

The Study of Hōnen's Doctrine on Akunin-Shōki (Evil Men as the Object of Salvation)

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1. The varied stages and the issues in the study of Hōnen

During the last 25 years we have seen interesting developments in the studies of Hōnen. One of the causes for this is that not only the normative study based on the faith in the area of the sect's theology was adopted, but also the descriptive studies based on historical and bibliographical materials were used. By adopting such methodologies as these, problems which were before confined only to the study of the sect's theology have been unveiled for a deeper viewing.

Generally speaking, the study of Hōnen has come into the area of religious study. When we suggest the methodology for religious study, regardless of doing so consciously or not, the methodology which Jachm Wach and Kishimoto Hideo used, for example, can also be adopted for Hōnen's study. In such a methodology as this, more attention is paid to descriptive objectivity than to the situation as filtered by the subjective sect-consciousness. As an example, we can mention what Nakano Masaaki pointed out in his main work, "A basic study of Hōnen's works", Hōzōkan, Kyoto, 1994; Shinran's "Saihō-shinan-shō" exemplifies the actual value of Hōnen's works.

a.

With such a tendency concerning Hōnen's study as this, as a typical instance we can present the problems around "Hōnen's doctrine of evil men as the object of salvation <Akunin Shōki>." Now, I shall explain this

problem and its background.

This problem was raised by the discovery of new material called “A biography of St. Hōnen (*Hōnen Shōnin denki*)” at Daigo-ji Temple, Kyoto, in 1917 (Taishō 6). It is called the “Daigo-bon” for short. It has Seikanbō’s signature as the writer or listener; he was an excellent pupil of Hōnen’s. It is composed of six parts: “The Story of One Life (Ichigo-monogatari)”; “(Hōnen’s) Replies to Zenshō-bō (*Zenshōbō e no Kotae*)”; “Explanation of the Threefold Mind (*Sanjin-ryōken ji*)”; “A Separate Biography (*Betsudenki*)”; “Diary of His (Hōnen’s) Last Hour (*Gorinjū-nikki*)” and “The Record of His (Hōnen’s) Attainment of Samādhi (*Zanmai-hottoku-ki*)”. This document was written directly by Hōnen’s pupil Seikan-bō or what was preached by Hōnen.

The third part, “Explanation of the Threefold Mind (*Sanjin-ryōken ji*)” is composed of 27 articles and sermons. We must pay special attention to the 27th article. It has the title “Even a good man can be received in Buddha’s Land, so how much more an evil man, this is an oral transmission,” and then Seikan-bō added as follows: “I understand that Amida’s Original Vows were not set up for the good man who has the means to depart by his own power from suffering, but were mercifully proclaimed for only the vilest man who has no means for salvation. By embracing Amida’s Vow, the good man can be received in Buddha’s Land, much more an evil man is to beg Amida’s power”. This saying in the title is Hōnen’s words, and Seikan-bō’s interpretation of it follows. Hōnen’s words are just the same as these; “Even a good man will be received in Buddha’s Land, so how much more an evil man ” in chapter 3 of “Tanni-shō” as recorded by Shinran’s pupil, Yuien. This sentence is Hōnen’s oral transmission.

At the time when “Daigo-bon” was discovered, the modernization movement of Japan was in full course. “Tanni-shō” sealed before that

time by the Shin-sect was unveiled by two members of the group Seishinkai, Kiyozawa Manshi <1867-1903> and Akegarasu Haya <1877-1954>. The catch-phrase "Shinran equals Akunin shōki setsu <Doctrine of Evil Men as the Object of Salvation>" became popular. This caused serious problems on how to judge the new material from Daigo Temple.

b.

At first, about this new material Mochizuki Shinkō <1869-1948>, who was a high priest and a great scholar, published in 1918 (Taishō 7) a treatise "On St. Hōnen's Biography in the Daigo-bon <Daigo-bon Hōnen Shōnin denki ni tsuite>" (The Study of Buddhist Materials, vol,37.28). In it he wrote: "This sentence is in the last, 27th, article, and it seems to be additional material written by an editor. I can not find the sentence, 'Even a good man will be received in Buddha's Land, so how much more an evil man' in the collections of Hōnen's preachings <Wago-tōroku>." He concluded that this "Daigo-bon" was non-Hōnen.

Then, Ienaga Saburō, who was an authority on the history of Japanese Buddhism, pointed out that "The part that includes this doctrine on Evil Men as the Object of Salvation <Akunin shōki setsu> is indistinct and an anonymous material, not found in Hōnen's other articles or preachings." He also reached the conclusion that "Daigo-bon" was not written by Hōnen (A Study of the History of the Middle Ages Buddhist Thought, Hozōkan, 1947). For Ienaga, the ground for non-Hōnen centers on the unreliability of this new material.

On the one side stood Mochizuki Shinkō, an authority as well as a high priest of the Jōdo-shū-sect and a great scholar of Buddhism, along with Ienaga Saburō, who was an authority on the historical study of Japanese Buddhism, particularly of Shinran. By two such authorities it was concluded not to be Hōnen's material, so, "Daigo-bon" was labeled as not-Hōnen material in Buddhist society. In the Jōdo shin-shū sect, through the

powerful faith-movement of spiritualism <Seishinshugi> with the “Tanni-shō” as an axis, modern Buddhism moved forward more and more.

In such a religious stream as this, “Daigo-bon” was disregarded without any further checks or examinations. This problem about “Daigo-bon” was seemingly untouchable for a long time from both the Jōdo-shū sect and the study of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism.

c.

Nevertheless, on the other side there were a few scholars who published treaties with the hypothesis that the words in “Daigo-bon” were Hōnen’s. For example, Matsumoto Hikosaburō in his article “Some Problems on the reformation of the Kamakura Period” 1942, emphasized his belief that the famous sentence is indeed Hōnen’s. This problem had, in fact, been running through the bottom of the Japanese Pure Land Buddhism reserchers’ academic consciousness like a water vein.

It was in the paper “On the genealogy of the Doctrine on Evil Men as the Object of Salvation <Akunin shōki setsu>” presented by Kajimura Noboru at the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies Annual Meeting, 1970, that an incision about this problem was made again. Kajimura wrote, “‘Daigo-bon’ is a document recorded by Hōnen’s immediate pupil, Seikanbō Genchi,” and he emphasized the reliability of this material. By doing this, he declared that Hōnen preached without a doubt “Even a good man will be received in Buddha’s Land, so how much more an evil man.”

It was a study group’s paper titled “Studies of Texts of Jōdo-Shū Buddhism presented to Professor Tōdō Kyōshun on the occasion of his 70 th Birthday” that since 1986 has prepared for the reexamining of this problem. This group published the original text of the “Daigo-bon” in photocopy. For the first time all eyes could see “Daigo-bon” in the original style. It was very epochmaking.

There are 14 papers on the “Daigo-bon” in this volume of studies. Specially, Tsuboi Shunei discussed about the 27th article, “Explanation of the Threefold Mind (Sanjin-ryōken ji)” as seeming to be Ryūkan's idea. Also, Hirokawa Takatoshi pointed out that the speaker of “Sanjin-ryōken ji” can not necessarily be determined to be Ryūkan, but possibly was Shōkū. And I, Fujimoto Kiyohiko, took a firm stand for the theory that the speaker was Hōnen himself, taking into account Hōnen's other preachings. Tsuboi's opinion was that this 27th article was preached by Hōnen's pupil, Ryūkan; Hirokawa added Hōnen's pupil Shōkū as a possibility opposed to Tsuboi's opinion, but neither referred to Hōnen himself.

After this, in 1988 yet some more new material, the *Rin-en-sō*, was discovered in Saifuku-ji belonging to the Jōdo-Shū-Seizan sect in Aichi prefecture. In it the sentence was found: “I understood, even a good man will be received in Buddha's Land, so how much more an evil man; the 48 Vows are like a raft” which was wholly the same as in the “Daigo-bon” and “Tanni-shō.” It is believed that this material was heard and written by Shōkū's pupil, Gyōe, in 1386.

The discoverers of “Rin-en-sō” said: Because the “Tanni-shō” was not introduced in the catalogue “Jōten-mokuroku,” which Shinran's pupil Zongaku (1202–1373) edited in 1362, this sentence in the new material “Rin-en-sō” is not a quotation from “Tanni-shō”. After all, the sentence ‘Even a good man will be received in Buddha's Land, so how much more an evil man’ has not only one handing down, from Hōnen to Shinran, but also another from Hōnen to Shōkū and his own pupils.

Through such a process of discussion as this, in April, 1993, the director of the Institute of Shin-shū Theology, at Nishi-hongan-ji, Kakehashi Jitsuen, who had intimated already the necessity for “re-examination of Shinran's doctrine on Evil Men as the Object of Salvation (Akunin

shōki)” in his work “The Study on Hōnen’s Theology”, (Nagata-bunshōdō, Kyoto, 1986), presented an article titled “The originator of the doctrine on Evil Men as the Object of Salvation <Akunin shōki> is Hōnen.”

In addition to this, in August, 1993, NHK’s TV program “Shinran: the truth of the doctrine on Evil Men as the Object of Salvation <Akunin shōki setsu>” was aired, and it concluded that “Akunin shōki setsu” was based on Hōnen’s words and thought. Through the mass-media, it was generalized that the idea of “Akunin shōki setsu” was derived from Hōnen.

2. Hōnen’s Doctrine on “Evil Men as the Object of Salvation <Akunin shōki>” — The 4 types of Hōnen’s “Akunin shōki setsu” —

We can not find a direct definition of the concepts “devil” or “evil man” in Hōnen’s preachings. So, it is very difficult for us to interpretete this Japanese concept into the English. In general meanings, we will use the word of ‘evil’.

But fundamentally, as Hōnen preached every time, the meanings of the terms can be found in words like “I myself am an ordinary man, subject to the cycles of birth and death, and am always drifting in various states of existence for innumerable kalpas, and can not reach the codition of salvation,” as was declared in ‘A Commentary on the Meditation Sūtra’ as Two Kinds of Deep Belief, by Shan-tao <Zendō 613–681>. He also spoke, “Ordinary men are sinful and evil, and they are endlessly transmigrant. They follow ignorant and violate precepts” (Tozan-jō, *Hōnen Shōnin Zenshū* (hereafter *HSZ*), p. 427). Also, “The sinful men who do not wish to be received in Buddha’s Land do not chant Amida’s name and commit themselves to sin” (Hōnen’s reply to Ōgo no Tarō, *HSZ*, p. 521).

In Hōnen, “evil” is not defined relatively on the ethical level. His definition of “evil man” matches his attitude of regarding himslf as a man

who has not the ability of practicing “San-gaku”, the three learnings: Kai (precepts), Jō (meditation), E (wisdom), and of firmly believing in “the two kinds of Deep Belief” by Shan-tao. Now, considering Hōnen's preachings from these viewpoints, there are four types of “evil men can be received in Buddha's Land.”

Type 1: “If one chants Amida's Name, the good men as well as the evil also will be received in Buddha's Land” (Hōnen's answer to Tsunoto no Saburō, *HSZ*, p. 572). In a theory of this type, the good men and the evil are not separated. So, Hōnen said always, “Repeatedly chanting Amida's Name <Namamidabutsu>, the good as well as the evil all together, men as well as women all together, 10 persons together and 100 persons together, all will be received in Buddha's Land” (Nenbutsu-ōjō-yōgi-shō, *HSZ*, p. 682).

Type 2: “A good man chants Amida's Name as a good man, an evil man does so as an evil man. Both of them chant Amida's Name by nature” (Hōnen's words heard by Zenshōbō, *HSZ*, p. 462). In the theory of this type, a good man and an evil man are separated. So Hōnen said, “The individuals who chant Amida's Name, by chanting Amida's Name by their nature, are received in Buddha's Land” (12 dialogues, *HSZ*, p. 639).

Type 3: “Even an evil man will be received in Buddha's Land, so how much more a good man” (Hōnen's letter to priest Kuroda, *HSZ*, p. 500). In a theory of this type, a good man is superior to an evil man. So, Hōnen said, “Even the sinful man will be received in Buddha's Land, much more so should the good man be” (Hōnen's reply to Ōgo no Tarō, *HSZ*, p. 524). Conversely speaking, “Because good man can not be received in Buddha's Land without the power of the Nenbutsu <chanting Amida's Name>, how much less evil man” (Nenbutsu-ōjō-gi, *HSZ*, p. 688). Here, this theory supposes “the evil” to be a negative one.

Type 4: “Even a good man will be received in Buddha's Land, so how

much more an evil man. These words are the oral transmission” (Daigobon, *HSZ*, p. 454). In the theory of this type, an evil man is superior to a good man. This concept of “Akunin shōki setsu” is not found in Hōnen’s other preachings. We have to notice here that these words are an oral transmission.

In Hōnen’s doctrine, the significance of “Akunin-ōjō” is given by all the above 4 types. Hōnen’s teaching of “Akunin shōki” had been passed on to his pupils as “Language of soul” in oral transmission. Therefore, it is unnecessary to take up only type 4 as salient concern. Basically, Hōnen’s ‘Doctrine on evil man as the object of salvation’ is that one who is aware of his disability of practicing “San gaku <precepts, meditation, wisdom>” has rightly the potential of receiving Amida’s Vows.

3. The recent trends in the study of “Akunin shōki”

a. On Taira Masayuki’s understanding

He published a work titled “Society and Buddhism in the Middle Ages of Japan”, (Hanawa-shobō, Tokyo, 1992.) It shocked the studies of Japanese Middle Ages Buddhism, including Ienaga’s theory. That is, at first he emphasized one aspect of “the authorized Buddhism (Ken-mitsu Bukkyō: the exoteric and the esoteric) and the heretical Buddhists (Hōnen and Shinran). Then, he pointed out as follows: “Hōnen’s and Shinran’s Buddhist thought advocated the equality of all sentient beings in this world. So, it was the thought of the liberation of the Middle Ages: that is, the simple workers, who were divided and forced out of the establishment, the ‘negation of negation of the ancient age’, wished for the common people’s land” (p. 255).

He also wrote, “Akunin-ōjō setsu : 悪人往生説 refers to good men belonging to the social stratum as the right cause <shō-in : 正因>. That is ‘Even evil men (the secondary value) are received in Buddha’s Land, so

how much more good men' (the first value)." And he added, "The thought in the 'Tanni-shō' which regards the good man as of secondary value and the evil man as of first value is called Akunin shōki-setsu : 悪人正機説 <The Doctrine on Evil Men as the Object of Salvation.>

And he said also, "In the case of the 'Daigo-bon,' the sentence 'Even good men are received in Buddha's Land, so how much more evil men' and Sikan-bō Genchi's understanding that Amida's grace is given not for good men but for evil men , are typical of 'Akunin shōki setsu : 悪人正機説,' which regards the evil man as the first <main> and the good man as the secondary <other>" (ibid. p. 224). He upholds the meaning of Hōnen's "Akunin shōki setsu" as arrived at in the "Daigo-bon".

b. On an opinion that "'Senchaku-shū' explains Akunin-shōki setsu"

In 1992, "Akunin shōki setsu by Hōnen and Jōkei" edited by Inayoshi Manryō, Hakuba-sha, Kyoto, was published. In this book the article by Inada, Inayoshi and others, "Senchaku shū' explains Akunin-shōki setsu," was printed.

In conclusion, they said: "When Hōnen preached 'Senchaku-shū', he established already Akunin shōki setsu. But he would not declare it outwardly because of the social conditions at that time." They indicated as follows: "It is true that Hōnen did not preach in 'Senchaku shū' 'Even good men are received in Buddha's Land, so how much more evil men' as a comparative presentation, but he declared logically that 'Akunin-shōki' is really the true motive of the 'Meditation Sūtra' and Shan-tao's 'Commentary on the Meditation Sūtra' and the secret principles of Jōdo-shū" (p. 146).

4. Conclusion

In this presentation, I have given only an outline of the varied stages and some problems concerning to "Akunin shōki setsu" after the new document "Daigo-bon" was discovered in 1917. And now, we clearly

understand three important points as follows.

1; The so-called ‘Akunin shōki setsu’, “Even good men are received in Buddha’s Land, so how much more evil men” is in fact Hōnen’s original words.

2; This sentence is not contradictory to Hōnen’s doctrine. Especially through Hōnen we can accurately grasp “Akunin-ōjō setsu” which carries moreover a wide meaning. We should not be given over to strictly defining the meaning of “Akunin shōki setsu”.

3; Concerning recent issues, we picked up two points. One point at issue is Taira’s strict understanding of “Akunin shōin, Akunin shōki”; the other is the opinion that “Senchaku shū’ explains Akunin shōki setsu” as indicated by Inada, Inayoshi and others. By making clear studies of both points, the theme “Akunin shōki setsu” can be taken up to a higher level.