



Problems of Calendar in Translation— Year of Shinran Shonin's Demise

by Masami Fujitani

According to *Shinran Den-ye* (pictorial biography), authored by Kakunyo Shonin in 1294 A.D. or 31 years after Shinran Shonin's death, the Shonin breathed his last breath at the Hour of the Horse¹ (11 a.m. - 1 p.m.) on the 28th day of the eleventh month in the second year of Kocho, the Mizuno-e Inu (Senior Water-Dog cycle year). This sentence has been the orthodox source for the date of Shinran Shonin's demise or Ho On Ko.

Among the ten sub-denominations of (Jodo) Shinshu,² Higashi Hongwanji and Koshoji schools take the day for November 28th, bravely validating the lunar date for the modern Gregorian solar calendar. It is of interest to notice that some BCA temples in northern California observe the Ho On Ko in November in accordance with the Higashi tradition. As for Nishi Hongwanji and Takada schools,³ the Ho On Ko day is converted to January 16th of the Gregorian calendar through elaborate computation.

Here, in a small southern California town far beyond access to Hongwanji archives and savants, I may be too daring, but with my most sincere thanks to our great Sangha I have availed myself of the following two books in studying the date assessment:

A. Herman H. Goldstein: *New and Full Moons 1001 B.C. to A.D. 1651*, American Philosophical Society, 1973.

B. Hsueh Chung San & Ou Yang: *Lian Ch'ien Nien Chung Hsi Li Tui Chao Piao* (A Sino-Western Calendar for Two Thousand Years), Hong Kong, 1961.

Book A, thanks to computer technology, shows all new and full moons with the exact Babylonian time of their rising through twenty-seven centuries in accordance with the Julian calendar. Book B presents the comparison of the Chinese lunar calendar with the Julian (February 11, 1 A.D. - September 4, 1582 A.D.) and Gregorian systems (September 15, 1582 - January 23, 2001 A.D.).

The date in question, the 28th day of the eleventh month in the cycle year of Mizuno-e Inu (Senior Water Dog), falls on January 9, 1263, of the Julian calendar (cf. Book B, page 253). As a Chinese lunar month begins and ends with a new moon, the 28th day must be two days before a new moon day, i.e. the 30th. January 9th as an appropriate date is attested to by its immediately following the new moon day, January 11th, as located on page 189 of Book A.

Now, the Gregorian calendar, reforming the Julian system which had been in use since 46 B.C., was initiated by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 A.D. Roman Catholic nations such as Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Poland were

prompt to adopt the new calendar. In five years German, Dutch and Hungarian Catholics joined them. Protestant countries were rather slow in employing it as shown in the cases of England (1752), Sweden (1757), etc. Japanese adoption of the Gregorian calendar was in 1872. China started using the Gregorian calendar in 1912, but the traditional lunar calendar is still alive. In the same fashion, the Eastern Orthodox group did not change the calendar until the rise of communism in 1917 (USSR and Turkey) or 1919 (Yugoslavia), for example, while the Julian calendar is still being religiously used. It was as late as 1923 that the Greeks accepted the new calendar.

The Julian calendar lags eight days in 1,000 years or one day every 128 years against the Gregorian.⁴ When the Gregorian system was introduced in 1582, the difference between the two calendars was set as ten days. From this calculation we are advised to know that at the time of Shinran Shonin's demise the difference was about 7.5 days ($10 - \frac{1582 - 1262 \text{ or } 3}{128}$) while it is thirteen days in 1982.

Therefore, by adding 7.5 days to January 9th, we obtain January 16th (16.5) on our Gregorian calendar.

Since mid-Tokugawa era Shinran Shonin's birthday has been, without any documentation, agreed upon as the first day of the fourth month in the third year of Shoan, Mizuno-to Mi (Junior Water Snake). Higashi Hongwanji does the same as the Ho On Ko, interpreting the date as April 1st. We locate the day on May 14th of the Julian calendar and amend it to May 21st, Gregorian.

The question next is if Shinran Shonin died in 1262 as conventionally stated or not.⁵ On this point, we should realize that our written sources refer the Shonin's death to the 28th day of Mizuno-e Inu but never in 1262. Actually, the 2nd year of Kocho or Mizuno-e Inu covers the period of January 29, 1262, through February 16, 1263, of the Gregorian calendar, in the same way as this year, Mizuno-e Inu (Senior Water Dog), happens to be the same cycle year as the Shonin's demise is from January 25, 1982, to February 12, 1983, with a leap month. The 28th day of the eleventh month of Mizuno-e Inu of Shinran Shonin's Nirvana must, therefore, definitely be in 1263 of the Gregorian calendar. If we cling to 1262, we should relinquish Kocho 2-nen and Mizuno-e Inu. Gotanye, Shinran Shonin's birthday, seems to be immune to the problem, but the first day of the fourth month is still uncomfortable. The date may be in the year 1173, but it should not be in the fourth month. As long as we stay at ease within our agreement, it appears not to be a worry at all, but in this modern exposed

world we must be alert to sophisticated technology as well as the blazing fact that the Chinese lunar and Julian calendars are now robustly alive. We are familiar with the Chinese New Year celebration and the Eastern Orthodox Christmas held on January 7th, or 13 days after December 25th.⁶

The same problem is involved in many items surrounding us,⁷ but here I respectfully recommend Shinran Shonin's date of demise to be assessed as January 16, 1263, instead of 1262, or the 28th day of the 11th month, 1262-63, and constant cautions be taken in translating other historical dates.

NOTES

1. *The time is generally corrected to 2:00 p.m. or the Hour of the Sheep via such documents as Anjo Goei Uragaki (Notes on the Anjo Image of Shonin) or Kyogyoshinsho Shikigo of Jotokuji, Fukui. cf. Enjun Miyasaki; Shinran's Life, Shinran Shonin, Tokuma Shoten, 1973, p. 156.*
Gosho (Epistle) No. 18 by Gyoshu Shonin, 14th Patriarch of Takada school, is quoted, "It was on the 28th day of Koshu (eleventh lunar month) in the second year of Kocho . . .," but the hour is not specified.
2. *Jodo is prefixed to only our Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha Hongwanji among the ten schools, while others are called Shinshu Takada-ha, Shinshu Ohtani-ha, etc.*
3. *Fukyo-jiten, Hyakka-en 1958, p. 653.*
4. *Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 5, p. 192. Our Wonderful World, An Encyclopedic Anthology, Vol. 3, p. 160.*
5. *The majority of writings in and out of the Hongwanji supports the 1262 theory except the Shoshinge, Ryukoku Translation Series, Vol. 1. However, the first edition of the Shoshinge, 1961, erroneously mentions the twenty-ninth day which was eventual-*

ly corrected in the 2nd edition. The Shinshu Seiten, 1978, of the BCA, refers to Shinran's year of death four times—three times to 1262 and once to 1263. Unfortunately, the Seiten used the first edition of the Shoshinge in which the date remains in error.

The Shinshu-shi, p. 14, History of Shinshu, Ryukoku University, 1960, is quoted, "The founder's death occurred on the 28th day of the 2nd year of Kocho (1262), January 16th in the following year if in the solar calendar . . ." This is a confusing statement because 1262 is 1262 and never 1263 regardless if Gregorian or Julian. The Sino-Japanese lunar calendar is not based on Anno Domini (year of the Lord).

6. *The Russian Orthodox Church, for example, following the Julian calendar, celebrates Christmas on January 25th according to my conversation with the priests.*
7. *One example is the relation between Vesak and Buddha Days. Early Chinese Buddhists translated Vaisakha, the second month of the Indian lunar calendar, corresponding to Gregorian May, approximately, as the second month which eventually became to be taken for the Chinese Lunar 2nd month; for example, in Digha Nikaya Book iv, etc. Furthermore, due to two month's difference between two major Chinese calendars, Hsia and Chou, Vaisakha is more interpreted as the fourth month (Buddhacarita, Life of Buddha in Chinese, and so forth). Northern Buddhists availed themselves of this two month's difference in separate commemorations of Buddha's birth (8th day of 4th month), Enlightenment (8th day of 12th month), and Nirvana (15th day of 2nd month), which are originally combined in Vaisakha. Cf. Makoto Nagai; Why April the Eighth?, the Young East, Vol. ix, No. 35., M. Fujitani: On Wesak, American Buddhists, May 1959, or, Wesak, Hanamatsuri and Buddha Day, Gunasena's Buddhist Annual, 1964, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Japanese-American Buddhists convert the dates to the Gregorian ones.*

FROM THE TEACHING OF BUDDHA:

There are causes for all human suffering, and there is a way by which they may be ended, because everything in the world is the result of a vast concurrence of causes and conditions, and everything disappears as these causes and conditions change and pass away.

Rain falls, winds blow, plants bloom, leaves mature and are blown away; these phenomena are all interrelated with causes and conditions, are brought about by them, and disappear as the causes and conditions change.

One is born through the conditions of parentage; his body is nourished by food, his spirit is nurtured by teaching and experience.

Therefore, both flesh and spirit are related to conditions and are changed as conditions change.

As a net is made up by a series of ties, so everything in this world is connected by a series of ties. If anyone thinks that the mesh of a net is an independent, isolated thing, he is mistaken.

It is called a net because it is made up of a series of connected meshes, and each mesh has its place and responsibilities in relation to other meshes.