final years of the period, 'religious establishments had become the ruling headquarters of feudal territories similar in most respects to the daimyo domains.'[9]

The more powerful temples also had an administrative function. They issued regulations and could punish farmers by banishment from the area if they refused to comply. For example, if a farmer cut wood in a prohibited area or failed to contribute the stipulated *nengu* 年貢, the temple could force him to promise, in a written declaration before a Buddhist statue or even in a Shinto shrine, to obey the rules in the future. If the farmer still failed to comply, he and his family could be banished; after a stipulated period he could appeal for reinstatement into the community, but only if he promised to dedicate his efforts and resources to the temple.[10] Yet religious institutions could not afford to be too severe in managing the lives of the farmers, for temples and their personnel also needed the support of the local populace. And if the local people became antagonistic toward a temple, its priests, and officials, a stalemate could occur in the relationship.

In the *shōen*, economic issues were paramount in the relationship between

[7] John Whitney Hall, *Japan*, Dell, New York, 1968, p. 66.

[8] Enjiro Honjo, *The Social and Economic History of Japan*, Institute for Research in Economic History of Japan, Kyoto, 1935, p. 11.

[9] Hall, p. 134, and also p. 80.

[10] Hieizan Bunka Sōgō Kenkyūkai 比叡山文化綜合研究会, ed., *Katsuragawa Myōōin* 葛川明王院, Shibagane Seido, Kyoto, 1960, p. 36.

temple and populace before the institutionalization of the *danka* system. Economics determined allegiance of a political nature, and the temples and monks had the responsibility of presenting the demands of the populace when necessary before the competent higher authorities. The prosperity, both social and economic, of temples ultimately rested on the allegiance of the people.

The Tokugawa Period

This situation changed considerably in the Tokugawa period as the axis of the *dannadera-danka* relationship shifted. The principal policy of the Tokugawa leadership in the early years of its formation was the establishment of secure political control over the entire country. This the shogunate achieved brilliantly, especially in its control over religious bodies and individual households by the institutionalization of the *danka* system on a national scale.

The initial and avowed impetus for legislation concerning the *danka* system was the fear of Christianity, a religion that not only recognized an authority higher than that of shogun or daimyo but also carried with it the implied threat of foreign powers and their territorial ambitions. As a result, in 1614, Hidetada, the second Tokugawa shogun, issued an edict banning Christianity as inimical to the state and Japanese religions.[11] The edict also provided Buddhist priests with the power and obligation to ascertain that people living in their areas were neither Christian nor hostile to the state.[12]

In 1638, the earlier anti-Christian edict was elaborated at the same time as the *sakoku* 鎖国, or seclusion, policy was introduced.[13] The entire populace, through the households, was required to register at a temple (*dannadera*) within a certain geographical and social area. By means of an annual examination of religious beliefs (*shūmon aratame* 宗門改め),[14] household members procured a temple certificate (*tera-ukejō* 寺請け状) to the effect that none of them was Christian. At one stroke, all Japanese were incorporated administratively into the existing Buddhist structure. Temples acquired additional material support in the form of annual contributions from people who had formerly been on the periphery of the Buddhist establishment. Temples also benefitted in the form of labor contributed from each household for the upkeep of its buildings and property. Households that had not been formally affiliated but had occasionally participated in ceremonies and rituals now became members of the temple. Even Shinto priests were obliged to become members of temples and their shrines were placed under the control of government officials (*bettō* 別当 or *shashō* 社掌), who were often chosen from the ranks of the Buddhist clergy.[15]

[11] C. R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan*, University of California Press, 1967, pp. 317-18.

[12] Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*, Columbia U.P.,1966, p. 146.

[13] Hall, p. 188; Boxer, pp. 383-84.

[14] Hall, pp. 185 & 188; also, Gustav Voss & Hubert Cieslik, *Kirishito-ki und Sayō-Yoroku*, MN Monograph 1, 1940.

[15] Kitagawa, p. 168.

The edict commanding all households to register at a temple under the *tera-uke* system provided a certain amount of free choice within natural social and geographical limits. There was a number of reasons why a household would choose to register at a particular temple, but freedom of choice varied greatly from region to region. Moreover, the strict separation of classes was also reflected in *danka* membership. Some of the considerations in the selection of a *dannadera* were as follows:

1. The affluence of a temple, for an establishment in difficult financial circumstances might demand high contributions and charge inflated fees for burial in its graveyard.
2. The status of a temple by virtue of historical events or famous monks and the social status of the particular household.
3. In cases of relocation, the relationship between a temple in a household's original village (*oya-dera* 親寺) and the temple in the new one (*kotera* 子寺).
4. Kinship ties between families associated with a temple or friendship ties with families of a *dannadera*.
5. Easy access and transportation to a temple.
6. The recommendation of a powerful personage to whom a household owed allegiance.
7. The religious activities of a temple and the sect to which it belonged.[16]

The 1638 edict further provided that people had to attend certain Buddhist rites, in particular, ceremonies on the anniversary days of ancestors, in order that their temple certificate should retain its validity. The death penalty was prescribed in cases of a lapsed certificate. In some regions commoners were obliged to wear name tags for identification purposes. This was particularly true in Satsuma as a means to counter what the authorities viewed as a tendency toward Christianity and the Ikkō sect, to both of which the government of Satsuma felt deep aversion.[17]

In essence, then, the monks fulfilled a policing function for the state in recording membership under the orders of the temple magistracy (*jisha bugyō* 寺社奉行) in each local territory. Thus the Buddhist clergy had the dual responsibility of carrying out both religious and bureaucratic duties. From 1671 monk officials were obliged to record additional statistics such as 'births, marriages, adoptions, deaths, changes of residency and occupation.'[18] To reciprocate for material support provided by the *danka* membership, temples provided *terakoya* 寺子屋, or local schools, where children of commoners could learn reading, writing, and simple arithmetic, as well as receive moral and ethical instruction. Such schools varied with the sect to which a particular temple belonged, but they invariably imparted social teachings based on Confucianism,

[16] Wada, pp. 520-21.

[17] Robert K. Sakai, 'An Introductory Analysis', in *Status System and Social Organization of Satsuma*, University of Hawaii Press, 1975, p. 7.

[18] Edward Norbeck, *Religion and Society in Modern Japan: Continuity and Change*, Rice University Studies, 56:1 (Winter 1970), p. 47.

stressing filial relationship, loyalty, and obedience, virtues that underpinned the Tokugawa state.

The Tokugawa government patronized Buddhism for its emphasis on rites of passage and its ability to control its members. As adherents of the Jōdo sect, the shogun's family helped rebuild the head temple of Chionin 知恩院 in Kyoto and accorded a higher status to other temples of that sect. Jōdo was essentially quietist and non-militant, and thus harmonized with the Tokugawa stress on control. In addition, the sect taught that individuals could not attain salvation unaided; believers had to rely on something larger than themselves. This point of doctrine harmonized with the policy of the ruling authorities, who also tried to make the general populace rely on a power greater than themselves and to look to their rulers for security and comfort.

The stress of the Tokugawa was on loyalty and dependence. Lands of wealthy temples had been confiscated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to eliminate their economic independence; these lands were then redistributed to supporters of the new regime. This repossession reflected a larger goal as well: to tie farmers to the land so that they could not challenge the military class. Many temples were left with barely enough land to support themselves. Farmers had been demilitarized by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's 豊臣秀吉 'sword hunt' (*katanagari* 刀狩), and those cultivating temple lands could no longer provide military support to temples. The *danka* system that was introduced continued the temples' dependence on the state, yet through mandatory household affiliation provided them with economic support at no real financial burden to the Tokugawa.

This political stress by the shogunate on patronizing sects and the *danka* system exacted a price from Buddhism. As each household, whether in urban or rural areas, had to be a *danka* member, at least nominally, a temple had to exist or be established in almost every town and hamlet. There were 13,037 temples at one time in the Kamakura period, but this number once grew to an unwieldy 469,934 during one period of the Tokugawa era,[19] an expansion that placed a heavy burden on Buddhist organizations to provide enough priests to carry out both governmental duties and religious ceremonies. Conversely, the system put a burden on *danka* members to support so many temples and monks. As a result, often relatively small *danka* were compelled to support a temple and its priest unaided. Although the temples had an increasing number of bureaucratic duties to perform on behalf of the government, they continued to be hierarchically organized within the different sects. This hierarchy, in fact, became increasingly centralized as branch temples were more tightly integrated into the organization structure of their headquarters (*honzan* 本山). The latter oversaw many dependent temples (*matsuji* 末寺) to which they were tied in varying degrees of closeness. Each dependent temple was subject to a higher temple

[19] Kitagawa, p. 164.

and each sect was responsible to the government for its corporate activities and policies. In this way, the shogunate was able to use the established Buddhist organizational structure for its own specific administrative purposes.

In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that many monks tended to appear more like civil servants than men of religion. Often, they demonstrated a tendency to identify with the higher echelons of authority rather than with the ordinary people belonging to a temple, for in many cases the monks were in large measure economically dependent on the wealthier members of the *danka*. From the point of view of *danka* members, their relationship with Buddhism often came to be more formalistic and pragmatic rather than a matter of individual religious conviction. Respect for religious authority continued to exist, but *danka* members often distanced themselves from the administrative duties that the monks were supposed to carry out for the government. Temporal authority was viewed as something to be avoided, and conflicts that occurred within a *danka* were often settled by the members themselves, although a monk could be called in to act as mediator.[20] Rules governing the conduct of the monks vis-à-vis the temple and the households to prevent quarrels among monks and to prevent the wanton abuse of the *danka* members were enacted by the government.[21]

The *danka* system reflected also the larger organizational structure of Tokugawa society. The smallest unit was the household (*ie* 家); the individual within it existed merely as a member of that unit.[22] In contrast to the pre-Tokugawa periods, the status of the household and the importance attached to ancestor veneration became formalized; ancestor cult developed from being a private household affair into a public ceremony in a *dannadera*, at which one or more monks officiated.

In addition to their administrative functions described above, temples also played a vital role in developing the Tokugawa economy. Even before the consolidation of Tokugawa power, wealthy temples and merchant guilds worked together to facilitate commerce by means of letters of credit issued by large temples possessing branches throughout the land.[23] During the civil disturbances in the hundred years following the Ōnin War, temples and shrines were among the few relatively safe places where business could be conducted and treasures and documents stored.[24] These lucrative undertakings did not cease in the Tokugawa period.

> Shrines and temples also acted as financial organs and made loans; made cooperative credit facilities known by the names of *mujin* 無尽 and *tanomoshi* 頼母子; and utilized bills of exchange. Thus, the position of shrines and

[20] *Understanding Japanese Buddhism*, 12th General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Japan Buddhist Federation, 1978, p. 21.

[21] Kōmoto, p. 102.

[22] Chie Nakane, *Kinship and Economic Organization in Rural Japan*, Humanities Press, New York, 1967, p. 41.

[23] Hall, pp. 122-23.

[24] Honjo, p. 72.

> temples in the financial mechanism of the country was very important. In the communications of the time, the establishment of barriers known as *sekisho* 関所 during the middle ages also had close relations with shrines and temples.[25]

But temples were involved not only in the financing and production of goods, the lending of money, and the issuing of bills of exchange, but also in the growing secular land system of tenancy upon which rested their principal economic support.

The traditional pattern of tax-exempt lands and commendation of land to religious institutions for hereditary cultivation rights continued, yet as temples became more actively involved in money lending and the mortgaging of land increased in accordance with reforms concerning the ban on alienation of land, they were able to obtain more land in two ways. One was the outright purchase of property, while the other was the foreclosure on land from farmers unable to pay their creditors. In some cases, a small temple might come to the help of its *danka* members. In one particular example, revealed in field research, a household gave land in trust to its *dannadera* until it was in a position to 'buy' it back.[26] In general, temples did not squeeze their tenants too harshly,[27] for, apart from humanitarian reasons, it was usually not in their own best interests. But large and powerful institutions ran the risk of distancing themselves from the ordinary people and appearing as impersonal landlords, unlikely to consult all the members of their *danka*. Also, large temples were prone to cooperate with the richer households of their *danka* for the mutual benefit of both parties. This obviously caused resentment among ordinary members, and various protest movements and marches by tenant farmers against temples in the late Tokugawa period are on record.

In contrast to the secular land system, the land cultivated by tenants of a temple did not belong to individual monks but to the temple itself. Ownership of such land was supposed to provide the economic basis to support the sect to which the temple belonged and to perpetuate ancestor veneration.

This system, at least as it operated in the smaller temples, was therefore not in theory profit-oriented. The percentage of the crops presented to the temple may at times have been high, but the rationale behind this payment was to maintain the institution and the monks, and to ensure prayers and rituals for ancestors. In certain cases, income was used for the upkeep of temple schools. Thus the attitude of a tenant of a *dannadera* toward cultivating temple lands and secularly owned lands would have been quite different. Even if a farmer who cultivated temple land was not a member of that particular temple's

[25] Honjo, p. 73.

[26] Interviews with villagers of Ikadachi conducted in 1982.

[27] But two cases of protests against temples, Kōyasan 高野山 and Higashi-Honganji 東本願寺, are recorded in Hugh Borton, *Peasant Uprisings in Japan of the Tokugawa Period*, Paragon Book Reprint, New York, 1968, p. 18.

danka, the fact remained that he would have viewed more positively temple land that carried with it less mercantile objectives.

But given the relatively autonomous village control in most *han* 藩 in the Tokugawa period, it may be doubted whether the members of a *danka* would willingly take on additional burdens or whether a monk and temple, despite their power and authority, would willingly pursue a course detrimental to its *danka* members. Matters relating to small, local temples appear to have been settled more by *danka* members rather than by the monks or local authorities. The size and prosperity of the temple, and the number and wealth of the households in the *danka*, were all decisive factors in the temple-*danka* power structure. Whether a particular case involved many or few households versus one monk or not, considerable skill would have been required to obtain a consensus on matters relating to the temple. In light of the political control and the economic burdens involved, the *danka* structure may have been a restrictive and at times repressive system, but that does not mean that there was no room to maneuver within it. Conditions varied greatly, depending on the period and location, but in general, as a result of the slowly changing pattern of land control throughout the Tokugawa period, from a feudalistic style to one of tenancy shaped by market forces, the balance of control tended to tip away from the temple and toward the *danka*.

The Meiji Period

Although the laws pertaining to the *danka* system were abolished in the early years of the Meiji period, the system continued to exist as a viable entity.[28] In 1871, only four years after the Meiji Restoration, the law of 1638 institutionalizing the *danka* system was revoked in the wake of anti-Buddhist sentiment and a government-sponsored Shinto revival. Over a period of years, the *danka* system was slowly and legally dismantled and new ordinances took its place. The new government aimed at justifying the emperor as head of state and sought to make Shinto the national religion (*daikyō* 大饗).[29] It therefore moved to purify Shinto by displacing Buddhism and played upon the general dissatisfaction that had risen against Buddhism in the last years of the Tokugawa period.

In 1868 the Meiji government issued a separation decree bringing *ryōbu shintō* 両部神道 to an official end and purifying Shinto of Buddhist elements;[30] at the same time it lent its support to the *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 movement that aimed at breaking the power of Buddhism. The Tokugawa institution of appointing Buddhist priests to manage Shinto shrines was abolished in the

[28] Noriyoshi Tamaru, 'Buddhism—Distinctive Features of Japanese Buddhism', in *Japanese Religion: A Survey by the Agency for Cultural Affairs*, Kodansha International, Tokyo, 1972, p. 51.

[29] Kitagawa, p. 201.

[30] Hideo Kishimoto, *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era*, Obunsha, 1956, II, p. 112.

following year and replaced by the Department of Shinto. Shinto priests and shrines were placed under direct governmental control and for a brief time the entire populace was obliged to register at Shinto shrines. In this period of counteraction, temples, together with precious art works, were burned or otherwise destroyed. Monks deprived of a stable income left the priesthood, and many *danka* organizations were dissolved. In Satsuma, for example, 1,066 temples were abolished and 2,964 priests were obliged to secularize.[31] In Toyama, no less than 1,730 temples were destroyed.[32] The Meiji government in 1871 also decreed that land owned by religious entities should be treated as fiefs of the dispossessed daimyo and surrendered to the state without compensation. Five years later the authorities relented somewhat and permitted religious bodies to use, rent-free, these expropriated lands. Precinct land was returned to religious bodies if positive proof of ownership could be produced.[33]

The withdrawal of government support forced each temple, out of economic necessity, to rely all the more for survival on land cultivated by tenants that was now government-titled, and in this way the burden of the temple tended to be transferred to the members of the *danka* even more than during the Tokugawa period. These householders, freed by government fiat from all legal bonds with the temple, were now obliged under the Family Registration Law (*kosekihō* 戸籍法),[34] 1871, to register directly with the government instead of with a particular temple.[35] No longer servants of the state, monks were in many cases forced to enter the secular world to seek at least part-time employment, usually as clerks or teachers.

In 1889, the Meiji constitution was promulgated. Article 28 guaranteed nominal religious freedom to the general public, partly because a clause guaranteeing such freedom was one of the conditions in the revision of the 'unequal treaties' with foreign powers. In reality, however, religion remained under strict government control, and both State and Shrine Shinto received much official support and help.

In time, the development of a comprehensive legal code system, patterned primarily on the German and French systems, led to the clarification of the legal status of religious organizations. Article 34 of the Civil Code (*mimpō* 民法), 1897, provided that 'religious and . . . other associations concerning the public welfare can become juridical persons with the authorization of the competent authority.'[36] But Article 28 of the Civil Code Enforcement Law (*mimpō shikō hō* 民法施行法), 1899, specified that Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples could not become juridical persons under the Civil Code. The inten-

[31] Kishimoto, p. 118.
[32] Kitagawa, p. 202.
[33] William P. Woodard, *Allied Occupation of Japan 1945-1952 and Japanese Religions*, Brill, Leiden, 1972, p. 301.
[34] The Family Registration Law was first promulgated in April 1871, later as Law #26, 1914, and finally amended by Law #224, 1947.
[35] Fukutake, p. 155.
[36] Civil Code, Article 34 (Law #89 of 1896).

tion of this restriction, however, was not to deny those religious institutions the status of a juridical person, but merely to enable them to obtain this status under a special law that was yet to be drawn up.[37] This in fact took forty-four years. One of the reasons for the delay was that the government had also to clarify the question of lands expropriated from religious bodies in the early Meiji period.

The law was finally enacted as the Religious Organization Law on 8 April 1939, and went into effect at the beginning of the following year. It gave Buddhist and other religious organizations the option of becoming religious juridical persons (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人) with the privilege of tax exemption on their property and the right to disseminate their religious teachings. This meant that religious organizations which applied for and received government authorization finally obtained 'a clearly defined legal position',[38] although this move strengthened the power of the state over religion and required all members of temples and churches to participate in shrine worship.[39] It was no coincidence that the government finally chose to clarify these issues in 1939 as a bid for the support of religious bodies for the national war effort.

Despite the fact that these legal developments were often aimed at eliminating the *danka* system, it did not cease to exist. Emphasis shifted from Buddhism to Shinto, it is true, but the latter could not provide funerals for the dead nor take over the burden of memorial services, and these have remained the prerogative of Japanese Buddhism to this day.

Thus the government had withdrawn financial support from religious bodies and had expropriated their land, had then returned it rent-free, but had not really clarified its status until the promulgation of the Religious Organization Law in 1939. All this tended to lock the temple, monk, and the *danka* members in rural areas into an independent economic religious unit that increasingly relied on tenant agriculture. Such land was no longer feudally owned: it had become private property of the temple based on provisions of the Meiji Civil Code and subject to impersonal market forces.

The Postwar Period

Reforms after the Pacific War inevitably affected the *danka* system.[40] The Land Reform of 1946 attempted to redress an economic situation which many at that time saw as the reason for the prewar rise of the military: the discontented farmers, steeped in Shinto tradition, provided the rank-and-file support for the army that had led Japan into war.[41] Especially in rural areas,

[37] Yuiken Kawawata, 'Religious Organizations in Japanese Law', in *Japanese Religion*, p. 163.

[38] Kawawata, p. 164.

[39] Norbeck, p. 51.

[40] Tamaru, p. 67ff.

[41] Laurence I. Hewes, Jr, *Japanese Land Reform Program*, Natural Resources Section, Report #127, March 1950, General Headquarters SCAP.

Buddhist temples lost the main economic support that they had retained, by and large, throughout most of Japanese history, and this led to an exodus of monks from small temples; in addition, as the religious juridical persons ordinance described below made temples independent, many head temples suffered an appreciable loss of support.

The Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of Education had unsuccessfully urged that religious institutions should be exempted from the land reform so that they could maintain their economic basis. Only land that was not 'primarily revenue producing' was exempted and in most cases this consisted of the precincts of religious bodies.[42] The Land Reform Law simply 'did not recognize corporate ownership of cultivated land.'[43] All tenanted land in excess of 1 *chō* 町 (2.5 acres) in Japan, with the exception of Hokkaido, had to be sold to those tenants cultivating the land as of 23 November 1946.[44] Tenanted land did not include grass land, rough grazing land, or forests.

As a result of the 1947 amendments to the Civil Code, the household was no longer a legal entity,[45] the household head was deprived of his powers, individual rights were recognized, and equal inheritance was to be the norm. Yet, surprisingly, Article 897 reads as though it was a concession to the traditional household system as laid down in the Civil Code of 1897: 'The ownership of genealogical records, of utensils of religious rites, and of tombs and burial grounds is succeeded to the person who is, according to custom, to hold as a president the worship of the memory of the ancestors.'[46]

On 28 December 1945 the Religious Organization Law of 1939 was nullified by the Occupation authorities in order to establish religious freedom. On the same day, in a move to emphasize the right of religious juridical persons to self-determination, the Religious Juridical Persons Ordinance (*shūkyō hōjin rei* 宗教法人令) was promulgated to prevent government authorities from supervising religious bodies. This ordinance, open to broad interpretation, enabled any religious organization to maintain or obtain the status of a juridical person by merely filling out a registration form and filing it with the competent government authority.[47] As the ordinance lacked clearly defined citeria for determining qualifications for incorporation, dubious religious sects mushroomed, and the interpretation of Article 6 *contra legem* led to the secession of temples from their sect headquarters and weakened long-established sectarian organizations.[48]

Article 6 provided that for any alteration of its regulations a religious juridical person needed the approval of both the *sōdai* 総代 (delegates of

[42] Woodard, pp. 228 & 301.
[43] Harumi Befu, *Japan, An Anthropological Introduction*, Chandler, San Francisco, 1971, p. 86.
[44] Ronald P. Dore, *Land Reform in Japan*, Oxford U.P., 1966, p. 138.
[45] Tamaru, p. 000.
[46] Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Japan*, Stanford U.P., 1974, p. 34.
[47] Kawawata, p. 164ff.
[48] Woodard, p. 200.

believers) and the directors of the head organization of its religious denomination. Because the approval of the head organization was considered by the government and Occupation authorities as a violation of the principle of religious freedom, Article 6 was interpreted to mean that 'a religious body might freely secede from the parent body' and that 'property matters between the two, if not settled amicably, would be decided in court.'[49] Sectarian leaders objected to the fact that in many cases secession was carried out by chief priests without prior consultation with either temple supporters (the *danka*) or *sōdai* delegates. This was quite possible because the chief priest often held the seals of the officers and because the *sōdai* were not democratically elected but were often self-appointed local bosses or close friends of the chief priest, or both. One famous example was that of Chionin, the spiritual head temple of the Jōdo sect, which withdrew for some time from its secular headquarters, then located in Tokyo.[50]

Finally, on 3 April 1951, the ordinance was replaced by the Religious Juridical Person Law (*shūkyō hōjin hō* 宗教法人法); its objective was to end the deficiencies of the ordinance by clearly defining the term 'Religious Organizations'. Two types of organizations were declared eligible for incorporation as Religious Juridical Persons. The first consisted of local independent religious organizations such as temples, shrines, or churches that were or were not affiliated with the headquarters of a specific religious denomination. The second was the comprehensive spiritual organization (*hōkatsu dantai* 包括団体) of a specific religious denomination that was formed by two or more local religious bodies of this denomination.

Applicants under this new law were further required to have 'establishments for worship and [to] perform certain generally accepted functions traditionally associated with such religious organizations.'[51] It was no longer obligatory for a religious body to become a juridical person in order to carry out religious activities. The new law offered advantages for religious juridical persons such as the possibility to own corporate property and exemption from certain taxes. In order to avoid a new wave of secessions and the end of the legal existence of affiliated temples, various sects, such as Jōdo, prepared articles of incorporation in their own favor for the religious bodies of their denominations. Blank spaces were left only for the insertion of the name and address of the religious person (usually the traditional name of the temple), the number of the legally responsible officials (*yakunin* 役人), and the names of the believers' delegates (*sōdai*).[52] Typical provisions of the articles of incorporation (*shūkyō hōjin kisoku* 宗教法人規則) which aimed at securing the religious and economic interest of the *sōhonzan* 総本山, or general headquarters of the sect, are as follows:

[49] Woodard, p. 202.
[50] Woodard, p. 201.
[51] Kawawata, p. 166ff.
[52] Kawawata, p. 167ff.

> The head of the legally responsible officials [*yakunin*] of a particular religious body has to be a monk of the same religious denomination. This monk has to be appointed by or at least approved by the headquarters of the latter. He has to perform at the same time the function of the chief priest [*jūshoku* 住職]. Subject to the approval of the *sōhonzan*, he appoints the other officers [*sekinin yakunin* 責任役人] and also the members of the *sōdai*. However, the officers have to be chosen from among persons of the same religious denomination, the temple family, or the *sōdai*. And the *sōdai* members must be *danka* or individual believers [*shinto* 信徒].[53]

Mention of the term *danka* in such articles of incorporation clearly shows that, although the *danka* system was deprived of its former statutory bases, it is still considered a factual and legal reality subject to customary law.

Case Study

One of the three thousand temples said to have existed on and around Mt Hiei in the Heian period[54] was Reizei-in 冷泉院, which was supposedly located in the present-day Kamizaiichi hamlet within the *shōen* of Ikadachi.[55] Reizei is both the name of a period in Japanese history, 967-969, and also the name of an old aristocratic family in Kyoto. Exactly when the temple was founded is unknown. But in view of the wanderings of Tendai monks from Mudōji 無動寺, which controlled the area around Reizei-in, the involvement of the aristocracy in the patronage of temples, and the establishment of family temples to supplement Shinto shrines, it is probable that Reizei-in dates from about 967 when a member of the Reizei family became a monk and undertook religious exercises in the area.

Reizei-in was probably founded as a *tsuizen no otera* 追善のお寺, or memorial temple for the dead, and was maintained by the people of Ikadachi.[56] As a subordinate temple of Mudōji, Reizei-in oversaw the daily operations of the *shōen*, and was one of the main lodging places for itinerant monks. The temple received its own lands from powerful aristocrats and the local wealthy as contributions to finance its on-going services for the dead.

During the Ōnin War, 1467-1477, widespread fighting took place in Kyoto and many temple buildings in the capital were destroyed in the conflict. The military Kutsuki 朽木 family, which resided in the Ikadachi area and belonged to the Jōdo sect, advised Chionin to move from Kyoto to Ikadachi and store its valuable possessions at Reizei-in. When Chionin was subsequently

[53] Articles of Incorporation of Jōdo Sect Temples, filed at the *hōmukyoku* of any town in which a Jōdo temple is registered. In the case of Konrenji, the competent *hōmukyoku* is in Ōtsu.

[54] Masaharu Anesaki, *Religious Life of the Japanese People*, rev. ed., Kokwai Bunka Shinkōkai, 1961, p. 74.

[55] Shiga-ken Shichōson Enkakushi Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Shiga-ken Shichōson Enkakushi* 滋賀県市町村沿革史, Ōtsu, 1967, p. 210.

[56] Interview with Professor Itō Yuishin on 11 January 1982.

destroyed by fire, a temporary Jōdo headquarters, called Shin-Chionin 新知恩院, was built in the neighboring hamlet of Shimozaiichi. In 1521 Reizei-in changed its allegiance from Tendai to Jōdo and received the name of Konrenji 金蓮寺, becoming subordinate to Shin-Chionin. All temples subsequently built in Ikadachi were dependent on Shin-Chionin. From 1558 to 1570, Shin-Chionin was granted special protection on the orders of Asano Danjō 浅野弾正, daimyo of Katada, seven kilometers away on the west bank of Lake Biwa, and was given the status of a major temple.[57]

The precise reasons why Reizei-in became a Jōdo temple in 1521 with the new name of Konrenji are not known, but such a change in allegiance was not uncommon. There was a great deal of diversity within Tendai, and when a monk of a different sect moved into a temple, the establishment would automatically adopt his sect because an emphasis on ancestor veneration took precedence over doctrinal and sectarian differences.[58] At any rate, Reizei-in's switch to Jōdo may have saved it from a more painful change at the hands of Oda Nobunaga some fifty years later. In his campaign to break the power of the Buddhist establishment, Nobunaga ruthlessly destroyed the complex of Tendai temples on Mt Hiei in 1571, and but for its change to the Jōdo sect, Konrenji might well have suffered a similar fate.

Although dependent on the re-established Chionin in Kyoto, Shin-Chionin oversaw eleven temples in Ikadachi. Because of its long history and conversion from Tendai, Konrenji enjoyed a special status; for example, before being installed as head priest of Shin-Chionin, a monk was obliged to go to Konrenji to pray and pay reverence to ancestors of both Jōdo and Tendai sects.[59]

Konrenji

Konrenji's *kakochō* 過去帳, or temple records, reveal that from 1521, when the temple converted to Jōdo, until 1953, when the last monk left the temple, the establishment had twenty-nine resident priests over a span of 432 years; thus, on average, each priest resided at the temple for nearly fifteen years. However, Konrenji did not continuously have a monk in residence. The Jōdo sect did not have enough monks to staff all its temples, and it was especially difficult to find priests willing to live and work in remote, rural areas; as a result, the resident monk of one of Shin-Chionin's dependent temples in a neighboring hamlet would perform religious services for Konrenji's *danka* members whenever needed.

As noted above, the *danka* is at present no longer regulated by statutory law, yet its position still survives in customary law. The Religious Juridical Persons Law itself requires only one organ (that is, an executive or decision-making

[57] Pamphlet published by Shin-Chionin, 1980.

[58] Smith, p. 35.

[59] Interview with Monk Tōdō 藤堂 of Shōbōin, Namazu, on 25 November 1982.

body) made up of at least three responsible persons (*sekinin yakunin*). Any person with full legal capacity and without a criminal record is eligible. One person has to be appointed the representative officer (*daihyō yakunin*), who represents the temple legally and runs its affairs. All officers together decide on the affairs of the religious juridical person and are therefore jointly and severally responsible under the law. According to the law, as long as no legal provisions (statutory law, articles of incorporation, or other by-laws and relevant regulations) are violated, the *yakunin* must manage temple affairs in a suitable way 'duly considering customs and tradition'.[60] In addition to the *sekinin yakunin*, the articles of incorporation of traditional denominations provide for delegates of believers (*sōdai*) as a second organ, a form of 'condensed' *danka*.

Following this standard pattern, Konrenji's articles of incorporation (*shūkyō hōjin konrenji no kisoku* 宗教法人金蓮寺の規則) also provide that the *sōdai* have to be chosen from among the *danka* members or *shinto* (individual believers).[61] Article 15, subparagraph 2, reads as follows: 'The delegates of believers [*sōdai*] shall be entrusted by the temple's head priest from among the *danka* or *shinto* of this temple who enjoy popularity and trust.' In a similar pattern, Article 6, subparagraph 2, regulates the appointment of the other organ, the *yakunin*: 'The responsible officers [*sekinin yakunin*][62] shall be selected by the representative officer [*daihyō yakunin*, that is, the temple's head priest] from among monks of the same religious denomination, the "temple family", or the delegates of believers.' As to the position of the head priest, Article 8 states, 'The representative officer has to hold concurrently the office of head priest of the temple; he has to be authorized by the representative officer of the comprehensive religious organization [*hōkatsu dantai*] of the [same] religious denomination.'

Moreover, Konrenji's articles of incorporation set forth the term of office of the representative officer, or head priest, as corresponding with his tenure as head priest, and three years, with the possibility of reappointment, for the other officers (Article 9, subparagraphs 1 & 2). Further, the representative officer has to represent the temple legally and manage its affairs. All officers (*yakunin*) together decide on temple matters; their status is equal and decisions are made by majority vote, and they are jointly and severally responsible for their actions.[63] Thus far, the provisions of the articles of incorporation mirror

[60] *Shūkyō Hōjin Hō* 宗教法人法, Law 126, 1951, articles 11, 18 & 25.

[61] The relationship between the *danka* and its *dannadera* has lasted through many generations, and this, together with the fact that the *danka* is the main economic support of the temple, leads one to perceive the *danka* and the *dannadera* as one body. In contrast to the *danka*, the *shinto* consists of only a relationship of one individual to a temple, and accordingly does not extend to *shinto*-members' households.

[62] The term *sekinin yakunin* is sometimes used in contrast to *daihyō yakunin*; it may also denote the whole body of officers.

[63] Articles of Incorporation of Konrenji: Article 10, subparagraph 3.

for the most part the provisions of the Religious Juridical Persons Law.

In practice, however, decisions are reached by the *danka* after deliberation among its members and are enforced by the *sewa no kata* 世話の方, the temple's caretaker. The latter is chosen on a rotating basis for a one-year term from among the *danka* members whose household heads perform *sōdai* functions. Furthermore, according to the articles of incorporation, the responsible officers have to assist the head priest in carrying out the business of the temple and overseeing temple affairs.

Article 10 of Konrenji's regulations provides that the head priest is limited at any one time to one monk, who must be chosen from among persons ordained as priests by the proper Jōdo authority. He must also obtain proper authorization from the head officers of the Jōdo comprehensive organization (*hōkatsu dantai*). According to Article 15, the number of Konrenji's *sōdai* members is fixed at five. This follows a long tradition of five families alternating as caretakers. The *sōdai* are supposed to work together to maintain and help the temple to prosper, to revere Hōnen 法然, the sect's founder, to spread the spirit of his teaching and the sutras of the Jōdo sect, to perform religious ceremonies, to impart religious education to believers, and to perform any other duties necessary for the temple.[64]

The Danka of Konrenji

The organization described above is the legal basis of the present temple administration, and it gives the impression that the *yakunin* decide and run all the affairs and that the *sōdai* only assist. Reality, however, is quite different. After studying Konrenji's articles of incorporation, one might suppose that the most important day-to-day affairs (apart from the purely religious tasks performed by the priest) are taken care of by the officers. But, on the contrary, daily activities are managed by the *danka* and particularly by the *danka* members who occupy *sōdai* positions; these are the most important decision-making figures. However, most villagers use the terms *danka* and *sōdai* interchangeably, seemingly unaware of any difference between the two terms. Only the visiting priest appears to understand the regulations properly.

As mentioned above, the *danka* appoints a caretaker for a one-year period from among its five *sōdai* members. He usually assumes this office by rotation, but because of health and other personal considerations of the household heads, this routine is not always strictly followed. Even though the *sōdai* position carries certain prestige within the *danka*, there is usually a marked lack of enthusiasm to become the caretaker. The position involves individual responsibility for the temple agenda, arrangement for repairs, and the unpopular chore of collecting various dues and keeping the books.

In 1981, for example, heavy rains washed away a sizable part of a dirt wall.

[64] Article 3.

Konrenji

It was the caretaker's duty to arrange for the construction of a cemented stone wall, which cost a total of ¥200,000. Each household was assessed for its share of the expense because this extraordinary amount could not be covered by the temple's ordinary finances.

There is, however, no direct way of avoiding the caretaker role, which always falls to the male head of a household. The selection has been ritualized for as long as anyone can remember. The meeting to choose the succeeding caretaker and to discuss temple finances is held in late March. If a *danka* member cannot attend, there are no penalties exacted, as in the case of the *danka* of Shin-Chionin in the neighboring village of Shimozaiichi, but before the meeting takes place, a household unable to attend in Kamizaiichi must convey its regrets to the caretaker.

Until the death of a *sōdai* member in 1982, members were recruited from among the heads of the deceased's household, and two kin households, and two other families. The eldest son of the deceased member lives outside the hamlet, however, and can return only occasionally to assist his mother with farm work, so the widow represents her household in the *danka* meetings. As she is a woman, however, this household has lost its *sōdai* status. This was assumed by a household head whose family conducts various businesses and has become involved in local prefectural politics. Thus when a household head dies without leaving an adult son in the village, the *sōdai* position is transferred to another household. This change within the system has created a tension that

is only subtly perceived, but the entry of the new family appears to have complicated personal relationships within the otherwise quiet life of the *danka*.

In the regular *danka* meetings, women play an active role, especially as regards the preparations for the priest's visits and the cleaning of the temple and precincts. Women who are household heads, no matter what their age, regularly participate in *danka* consultations and may state their opinions forcibly.

The division of duties between the visiting priest as representative officer and the *danka* (or *sōdai*) correspond to the legal regulations only insofar as the monk performs religious ceremonies, keeps temple records, and issues death anniversary slips (*nenki no oboegaki* 年期の覚え書). For transactions involving temple property, he is the only one authorized to put his seal to any document; his seal is also necessary for filing amendments with the competent authorities in the religious juridical person's (that is, the temple's) register.

Even the double appointment procedure of the monk of the temple, both as its chief priest and as its representative officer, does not precisely follow the articles of incorporation drawn up by its religious headquarters. In the case of Konrenji, a priest has to obtain written consent from the *danka* and individual believers to be appointed the temple's chief priest.[65] The execution of this document is preceded by a ceremony called *danshinto gishiki* 檀信徒儀式, in which all the *danka* members participate. After the candidate has been approved by the *danka*, the religious headquarters of the Jōdo sect (Chionin) is contacted and confirms only *pro forma* his appointment. The registration of the priest as newly appointed representative officer of the juridical person, Konrenji, is then filed with the Bureau of Judicial Affairs (*hōmukyoku* 法務局) of Shiga prefecture, located in Ōtsu. This bureau is in charge of the Religious Juridical Person's Register.

Although Konrenji is a juridical religious person and as such the formal owner of its estates, treasures, and other property, a close reading of its articles of incorporation shows that Chionin has, at least legally, the final say over the temple's property. The majority of *danka* members appear not to be aware of this fact. When asked to whom the temple belongs, the local people almost unanimously reply that it belongs to the village, '*Buraku no mono da*' 部落の物だ. Only two villagers seemed to perceive that this was not the case, one by guessing that Konrenji's property belonged to itself in its capacity as juridical person, and the other by surmising that it belonged to Chionin.

The attitude that Konrenji is a '*buraku no mono*' is clearly seen in the way that the temple is administered. Only in religious matters, such as memorial prayers and funerals, is the priest consulted, and never in the case of major repair work, cutting down trees and bushes, or planting new shrubs in the tem-

[65] Konrenji has only two or three *shinto* members. Villagers are divided as to who can be called a *shinto* of the temple, but usually only the *danka* members take part in this *danshinto* ceremony.

ple precincts. The major reason for this is that Konrenji has had no resident priest since 1953, when the last monk left the temple because the land reform and postwar situation deprived him of a viable economic base. Since then, Konrenji has been served by a *kenmu jūshoku* 兼務住職, or a monk who holds this position in addition to being priest of another temple. The present situation is likely to continue indefinitely and it seems to satisfy both sides. The meager financial prospects for a resident monk at Konrenji and its rural location do not attract ambitious monks, while ascetic priests in search of solitude for religious exercises would find the temple too closely encircled by the villagers' houses. The present priest lives in Shōbōin 昌峰院 in the nearby village of Namazu and receives a fee out of Konrenji's finances only when he performs a religious service. *Danka* members thus save a considerable amount of money, which they would otherwise have to pay to a resident monk. In addition, villagers would also have to pay the equivalent of sixty kilos of rice, which in 1982 would have amounted to ¥60,000.

Finances

Konrenji itself needs about ¥100,000 each year for its upkeep and the fees paid to Chionin. In 1982 the regular financial contributions of each *danka* household was ¥1,000 per month. The caretaker pays ¥1,500. In addition, after the autumn harvest each *danka* household donates to the temple the financial amount equivalent to five *shō* 升, or about seven kilos, of rice. At the autumn equinox, when the major memorial services are performed with the participation of all *danka* members, each member pays a special fee of ¥1,000, and again, the caretaker contributes ¥1,500. These fees are collected to maintain the temple, and part is sent to Chionin as the temple's self-assessed donation.

The payment of the annual support fees and religious dues should in theory be made according to the articles of incorporation, but in reality the arrangement tends to be more flexible. The *danka* members of Konrenji are few and not wealthy, and the temple does not possess any sizable estates or other valuable property. As a result, the *danka* is merely 'advised' as to the amount of an appropriate contribution to Chionin. This amount, however, is not fixed by the head temple, but is decided on by the *danka* in light of Konrenji's finances and what the *danka* members themselves wish to contribute. Konrenji receives no financial support from Chionin and the articles of incorporation clearly provide that the temple has to pay its operating expenses out of its own resources.[66]

According to the villagers, the annual contribution from Konrenji to Chionin is at present about ¥15,000 per year. This amount has not increased since the 1940s but has rather lost value drastically if inflation is taken into account. The usual reason offered is that the number of *danka* members has

[66] Interview with Monk Tōdō of Shōbōin on 23 October 1981.

decreased, but in fact the difference in numbers before the Pacific War and at present is only three. It seems more accurate to say that despite the gradually increasing prosperity of each member household, the *danka* do not wish to contribute more to a temple that conducts only a few memorial services for their ancestors and no longer plays a daily role in their religious lives.

As a religious juridical person, Konrenji is exempt from various taxes. But if the temple is used as the living quarters of a household not considered as the family of a priest in residence or a temporary caretaker, then the rent from the tenant would be officially subject to taxes. The *danka* members have agreed to rent the temple out successively to three non-Japanese research students under the style of 'caretaker' in the sense of *rusuban* 留守番. Each of these residents has paid a nominal rent to the caretaker, at first a monthly rent of ¥3,000 and, since 1977, ¥4,000. This rent is used by the *danka* for the maintenance of the temple. The rent has been kept low not only out of fear of tax assessment but also because each of the non-Japanese tenants has used his own time and money to keep the temple in good repair. The *danka* members have aimed to gather the minimum amount of money necessary for the upkeep of the temple; they are not interested in making a profit, which would, in any case, most likely result in their having to make a larger contribution to Chionin.

Another source of income, albeit only periodic, comes from the temple's forest land. When timber is cut, Chionin lays down the conditions and the price at which it is to be sold. This money is then deposited in the temple's account by the caretaker. To maintain this forest land, cleaning and clearing are carried out twice a year, in spring and autumn, by a group made up of one man from each *danka* household. A similar procedure is followed when the temple precincts are cleaned and the building itself is repaired. To carry out the general cleaning in preparation for *obon* お盆 and the autumn equinox (*aki no higan* 秋の彼岸), each *danka* household provides one representative; the family of the *sewa no kata* sends at least two persons. After this work, the *danka* members relax and reinforce harmonious relations, discussing temple affairs over cups of green tea and snacks.

Membership of the Danka

In 1920 there were sixteen households in Konrenji's *danka*; this number had fallen to thirteen by about 1941, and in 1983 only ten could be counted. The hamlet of Kamizaiichi, in which Konrenji is located, has twenty-three households; thus, about half claim affiliation with the temple, the remainder being affiliated elsewhere. This division is not unusual and reflects the historical ties of the households. The continuing decrease in numbers is partly due to families leaving the hamlet for better economic prospects in the cities, and partly to a shifting in religious allegiances. Two households left Kamizaiichi during the war years. Another household that departed in 1953,

the same year that Konrenji ceased to have a resident monk, has remained as a nominal, non-active member of the *danka*. Yet another family was absent from the hamlet for about fifteen years, but during that period leased out its lands; it also has kept a nominal relationship with the temple.

One family converted to Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 and therefore was obliged to leave the *danka* because their new religion demands complete submission of its members to its teachings. This is in marked contrast to the traditional sects' toleration of double religious affiliations within one household. In addition, Sōka Gakkai is clearly oriented toward the achievement of happiness in the present life and is deeply involved in social and political affairs. In contrast, the Jōdo sect is traditionally concerned with prayers for the dead and memorial services. In yet another *danka* family, the household head was appointed the senior priest of nearby Hassho 八所 Shrine. As Shinto has its own funeral rituals for its priests and their family members, the household head was obliged to sever his formal connections with Konrenji.

It seems safe to say that the number of members of Konrenji's *danka* will stabilize around the present figure for the foreseeable future as all the present families are well established in the hamlet. They appear to have enough financial support from job opportunities in the neighboring areas in addition to income derived from part-time farming. Moreover, all the present *danka* households that do not have sons to carry on the name and property of the family have, as a rule, adopted the husband of the eldest daughter, in this way insuring the continuation of the household and ancestor veneration.

Although the total number of the *danka* members will probably remain unchanged, there is one branch household (*bunke* 分家) of a main household (*honke* 本家) on the waiting list to join the *danka* as soon as a member of its household dies. When that happens, the family will need a temple, a burial site, and a monk to perform the necessary funeral ceremonies and memorial services. But the family sees no need to join the *danka* at present, as by doing so, they would become involved in its operational problems and financial burdens. This pragmatic attitude is not at all unusual in Japan and demonstrates the tendency to feel that until there is a death in a family neither temple affiliation nor *butsudan* 仏壇 is needed.[67]

Another stabilizing factor in the number of *danka* households is the economic forces working against the establishment of any new *bunke*. The family mentioned above is probably the last *bunke* that will be set up. Further division of the rice land possessed by each household is no longer economically feasible, and families do not need additional labor. Young people who might form a new *bunke* are not attracted to the job prospects close to Kamizaiichi. The construction of new houses or buildings is strictly controlled because the

[67] Nakane, p. 25; also, *Toshi Jiin no Shakaiteki Kinō* 都市寺院の社会的機能, Buddhist Association for Cultural Exchange, Tokyo, 1959, p. 54.

whole area is zoned as an agricultural and forested area, and so the rationale for new and viable *bunke* does not exist.

The relationship among the households affiliated with Konrenji reveals one of the strong characteristics of the Tokugawa *danka* system—that households sharing a common *honke-bunke* relationship have the same temple affiliation. 'The newly created household always follows the temple affiliation of its original household.'[68] Within Konrenji's *danka*, there are to all intents and purposes three separate *honke-bunke* relationships linking six households that comprise the majority of the membership. Four households have the same kinship and surnames. It would be too much to say that these households dominate the *danka*, but they do represent sixty percent of the group when it comes to decision-making. Most probably, each line of these families was the *honbyakushō* 本百姓, and the main line has continued into modern times with its possessions intact. The household whose *bunke* is waiting to become a member of the *danka* has long been one of the most affluent and therefore influential families in Kamizaiichi. Add the combined wealth of the six households to their numbers, and a picture of how related households can dominate a *danka* emerges.

The division of the four kin households further shows that the concept of ancestor veneration, at least in its outward form, remains strong in rural areas. Through the households, religious practices are directed toward ancestors, who continue to play a role in rural society.[69] During World War II, the *honke* of these four households moved away with the ancestral *butsudan* and settled in the village of Fumon, about seven kilometers away. Even today the households that divided from this line and then re-divided still return to their *honke* in Fumon on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and memorial services.

In general, religious considerations seem to play little part in wedding policies in rural areas, and it is not rare for prospective marriage partners to belong to different sects. For example, in two cases, those of a man and a woman, now heads of two different households, each was affiliated to the Zen sect at the time of his or her marriage, yet each automatically became a member of the Jōdo sect of the household into which he or she married. Neither was overly concerned about the difference between Zen and Jōdo teachings, but neither completely severed his or her relations to the *dannadera* of the household from which he or she married away.[70] Most *danka* members stated that the existence of a *dannadera* is appreciated only for funeral ceremonies and religious duties related to ancestor veneration; the temple appears to have little to offer in relation to people's own religious and spiritual needs.

[68] Nakane, p. 68.

[69] Meyer Fortes, *Ancestors*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 6.

[70] For different temple affiliations of members of the same households, see Noguchi, p. 125.

The stable population, the fact that agricultural zoning regulations restrict the initiation of new settlements, the suspicion felt toward outsiders which is reflected in the conservative marriage policies of the area, and the general trend of spiritual stagnation among the traditional Buddhist denominations lead one to the conclusion that Konrenji cannot in all probability expect any fresh impulses. Moreover, the quest for a better economic life outside the village does not leave the villagers much time or inclination to devote themselves to the temple and its affairs. This fact is partly the result of the postwar land reform that reinforced the trend toward an independent competitive spirit among the *danka* households.

Konrenji's Land

At the time of the 1946 Land Reform, Konrenji possessed about 3.08 acres, or 1.1 *chō*, of rice fields; in addition, it owned 0.735 acres, or 3 *tan* 反, of forest land. All of this land belonged to the temple, not to the priest nor to the *danka* members, and all the rice fields were let out to tenants who were primarily members of the *danka*. There were apparently no conflicts in the compulsory sale of Konrenji's land during the land-reform period. The procedure was simple and straightforward. The money from the sale of the land was given to the temple. The villagers arranged the sale of the land among themselves with the help of the village office of Shimozaiichi. The transfer of the land was duly registered at the land registry of the *hōmukyoku* in Otsu city. Of the 3.08 acres of rice lands, only 0.49 acres were sold to tenants outside the *danka*; the rest went to Konrenji's *danka*. Four households of the *danka* did not buy land because they were not tenants of the temple. Of the seven *danka* members who did obtain land, two bought enough to considerably affect their standard of living; two others made only a nominal change, and the remaining members did not significantly change. As two members of Konrenji's *danka* were also tenants of Yōgen-in 養源院 in Shimozaiichi, they were also able to purchase some of that temple's land as well.

All the tenants of Konrenji's land had long cultivated this land, so there were no cases of conflict which might have occurred if some households had cultivated the land for only a short time prior to the date, 23 November 1946, set by law to determine the legitimate 'owner'. There was no shame or guilt in receiving the temple's land for, in a sense, the land had long been cultivated by these households. The transfer of the land was considered and accepted as emanating from the directives of an outside authority; thus this new situation fell within the traditional accepted pattern of authority.

It was generally recognized by the members of this and other *danka* in the area that being a tenant of a temple with which one was affiliated was usually preferable to being a tenant of a secular landlord. Although the rents of temple lands tended to mirror those of secular land, the respect for the local priest

who performed ceremonies for one's ancestors, the religious affiliation with the temple, and the priest's dependence on the tenants were mitigating factors in any dispute. In case of crop failure or abnormally poor harvests, the *danka* of Konrenji was rather generous in lowering rents, especially as there were several households related by kinship ties. In contrast, tenants of landowners often migrated to towns or cities in search of work to solve their financial problems.

Each *danka* household had a hereditary right to cultivate Konrenji's land, an agreement that could be altered if and when the economic situation of a particular household warranted it. If any land became available, usually there were other households which needed to cultivate more land. Yet as both priest and temple were dependent on a constant share of the rice crop, tenancy arrangements could not be altered lightly. Any changes had to insure that the temple would continue to receive its basic financing undisturbed by the whims or changing economic circumstances of a particular household.

Religious Ceremonies and Funerals

The entire *danka* participates in the following three ceremonies. (1) *Obon*, 15-16 August, when the souls of ancestors are believed to return to their tombs and homes, and families pray at their tombs; (2) *Jizōbon* 地蔵盆, which takes place after *obon*, when prayers for the prosperity of the local children are recited; and (3) *aki no higan*, the autumn equinox, when families visit the tombs of their ancestors to pray and make offerings that they may obtain buddhahood.

Funeral rites are nowadays normally conducted in the houses of the *danka* members and are much briefer than in the past when the monks performing such ceremonies in Kamizaiichi used Konrenji as a place for robing, praying, and sleeping. Nowadays the priests seldom stay long enough to need special accommodations. If they do, they use a room in the household of the deceased or in the new community center built in 1977. In nearby Ikadachi, funeral ceremonies are performed in only two temples, Shin-Chionin and Shōbōin.

A priest who does not reside permanently in a temple receives financing only when he actually performs religious services. Prayers at a funeral, for example, are normally conducted in front of the bereaved household's *butsudan* by the head priest; he is usually assisted by two to four other monks who vary in rank. According to their rank and status, each receives from ¥30,000 to ¥70,000. In Kamizaiichi, five monks usually officiate at a funeral ceremony. In a neighboring village, the people of the hamlet agreed for economic reasons that one priest would suffice on such occasions. This policy of limiting the number of officiating monks to one has been criticized throughout the other hamlets of Ikadachi as '*somatsu na kimochi*' 粗末な気持, or a cheap feeling toward ancestors. After much external pressure, the households of this adja-

cent village relented and agreed to have three monks officiate at their funeral services. The people belonging to Konrenji's *danka* in Kamizaiichi still feel that such a financially oriented approach is a very poor and unbecoming attitude toward the dead.

Nevertheless, several of the villagers interviewed voiced a general diminished respect toward monks, and the latter were occasionally referred to as *osōshiki no sarariman* お葬式のサラリーマン ('funeral salarymen') or *sōshikiyasan* 葬式屋さん ('funeral entrepreneurs'). This attitude reveals the extent to which traditional Buddhism has become equated with funerals and the extent to which the duties of monks revolve around death. In addition, it is noticeable that the polite language normally used toward superiors is no longer spoken when addressing monks. The religious services conducted by monks have become downgraded in the eyes of many of the villagers, who view them as business practices. The fact that it is necessary to pay the monk for each of his services is regarded as something that cannot be avoided unless one dares to go against the established tradition of ancestor veneration and, in the process, lose face in the small village community. Moreover, the villagers still demonstrate some evidence of the belief that disaster within the village or family (for example, fires, accidents, epidemics) may have been the result of neglect of deceased ancestors.[71]

In Kamizaiichi there is no formal funeral association, or *sōshiki-gumi* 葬式組, but instead households help each other in preparation for such services. For this purpose, an imaginary line is drawn through Konrenji, dividing the hamlet into upper and lower Kamizaiichi. When a person dies in 'upper' Kamizaiichi, all the households there help the family of the deceased, and the same holds true for 'lower' Kamizaiichi.

An integral part of funeral practices for which the officiating monks receive extra money is the custom of choosing a posthumous name (*kaimyō* 戒名) for the future life (*raise* 来世) of the deceased. The monks usually select one Chinese character from the name of the deceased, and this is combined with other characters to symbolize the virtue, beauty, and/or wisdom of the departed person.[72] In order to receive this posthumous name, however, the Jōdo sect requires that a person must be instructed by a monk on the five important principles (*gojūsōden* 五重相伝) established by Hōnen, the founder of the sect. In the Ikadachi area, the regular *gojūsōden* ceremony is performed for the *danka* members only once or twice during a monk's term of office. If someone dies without having received this instruction, his or her household has to arrange a special *gojūsōden* ceremony and pay a special fee (*orei no okane* お礼のお金) for this benefit. This happened in the case of one household several years ago when the eldest son was killed in a traffic accident. In such an

[71] Kōmoto, p. 110.

[72] According to some villagers, the greater the monetary offering, the more beautiful the posthumous name.

ad hoc *gojūsōden* ceremony, someone stands in as proxy for the deceased and is instructed in the five principles of Jōdo. Only after this ceremony has been conducted can the deceased be granted a posthumous name.

In former times, when Kamizaiichi did not have a community center, Konrenji served as a meeting place not only for *danka* members but also for all the villagers. When a monk was still in residence, the villagers often visited the temple for prayer and for other meetings of an economic and social nature. Economic meetings dealt with the temple's former lands, its finances, and the problems of individual households. Social meetings included periodic entertainment, such as amateur dramatics (*oshibai* お芝居), comic dialogues (*manzai* 漫才), and folk songs (*kayōkyoku* 歌謡曲). Konrenji's last resident monk taught reading and writing to the villagers about twice a month and delivered talks on economic, social, and religious matters. Not only because of his office as monk but also because of his position as an official of the village town hall and school teacher, he was occasionally a mediator among villagers in problems such as border disputes about rice land, the election of the village head, and quarrels between spouses.

Since 1953, however, Konrenji has not had a resident monk, so the *danka* members now make decisions relating to all affairs other than religious ceremonies. For example, the *danka* decided to set up a new graveyard on a nearby hill because the temple precincts had become rather crowded. Only six families still have the graves of their ancestors within the precincts.

After the death of a member of a household and up to the hundredth anniversary of an ancestor's death, a white strip of paper (*nenki no oboegaki*) on which the monk inscribes the most recent date of a memorial ceremony is taped in some visible place in the temple. Usually it is in the temple corridor or on the wall of the meeting room next to the main hall where the statue of Buddha is located. The *nenki* ceremony itself consists of a short prayer recited by the monk and costs about ¥5,000; upon its completion a new strip of paper is put up in the temple. When *danka* meetings at the time of *obon* and *ohigan* take place and villagers observe that an overdue *nenki* slip is still attached, they know that the proper memorial service for the ancestors of a particular household has yet to be performed. Such news circulates quickly through the hamlet and can produce considerable embarrassment, so households generally try to have the *nenki* performed on time. Social pressure thus contributes to the impetus for performing ceremonies for ancestor veneration.

Apart from the religious ceremonies carried out by the monk, memorial rites also entail a social function in that the household possessing the mortuary tablet of the ancestor invites all the relatives of the deceased to a dinner party, or *enkai* 宴会. Such a party tends to be rather lavish and often places a financial burden on the family. As a result, villagers have begun to hold joint memorial rites for two or three ancestors whose *nenki* lie within a range of one to five years. Nevertheless, for the recent dead with whom householders have had a

personal relationship, the respective ceremonies of one, three, and seven years after their deaths are rather strictly observed.

At the *enkai*, little is thought or spoken about the deceased unless the death was recent. According to several villagers, it is only when cleaning the household *butsudan* and dusting the stupa on which the posthumous name of the ancestor is inscribed that one thinks nostalgically and gratefully of the deceased. Usually many participants at such memorial meetings have not seen each other for a considerable time and so topics of conversation tend to be of a personal or business nature. After the party, only three to five of the closest relatives of the ancestor visit the monk and join him in prayer. For this, a donation of about ¥10,000 is customary.

As may be seen from the foregoing account, the activities of small rural temples such as Konrenji, which has not had a resident priest for three decades, are restricted mainly to group ceremonies of ancestor veneration. The *danka* still feels a tie to the temple, whether it be the weight of traditional custom or the fact that the temple exists in their midst and thus provides a sense of stability and continuity in their lives. Yet the prewar economic ties no longer exist, and as a result the temple-household affiliation has been considerably weakened.

Conclusion

A study of the *danka* system helps to throw light on the traditionally pragmatic and formalistic attitude toward Buddhism in Japan. In using this religion to enhance their control and security, the Tokugawa rulers set forces into play that tended to formalize and fossilize Buddhism, and divert it from its religious potential, sapping its spiritual quality and energy. This deleterious effect was especially noticeable at the beginning of the Meiji period during the counteraction against Buddhism.

The *danka* system has not died out despite its legal abolition and the withdrawal of government support in early Meiji; it still provides the major financial support for most temples of traditional Buddhist denominations[73] and still defines the historical relationship between temple and household. Yet this relationship has been incorporated into the religion to such a degree that its very strength has had a retrogressive effect, for its fixed, traditional nature does not allow Buddhism to adapt easily to modern social and economic situations. The modern situation demands a different approach to religion and it works toward the dissolution of the traditional household system. The stress in the *danka* system, however, is on the household, not the individual, and this has the potential for creating conflicts at a time when Japanese society seems to be gradually attaching greater importance to the individual. This trend has not

[73] *Toshi Jiin no Shakaiteki Kinō*, pp. 52 & 125ff, containing valuable information supported by statistical materials, was helpful in the formulation of these conclusions.

been overlooked by many New Religions (*shinkō shūkyō* 新興宗教) that encourage a more personal and individual affiliation among believers. The *danka* pattern of affiliation and the more modern individualistic pattern appear to be incompatible, if not mutually exclusive.

A study of the *danka* system further brings out some of the economic problems of postwar Buddhism in Japan. As most temples receive virtually no income from the land, and income from funeral and memorial services is insufficient to cover maintenance and other expenses, priests are increasingly obliged to keep temples solvent by seeking income from non-religious occupations. In such a situation, it is not surprising that the priests and *danka* members have little time to stress the spiritual teachings of Buddhism, and the old pattern of ritualized formality established in the Tokugawa period tends to be perpetuated. As a result, traditional Buddhism is finding it difficult to adapt to modern society, to maintain meaningful ties with the general populace, and to initiate community and social projects. Accordingly, many traditional temples are viewed as merely institutions for funeral services and memorial ceremonies.

The *danka* system is weakening in the cities, yet it appears to be holding its own in rural areas. It is conceivable, however, that as the concept of 'household' gradually loses some of its traditional value and force, the *danka* system may eventually disappear altogether. To foresee such future trends, a more comprehensive study of the larger social and economic development of modern Japanese society would be indispensable. A study of the *danka* system as it exists today, however, does not only illuminate the spiritual decline of traditional Japanese Buddhism, but also brings to light one important merit: the system has contributed to an important degree to the inherent stability of Japanese society and the continued existence of its traditional temples—among them, Konrenji.