

## Kōsai and the Paradox of *Ichinengi*: Be Careful of What You Preach

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WHAT IS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL experience of Pure Land Buddhism that supposedly changed so radically in the Kamakura period with the anagogic insight brought to the community by Hōnen that produced a message so powerful, so inspiring, for so many? This is one of great enigmas of Japanese Buddhism, and indeed of all Buddhist history. Unfortunately, there are enormous text-critical problems associated with nearly all the writings in the Hōnen corpus, as well as the voluminous biographical material about him and his movement written in the century following his death, and this situation makes our understanding of Hōnen exceedingly precarious. Arguably equally influential, however, are the many extant writings from the generation of Pure Land religious leaders who emerged from Hōnen's corps of authoritative disciples. Written by his most intimate students, all endeavor to "clarify" Hōnen's doctrines while describing their own religious perspectives. These works not only afford first-hand insight into Hōnen's message, but as creative voices in their own right are testimony to the lively discourse of this age, and in addressing such topics as the relationship between praxis and realization, speak to universal religious concerns. This paper examines Kōsai's thought and his views on the meaning of nenbutsu. Kōsai was one of the direct disciples who spent considerable time with Hōnen. His interpretative standpoint, usually referred to as *ichinengi* (一念義), has been problematic for Jōdoshū, Jōdoshinshū, and the government authorities since the Kamakura period.

We have very little information about Kōsai's life. He was apparently a scholarly Tendai monk living at the Western Pagoda on Mt. Hiei until he met Hōnen, which led to a personal transformation of sorts. Depending on the source, Kōsai joined Hōnen's inner circle at age 36 in either 1198 or 1208.<sup>1</sup> If we accept the information in the *Hossui bunrūki*, he died in 1247, some thirty-five years after the death of Hōnen. We know he had a significant number of disciples in the capital of Kyoto, northern Shikoku, and in Echigo in northern Honshū, and his line continued to attract students at least into the second half of the fifteenth century. But under political pressure from both government authorities and within the dominant factions of the Jōdoshū itself, Kōsai's lineage apparently did not survive the sixteenth

century, although his ideas have continued to be influential throughout the Edo period and into the twentieth century.

Although there is little to indicate that Hōnen himself held strong political ambitions, his impact had wide-ranging political consequences. Popular among both the highest government officials and individuals of no political significance, it is well known that his popularity brought with it political suppression both during his lifetime and for his disciples after his death. And one of the political problems was the fact that Hōnen's teachings were so popular that groups emerged claiming affiliation to his lineage yet professing doctrines of their own making, of which he could not approve. Groups labeled under the rubric *ichinengi* were probably the most tenacious problem for Hōnen and for the Jōdo school after his death. That activities of people associated actively or passively with the *ichinengi* moniker were problematic for the fledgling school is well attested to; what is much less clear is what sins such people actually committed. There are a number of extant records of people outside these groups complaining about them or the doctrines supposedly professed by their leaders; what we lack, however, are statements from those people themselves. Using what scant reliable records are extant from this period, this paper is an attempt to come to terms with the doctrines expounded by perhaps the most famous leader of the *ichinengi* movement, if not its founder, Kōsai.

### WHO WAS KŌSAI?

Among the great many individuals who considered themselves direct students of Hōnen, there are two methods used today to determine which names truly belonged to his inner circle: first, if the student received personal permission from Hōnen to copy his *Senchakushū*, and second, if he is included in one of the lineage lists of intimate disciples compiled in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. On both these accounts, Kōsai qualifies as a bona fide disciple. He is also one of the five core students of Hōnen mentioned in a number of these lineage accounts, including two written by Nichiren, and even the rather polemic "official" biography of Hōnen compiled by Shunjō notes that Kōsai was allowed to secretly copy the *Senchakushū* in 1208, making him the last known person to do so.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned above, Kōsai's dates are somewhat disputed, but they are probably 1163 to 1247, making him ten years senior to Shinran (1173–1262). Hōnen lived from 1133 to 1212.

The hermeneutic term *ichinengi* reflects a categorization schema that arose in the Buddhist discourse of the century or so after Hōnen's death in 1212. At this time there was considerable discussion—and considerable disagreement—among the learned clergy affiliated with the Pure Land sectarian movement as to how Hōnen's doctrine should be understood properly.

Not everyone believing in this path was directly linked in a transmission lineage with Hōnen, but his impact was so pervasive that new rhetoric like this was largely based on his stated positions, though much of the new jargon plays a minor role in his writings. As early as 1257—ten years after his death—Kōsai is already referred to as the “founder” of *ichinengi*.<sup>3</sup>

### ICHINENGI AND TANENGI

Nearly all discussions of Pure Land Buddhism from this period employ the rubric of *ichinengi* and its supposed opposite, *tanengi*. By definition, the term *ichinengi* indicates “the doctrine of a single nenbutsu” and *tanengi* “the doctrine of multiple nenbutsu.” Here *ichi* is “one” and *ta* means “many,” with *nen* standing for nenbutsu. By itself, *nen* (Ch. *nien*) stems from its role as a verb meaning “to keep the mind focused on,” much like the Sanskrit *manasikāra*, and nenbutsu incorporates this sense as well, even when it is taken to mean recitation or invocation of the Buddha’s name, for that sacred name embodies in sound the Buddha and all of his qualities. As a noun, *nen* implies the brevity of an individual “thought,” thus a single nenbutsu indicates something like a single moment of buddha-consciousness. If this phrase in English seems ambiguous, the Japanese term *ichinengi* is no less so.

Be that as it may, in the literature of this era Kōsai is repeatedly labeled as the representative of the *ichinengi* position and in the hand of Ryūkan, another disciple of Hōnen, is typically placed the banner as the representative of *tanengi* thinking. The conflict between these two interpretive camps can be found in various places in thirteenth century Japanese philosophical and popular literature. Benchō, the founder of the Chinzei lineage of the Jōdoshū, described it like this:

Although the Jōdoshū is a single path of nenbutsu practitioners, the stream of those devoted to one nenbutsu (*ichinen*) and the stream of those devoted to many repetitions (*tanen*) [of nenbutsu] are divided like water and fire. The *ichinen* people laugh at those pursuing repetitious practice as being engaged in difficult or even ascetic practice.<sup>4</sup> The people doing the repetitious practice criticize those taking the *ichinen* standpoint as having no commitment to practice and no self-cultivation.<sup>5</sup>

Although the above reflects a fairly even-handed view of things, elsewhere Benchō clearly comes down on the side of *tanengi* and can be quite critical of the *ichinengi* position. (More on Benchō’s views below.)

Since it is well known that recitation nenbutsu is designated as the true practice in Hōnen’s epistemic, these two terms clearly indicate differ-

ent views of what should be considered normative for nenbutsu practice. But this “one versus many” is not about how often or how many times one chants the nenbutsu. In *ichinengi*, the single intoning of the nenbutsu does not imply that the nenbutsu is never to be uttered again, nor does this “one nenbutsu” indicate any “common” moment of ritual practice, but the particular experience of realization. There is a kind of continuum here stretching between faith and praxis, with *ichinengi* close to the faith pole and *tanengi* at the other extreme. Or, in the tradition of Japanese religious scholasticism, these different doctrinal camps are called “*anjin-ha*” and “*kigyō-ha*,” with the word *anjin* meaning faith obtained through realization as opposed to faith nurtured through observance and practice, for example. Thus what I am calling “faith” in the context of this discussion is defined by a religious experience that is sudden and utterly transformative for the individual. Faith in the sense of belief in the Pure Land doctrine of Birth in the Pure Land of Amitābha is no less strong in the *tanengi* standpoint, but it emphasizes the need for continual practice to keep the mind pure and clean, and so is appropriate to the monastic lifestyle. In some sense, these different positions parallel the importance placed in the two dominant schools of Japanese Zen on the *satori* or *kenshō* experience in Rinzai, versus the ritual-like significance of continual sitting meditation or *zazen* practice in the Sōtō sect, because nenbutsu represents the Buddha’s wisdom for Hōnen just as *zazen* does for Dōgen.

The controversy is partly grounded in a struggle for succession, and partly in the fact that at times Hōnen taught doctrines that could be interpreted as affirming both positions. He himself was famous for long periods of daily nenbutsu practice, and it is in his efforts to match Hōnen’s massive nenbutsu invocation quantities of sixty thousand per day that Ryūkan earned the title of representative *tanengi* or *kigyō-ha* thinker, though there is much in Ryūkan’s thought to suggest a much broader sense of nenbutsu. In his *Jōdo hōmon genrushō* written in 1310, Gyōnen extols Ryūkan’s affirmation of the need for constant practice, explaining that he justified this with the assertion that since one never knows when the end will come, it is better to spend as much time in practice as is physically possible to increase the likelihood that the mind will be in a purified state at that crucial moment.

Although these categories tend to simplify and therefore obfuscate the religious perspectives of those involved—who as a rule do not use categories like these to describe their own understanding—they are of important historical significance in that they embody philosophical positions prevalent in secondary works of the Kamakura period found frequently in the rhetoric of the time, such as doctrinal histories like Gyōnen’s *Genrushō*, *setsuwa* texts like the *Shiju hyaku innen shū*, and even in the polemic Buddhist writings of Nichiren. Since long periods of practice are supposed to lead to sudden moments of realization in Buddhism, one may wonder why these positions

are perceived to be in such opposition. In the traditions of Chan and Huayan, Zongmi's scheme of sudden realization and gradual cultivation expresses the same assumption behind most Pure Land thinkers as well. But in the theatre of Kamakura period religious discourse, however inappropriate these terms may appear today, they carried great weight. There is no question that categories like these contained strong political implications, not only because they served as banners signifying competing factions, but also because of the antinomian tendencies that the civil authorities associated with the *ichinengi* belief system.

Another philosophical concern that emerges in the extant writings from this period asks, To what degree does the primacy of attainment transcend or even negate the value of practice? Think of the raft abandoned at the other shore, think of the oft repeated phrase in Chan that meditation does not make a buddha (or Nanyue Huairang polishing the tile before Mazu), but also think of the *a priori* assumption in Pure Land Buddhist thought that there is no attainment without the intercession of the Buddha. There are numerous statements throughout the Pure Land commentarial literature in China and Japan that speak to this issue, but it should be remembered that, mirroring the Chan debates, for Pure Land the issue of practice emerges in terms of the need for practice prior and subsequent to realization. In other words, does constant practice bring one closer to awakening when it is eagerly sought for, and is there a need to practice so diligently after the matter has been settled? This distinction is anything but clear in most Pure Land writings, and I believe this has led to no small amount of confusion in this instance. Examination of the complaints against the followers of *ichinengi*—disdain for the rules of both the sangha and society at large—suggest an intense, even zealous, focus on the issue of salvation to the exclusion of other, more mundane religious concerns such as ethics and community. However, the extant writings of Kōsai confirm both the value of nenbutsu practice and the central importance of the *ichinen* attainment. It is never clear precisely how Kōsai sees the relationship between the two.

### THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

In some sense, one might even hazard a comparison between millenarian movements, like the White Lotus Society in China or the Ikkō ikki movements three centuries later in Japan, and the *ichinengi* "movement" in thirteenth century Japan in that they are all public expressions of what, to the authorities, is a perversion of values. That is, insofar as most civilian governments tolerate religion and commonly have a mutually authoritating relationship with religious systems of belief and religious institutions (indeed this describes the situation in Japan at this time), an individual's pursuit of

his or her own salvation is tolerated and usually lauded as praiseworthy because it tends to direct personal frustrations away from attacks on the establishments of power, both secular and sacred. In other words, religion as status quo-confirming, as a "sacred canopy," is in everyone's self-interest. But when religion becomes the sole measure of authority in an individual's life, the authority of secular and sacred traditions may evaporate. Or, new institutions emerge that rival preexisting ones. This was the danger of the White Lotus and Ikkō ikki movements which, for a time at least, achieved some degree of autonomy as organizations. Although there are no signs of it ever becoming organized on a scale that could threaten local authorities as an "ikki," or insurrection, the doctrines of the *ichinengi* movement are described by its detractors as potentially threatening in just such a way. But it is exceedingly difficult to judge precisely how those associated with the *ichinengi* point of view felt about such things, as there are no extant statements from anyone regarding morals, ethics, or any social institution.

The prime source for the secular reaction against the ideas of *ichinengi* is found in certain entries in the *Sanchōki*, the diary of the imperial Chamberlain Fujiwara Nagakane covering the years 1199 to 1206.<sup>6</sup> The entry for the twenty-first day of the second month of 1206 records a heated complaint against Hōnen who is called an enemy of Buddhism, and insists that he and other of Hōnen's disciples, such as Anraku, Kōsai (called Jōkaku), Jūren, and Gyōkū, another Hōnen disciple also preaching the *ichinengi* position (called Hōhon),<sup>7</sup> be punished. In an entry on the thirtieth of the same month, a letter is copied into the diary that excoriates Gyōkū and Anraku (called Junsai) for the sin of disrespecting other buddhas in their fervor of devotion to Amida. Only one year later, Anraku and Jūren are beheaded in the most dramatic suppression of the movement, the result of an enigmatic incident in which two court mistresses took the tonsure without authorization. The grouping of Anraku and Jūren together with Kōsai and Gyōkū may indicate a philosophical affinity with the *ichinengi* position, or simply that all four were the object of scorn by the jealous enemies of the Pure Land school in the Tendai and Hossō schools. But insofar as Anraku and Jūren were known to be popular preachers, we can at least surmise from this listing in the *Sanchōki* that Kōsai and Gyōkū also had significant personal followings.

The suppression of the *ichinengi* "movement" was motivated not only by the enemies of Hōnen and the Jōdo school, but by rival factions within the school itself. It stands to reason that if Kōsai's doctrines were completely heretical within the context of Hōnen's doctrinal apparatus, he would have been dismissed as holding deviant views early on and would have been forgotten long ago. The fact that the problem of Kōsai and Gyōkū were taken up at the highest level of legal authority shows just how influential they actually were, and how persuasive were their teachings. We will briefly examine philosophical differences between these men and a rival school led

by Benchō, but suffice it to say at this point that those differences on points of doctrine do not appear to be large enough, on their own, to account for the complete suppression of this school.

The polemics against the *ichinengi* movement are included in the writings of the new orthodoxy under construction by the leaders of the Chinzei faction, most notably Benchō and Ryōchū, the second and third patriarchs of this school.<sup>8</sup> It is claimed that Kōsai and Gyōkū were expelled from the Jōdo school by Hōnen himself, but this notion can be found only in two biographies of Hōnen written by members of this Chinzei lineage. Gyōkū's departure is mentioned in the *Sanchōki*, but—despite Kōsai and Gyōkū having been listed together as leaders of the problematic *ichinengi* grouping—Kōsai's name does not occur in the context of Gyōkū's removal. In fact, Kōsai's excommunication is not corroborated by any thirteenth-century source, including those that show intimate knowledge of the Jōdo school. We may, therefore, conclude that this is a fabrication.<sup>9</sup>

A good example of how philosophical considerations are mixed with social concerns occurs in a passage in Benchō's *Nenbutsu myōgishū*. In the midst of a discussion of how some have turned their backs on Hōnen's teaching—the identical complaint that occurs in the Chinzei inspired Hōnen biographies—the affirmers of *ichinengi* are accused not only of interfering with their own prospects for birth, but the religious situation of others through their inappropriate guidance. Advocates of long periods of sustained practice, Benchō and his lot were indeed following Hōnen's personal precedence of sixty thousand nenbutsu invocations a day. The *ichinengi* people had the audacity to dismiss this intense practice requiring long hours as meaningless, claiming that those who pursue such praxis are pursuing a path of difficult practice, when the Pure Land path is supposed to be an easy one. They question their understanding of the meaning of nenbutsu.

[The *ichinengi* people say] those who recite the nenbutsu in quantities [of thirty thousand or even sixty thousand per day] are confused. Although it is true that we are to recite the nenbutsu, our birth occurs in only one nenbutsu (*ichinen*), and this is the profound meaning that deserves to be studied.... They pick up the sutras and say that those who advocate many recitations do not believe in the teachings, and to be afraid of committing a sin is to doubt the truth of the Original Vow. Everyone who [believes this] just as they hear it end up throwing out their practice of thirty thousand or sixty thousand nenbutsu and becoming a follower of this [teaching] instead. It is frightening to see how they end up [like] foot soldiers carrying nothing [with which to defend themselves]. Even people who [otherwise] harbor [normal] fears of doing sinful deeds, when



they give in to this teaching commit sin. People who [normally] observe the five- or ten-day vegetarian dietary restrictions, from this day forward are out hunting and fishing. Nuns and monks end up eating fish and fowl while wearing their monastic surplice. They simply disregard what has been passed down [over generations] as common sense in others. People in this world [normally] show restraint before the eyes of men and women, but these people call such restraint acts of hypocrisy. They are not ashamed about things that would shame the Buddha. And they laugh at those who accuse them by saying [the accusers] are only hypocritical followers of the nenbutsu. For them the depth of the nenbutsu of the Original Vow has nothing at all to do with concern over the watchful eyes of others. [You might find] a black-robed [priest] walking with a woman, or a nun and a priest together without hesitation, or someone carrying a fish over the shoulder of their black robe, or a nun carrying some pickled vegetables in the sleeve of her black robe. These are frightening things! ... In the province of Higo the so-called continuous expediency kind of *ichinengi* is frequently extolled. In this form ... two people read the character *nen* as heart (*kokoro*), and *ichi* as one, with the purpose of joining two people together in one mind. When a man and a woman meet and decide to join their hearts, what they call *ichinengi* here means they recite *namu amida butsu* together in one voice.<sup>10</sup>

In general, the sins here are things that violate the deportment of a monk or nun, and hence cast the sangha in a bad light. There were complaints of *ichinengi* followers feeling free of social norms and engaging in the behavior deemed inappropriate, including a certain freedom of sexual activity, which may be what the final section above is referring to. The following document expresses the salacious view from another court diary of the period:

Genkū Shōnin (Hōnen) was banished to Tosa for his dissemination of the nenbutsu doctrine. His disciples these days fill the city and the country, and under the name of nenbutsu give themselves up to fornication and immoral association with the wives and daughters of good families. They violate all the laws of the Buddha and the State, and practice shameful deeds daily.<sup>11</sup>

In that the popularity of Hōnen's movement was not welcomed in many quarters of the land, particularly within the entrenched monastic institutions on Mt. Hiei and at Kōfukuji in Nara, by itself we cannot assume that this statement is objective. But putting its contents together with the complaints from Benchō and in the *Sanchōki*, it appears that such immoral behavior



associated with Hōnen's teachings, frequent or infrequent as the case may be, was widely perceived to be genuine and subsequently dealt with by the politically powerful Chinzei group by laying it at the feet of the *ichinengi* people. That a doctrine which proclaims the Buddha's completed vows of compassion make entry into his paradise truly available to everyone who has faith in it, regardless of the diligence of their practice, could lead people to a sense of liberation is not difficult to understand, but the degree to which this justified not just the idea but the practice of moral license remains an open question. What I am suggesting is that the animosity toward those holding the *ichinengi* position may be more about factional rivalry than moral turpitude. That the *ichinengi* doctrine packaged this in a way more appealing, more convincing than the other disciples of Hōnen is also easy to accept, particularly with this level of animosity manifestly evidencing their success.

#### THE ORIGINS OF ICHINEN

Let us now turn from the overtly political aspect of the *ichinengi* suppression to the doctrinal in order to consider the question of heterodoxy in Kōsai's position. There are two areas that need to be explored in this context: what meaning, if any, Hōnen ascribed to the word *ichinen*, and what was and was not unorthodox or even "deviant" about Kōsai's standpoint on nenbutsu itself vis-à-vis Hōnen's doctrine.

First of all, it should be pointed out that there are many sutras in the Chinese canon in which the term *ichinen* (Ch. *yinien*) appears. Fumihiko Sueki has collected a number of such passages and compared them with extant Sanskrit texts for such works as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Sukhāvattīyūha*, *Daśabhūmika*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, and the *Vajracchedīka*. In Buddhahadra's translation of the *Huayen jing*, for example, *ichinen* may represent *ekacitta* or *cittakṣana*, that is, a single moment of thought. It is important to note that the phrase *ichinen sōō*, or "[wisdom] corresponding in a single thought-moment (*nen*)," quoted in the *Genrushō* from one of Kōsai's works, appears in the *Aṣṭa Prajñāpāramitā*. Sueki has shown how *ichinen* as *ekacitta* or *cittakṣana* is commonly used to denote moments of realization, and is frequently linked with words expressing faith such as *prasāda* and *adhimukti*. Thus we have in translations of the *Sukhāvattīyūha* the phrase, "anyone who, in hearing the name of the Buddha, feels their heart leap with joy in so much as one thought-moment (*ichinen*), obtains the great benefit," that echoes the original meaning of *prasāda*, which is to have one's mind purified, and which appears in the Ashikaga edition as the nifty phrase that emphasizes its brevity: *antaśā ekacittaprasāda api*.<sup>12</sup> One of the criticisms lodged against Kōsai and his comrade Gyōkū was their valuing

of a non-verbal experience of nenbutsu over recitation, and in this regard an important point to emerge from Sueki's findings is that although there are numerous examples of *ichinen* coupled with faith, contrary to popular belief there are no examples of its usage implying recitation, even in the *Sukhāvātīvyūha*.

### HÖNEN ON ICHINEN

The phrase *ichinen* was also not uncommon in Japanese Tendai and even Pure Land writings before Hōnen.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps most significantly in this regard is the use of the same word *ichinen* to indicate the ultimate attainment of buddhahood, as in a short work on the subject of Original Enlightenment (*hongaku*) attributed to Saichō called "Becoming a buddha in one thought-moment," *Ichinen jōbutsugi*.<sup>14</sup> Hōnen frequently refers to the passage quoted above from the *Sukhāvātīvyūha Sutra* to point out the significance of the attainment of birth, the goal of his system, in the space of a single thought-moment or *ichinen*. And the phrase *ichinen no shin*, or "faith in one thought-moment" (or, 'one nenbutsu') occurs frequently in the writings of Shinran. What was Hōnen's position on the issue of affirming or realizing one's birth in the Pure Land in only a single thought-moment, as the *ichinengi* doctrine states? As with many other issues that became controversial after his death, Hōnen has left a rather ambiguous trail of statements on this. The ambiguity, however, can be traced to which aspect of the issue he was addressing himself: philosophical/doctrinal or social/ethical. When speaking to the issue of that which he affirmed as orthodox Pure Land doctrine, Hōnen said this in a letter:

Question: In the discussion of the "profound mind" [as found] in the *Wangsheng lizan*, Shandao states that: "Whether ten invocations or one invocation [of the Buddha's name], one will attain Birth without fail. Do not harbor any doubts that this is [true] even for only one nenbutsu (*ichinen*)."<sup>14</sup> But in Shandao's explanation of the profound mind [as written] in his *Guanjing shu*, he describes it as: "Thought-moment after thought-moment [nenbutsu after nenbutsu], one does not drop [the Buddha] from one's mind. This is called the practice of those rightly assured [of Birth]."<sup>14</sup> Which of these should we decide upon?

Answer: The ten invocations or one invocation refers to the way one believes in the nenbutsu. Therefore, in terms of faith you should take the position that a single nenbutsu (*ichinen*) brings about Birth; and in terms of practice, I encourage you to vigorously engage in [nenbutsu] practice throughout your life.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere, Hōnen also stated,

The highest grade of the lowest class of sentient beings are those people who have committed [one of the] ten evil acts. If, in their final moments of life they put forth a single nenbutsu (*ichinen*), their sins will be dissolved and they attain Birth.<sup>16</sup>

In these passages Hōnen not only recognizes the validity and importance of religious attainment that comes in a single thought-moment of nenbutsu, but defines faith itself as “the position that a single nenbutsu brings about Birth.” He also encourages his audience to continue their nenbutsu practice both before and after attaining faith. On the other hand, when a letter arrived from the Etchū region along the Japan Sea coast which questioned the *ichinengi* doctrines being taught in that area, Hōnen responded this way:

The doctrine that states that Birth can be accomplished in a single nenbutsu (*ichinen ōjō no gi*) is also very popular here in the capitol. This is generally preposterous, and hardly worth even discussing.... This is just a misinterpretation of Shandaō’s gloss on the “ten invocations, one invocation” phrasing in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* in which he said that one should have no doubts about the possibility of attaining Birth in only one *nen*.... These days there are a lot of foolish people without any understanding who cling to the idea of ten nenbutsu or only one nenbutsu and abandon the need for any further practice; they are completely shameless about this.<sup>17</sup>

I think we can infer from these two statements that Hōnen did indeed affirm that there is a need for spiritual realization or religious confirmation in the Pure Land path, and that this is indeed experienced as a sudden, momentary psychological breakthrough. But when this was interpreted by some of the *ichinengi* followers to mean that therefore further practice was irrelevant, specifically that once birth was confirmed, then even the usual norms of monastic life were also unnecessary, this crossed the line of acceptability. I would suggest that the conflict seen here is not between competing definitions of practice or between disparate conceptions of faith, but rather reflects the inevitable contradiction or conflict between Hōnen’s assertion of exclusive nenbutsu as a salvific construct and the social/political implications of a doctrine that eschews any concern for moral propriety.

In general, Hōnen’s standpoint is one characterized by what we might call a “critical selection” built upon a philosophical edifice of rejection as the justification for establishment. This hermeneutic is called *hairyū* in the rhetoric of the Jōdo school. As Hōnen concludes at the end of chapter two of his *Senchakushū*:

I believe that anyone who reads these words should abandon the miscellaneous and cultivate the exclusive [practice]. Why should anyone abandon the exclusive cultivation of the right practice, by which a hundred out of a hundred attain Birth, and stubbornly cling to the cultivation of miscellaneous practices, by which not even one out of a thousand attains Birth?<sup>18</sup>

One might say that the so-called eighty-four thousand doctrines of Buddhism are all efficacious in their own way, but they are *neyārtha* in comparison to the single *nītārtha* doctrine of nenbutsu. This attitude is particularly clear in chapters two and twelve of the *Senchakushū*. Viewed from the standpoint of nenbutsu as a kind of meta-authority, what is striking about Hōnen's rhetoric is that while he recognizes the value of all Buddhist teachings and practices, the need to abandon everything else suggests a monism rarely seen in Japan until that time. In throwing out the option of pursuing other paths, cultivating other practices, seeking aid from other buddhas or liberation in the doctrines of other sutras, Hōnen raises the path to the Pure Land of the Buddha Amida to the status of being "the chosen" form of faith. The other Buddhist doctrines and practices are never identified as wrong or misleading; in Hōnen's language they are merely miscellaneous or heterodox, and sometimes they are even called "ancillary" (*jo 助*). And yet the establishment of this orthodoxy requires the rejection of that orthodoxy, or in this case, all other orthodoxies. His is an approach that inevitably led to devoted supporters and resentful antagonists.

Consider, for example, the "history" of the phrase *shahei kakuhō* (捨閉閣抛), or "rejection, closing, removing, and abandoning." Originally coined by Nichiren in his *Risshō ankokuron*, the term *shahei kakuhō* was culled from four verbs of denial used by Hōnen in the *Senchakushū* and used in Nichiren's polemic as proof that the world was going to hell because of the popularity of Hōnen's hermeneutic of refutation of the established order. The four denials are:

- (1) Daocho's "rejection" (*sha*) of the efficacy of the traditional path for the Pure Land path, as well as Shandao's rejection of a multiplicity of practices for devotion solely to nenbutsu
- (2) "closing" (*hei*) the gateway of focused or meditative practices to focus on recitation
- (3) of the two possible ways to escape samsara, "set aside" (*kaku*) the traditional path and select the Pure Land path
- (4) "throwing aside" (*hō* or *nageutsu*) all other forms of practice to take refuge in the nenbutsu.

Despite the origin of the phrase in Nichiren's polemic, as these phrases express themes of Hōnen that are repeated over and over in the *Senchakushū*, their content can hardly be denied. As a result, the phrase *shahei kakuhō* grew to reach a level of acceptability that would have shocked Nichiren, even becoming canonical within Japanese Pure Land discourse itself, if not a moniker representative of the core of Hōnen's mature teaching.<sup>19</sup> Accepting Nichiren's attack as a pejorative usage, we nevertheless might ask, What does this phrase imply about moral and ethical issues, if not the question of the relevancy of the monastic precepts?

It goes without saying that Nichiren saw something pernicious in Hōnen's interpretation of the Buddhist canon. However, if one were pressed to find a moral message in the hermeneutic of denial summarized by the phrase *shahei kakuhō*—for there is no direct moral message here—one would have to conclude that morality and the values associated with monasticism are decidedly not relevant, if not implicitly rejected. This stems from the centrality for Hōnen of Daocho's distinction between the traditional path to self-perfection and the path to the Pure Land, the theme with which Hōnen opens his *Senchakushū*, and is reflected in this formula. Shandao's move to shift emphasis from difficult meditations to the simple recitation of the Buddha's name also strongly implies that moral perfection is beside the point. This is clearly presumed in Hōnen's famous *panjiao* statement that the *Sukhāvāṭṭvayūha* is the "sudden among all sudden teachings." Why? Because it alone allows individuals to attain their religious goal without removing all their *kleśa*. Cultivation of *śīla* is an absolute requirement in any notion of the Buddhist path prior to Daocho's formulation, and there is nothing in the careers of either of these monks to suggest they did not hold their station in esteem. But when it comes down to what is required to attain Birth, neither Daocho nor Hōnen expresses any serious concern for *śīla* in their notion of the Pure Land path. This point has been overlooked and yet is central to our understanding of Kōsai's doctrine and the entire thrust of the values embodied in the doctrine of *ichinengi*.

Indeed the radical nature of the Pure Land path lies precisely here: the cultivation of all traditional religious values associated with Buddhism such as merit, virtue, morality, meditation, wisdom, and so on are not required and for many, even antithetical and therefore counterproductive to the goals of Pure Land Buddhism. The latter is generally the position taken by Shinshū thinkers, and there are hints of the same in Kōsai. I would also argue that the Shinshū doctrine of *akunin shōki*, that the Buddha's message is actually directed at those with the worst moral state, is not philosophically possible without the presumption of freedom from moral restraints implied by *ichinengi*. In other words, Hōnen's message of liberation mediated by the activities of an actively involved Amida Buddha who reaches out to everyone, especially those with the greatest moral need, is immediately suggestive of the observation that a religious life of good works is simply

insufficient, and even the attempt to reach the Pure Land in that manner is tantamount to a *jiriki* attitude.

## KŌSAI AND THE HŌNEN ORTHODOXY I: METHODOLOGY

If we look at the fundamental religious presumptions that lie within Kōsai's standpoint, it cannot be denied that by and large the *ichinengi* position is doctrinally of a piece with Hōnen's general approach. Kōsai accepts Amida as occupying a unique position among all buddhas, and the enactment of his vows as a reality that has provided access to his buddha-realm in a way not seen elsewhere within the pantheon of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Kōsai also accepts the primacy of nenbutsu as *nītārtha*,<sup>20</sup> as the chosen practice for the chosen path. In other words, the *ichinengi* position also builds a system of religious meaning upon certain publicly accepted ritual traditions associated with reaching Amida's Pure Land that, following Hōnen, reject other choices of praxis and belief.

Below is an example of how similar is the methodology employed by Kōsai. But notice how his adoption of Hōnen's "hermeneutic of selection" (which from another point of view would be more appropriately termed a "hermeneutic of rejection"), in which orthodoxy is expressed by means of rejecting A to establish B, is faithful in spirit but then continues to roll further down the road than Hōnen ever dared to go. Here is Kōsai in his *Gengibunshō* sub-commentary on Shandao's commentary on the *Guanjīng*:

The section after "Moreover, the [*Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*] also says," displays the heart of the essay. First, one is seen to abandon the path to self-perfection and enabled to practice the path to the Pure Land. Next, the assorted practices are abandoned and the nenbutsu is encouraged to be practiced. The abandonment of the path to self-perfection for the path to the Pure Land is based on the ideas in the *Huayan jīng*. . . . Abandoning the karmically good practices of meditation and being encouraged [to cultivate] the karmically good practices that do not require concentration; abandoning the miscellaneous practices and being encouraged to practice recitation of [the name of] the Buddha; abandoning the many recitations and encouraging the one recitation; abandoning the many buddhas and being encouraged to direct one's practice to Amida. These are based on the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Guanjīng*, and others, with the last among the four being based only on the *Guanjīng*. Abandoning the oral recitation and being encouraged to practice nenbutsu in one's mind is based on the Larger [*Sukhāvāṭṭvayūha*] sutra. Taking this as the truth and taking other paths and other practices as leading to Birth at another time is clearly based on the *Smaller Sukhāvāṭṭvayūha Sutra*.<sup>21</sup>

There is nothing in this passage that is not standard Jōdoshū doctrine, except the final assertion about abandoning oral recitation. I will return to this point below.

## KŌSAI AND THE HŌNEN ORTHODOXY II: SAMĀDHI AND THE ORTHOPRAXY OF RECITATION

As stated above, the word “nenbutsu,” both in its original Chinese form and its usage in Japan, did not always mean recitation of the sacred name of the Buddha. The term could also denote concentration on the icon or image of a buddha (not necessarily Amida), or simply something like “keeping the Buddha in mind.” Thus we see the term “becoming a buddha in one thought” (*ichinen jōbutsu*) in Tendai *hongaku* literature.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it is quite possible that the ritual invocation of the Name emerged as a device precisely for the purpose of maintaining the focus of one’s attention on a buddha or buddhahood and all that that the notion of buddha represented.

Where Kōsai diverges from the more common discourse of his contemporaries in the Pure Land movement is the way he uses *nenbutsu* to designate something more than mere praxis, even orthopraxis. In other words, it comes down to the question of precisely what the *nenbutsu* means, both as signifier and signified. Kōsai’s stance would not have been possible without Hōnen, whose doctrine of critical selection imbued the *nenbutsu* with an authority not previously seen. We have already seen instances when Hōnen himself put forth a doctrine in which the attainment of Birth is achieved in a single *nenbutsu*. Although he repeatedly stressed the superiority of recitation *nenbutsu*, did Hōnen’s elevation of *nenbutsu* necessarily restrict its meaning to the recitation form? I have already discussed elsewhere the interesting paradox of Hōnen’s own record of *samādhi* attainment, the *Sammai hottokki*.<sup>23</sup> This work describes Hōnen’s *samādhi* attainment in a dream and yet it was accepted as a religiously authoritative experience. The story is told that it occurred during an intense *nenbutsu* vigil called *betsuji nenbutsu* in which there is little doubt that the practice centered on recitation. But the nature of the attainment was completely unexpected—an important point emphasized by Jōdoshū scholars—and hence falls into the *ichinen* hermeneutic category.

There was a long tradition in East Asian Buddhism of striving for the trance state of *samādhi* in which either Amitābha Buddha or some aspect of his Pure Land appears to the practitioner. This extrasensory moment was believed to constitute confirmation of a non-backsliding stage on the Path, and this special single *nenbutsu* moment expressed the *ichinengi* position that can only be understood as a brief moment of *samādhi* attainment. The most important question for Hōnen on the subject of *samādhi* lies in his



assertion of the doctrine that affirms the religious value of *samādhi*, but only if it is obtained through recitation practice, called *nenbutsu samādhi*, rather than through other means such as the visualization exercises also found in the *Guanjing*. His boldest statement on the superiority of *nenbutsu samādhi* is found in chapter twelve of the *Senchakushū*. Notice that the critical categories here are not invocation versus silent mentation, but *samādhi* attained through visualization versus *samādhi* attained through *nenbutsu*. He does this by reading the term “*nenbutsu*” in the epilogue section of the *Guanjing* to imply recitation, even though the sutra itself is not so explicit and certainly could be read to merely mean “keep the Buddha in mind,” as is implied in the previous sentence.<sup>24</sup>

Question: Among all eleven [deep] contemplations in the *Guanjing*, [one can understand Śākyamuni] would put aside the shallow forms of visualization, but he would want to transmit the deep forms [to Ānanda], among those being the ninth contemplation in which one visualizes Amida Buddha himself, for this is precisely the *samādhi* of buddha-contemplation (*kanbutsu-zammai*). He should therefore put aside the other twelve contemplation practices but transmit the buddha-contemplation practice. Yet in the Xuanyifen chapter of [Shandao’s commentary] it says that the doctrinal focus of this sutra is buddha-contemplation *samādhi* and it is also *nenbutsu samādhi*. If these two form the focus of the sutra, why [do you claim that] he [Ānanda] abandoned the buddha-contemplation *samādhi* and only entrusted the *nenbutsu samādhi*?

Answer: One can see that the intent of the Buddha’s Original Vow is for sentient beings to solely devote themselves to invoking Amida Buddha’s Name; it is because all other fine practices both meditative and non-meditative are not of the Original Vow that they were not the subject of [Śākyamuni’s] entrustment. Moreover, while the practice of buddha-contemplation *samādhi* [in the ninth visualization practice] may be the most superlative among these other practices, it is still not of the Buddha’s Original Vow and hence it was not entrusted. *Nenbutsu samādhi* is the Original Vow, that is why it was entrusted.

This is an important point of doctrine for Hōnen, for much of his philosophical edifice stands upon it. Namely, that despite Shandao’s claim that both *nenbutsu* and *kanbutsu samādhi* are the doctrinal crux of the *Guanjing*, Hōnen sees the sutra ultimately expressing a message in which only the *nenbutsu* form remains in the end. When *nenbutsu* and *kanbutsu* are paired like this, the implication of *nenbutsu* is strongly that of recitation, as *kanbutsu* represents visualization.

When the problem is stated in these terms, then Kōsai will agree that recitation is of higher value and affirm Hōnen's paradigm. But then how do we explain his clear statements that non-recitation *nenbutsu* is of higher value, confirmed by Benchō's criticism of his fellow *ichinengi* leader, Gyōkū? What Kōsai, and probably Gyōkū, were trying to do is to focus on the psychological experience of the *nenbutsu samādhi*, not the means to achieve it. Notice that in asserting the superiority of silent *nenbutsu* over recitation, Kōsai does not base his judgment on a different reading of this passage of the *Guanjing*, Shandao's commentary on it, or even Hōnen's interpretation. Rather he states that "Abandoning the oral recitation and being encouraged to practice *nenbutsu* in one's mind is based on the *Larger [Sukhāvativyūha] Sutra*." Unfortunately Kōsai does not make clear precisely what section in this sutra he is using for this judgment. Certainly Kōsai, and the historian Gyōnen for that matter, felt that his positions did not violate the spirit of Hōnen's doctrine, and we can guess from these passages that he could claim this because he fully recognized Hōnen's claim of the superiority of *nenbutsu samādhi*.

When we look at Hōnen's usage and his reaction to others' usage of *ichinen*, it is important to keep in mind that just like the term *ichinen*, the concept of *nenbutsu* itself encompassed not only recitation but a wide range of ritual and meditative practices in his Tendai sect both prior to and after Hōnen; this is no less true for the ritual use of *nenbutsu* centered on Amitābha Buddha, for the object of *nenbutsu* can of course be Śākyamuni, Maitreya, Vairocana, and so on. And one of the core hermeneutic traditions within the Tiantai/Tendai school centers on the issue of *samādhi* practice linked to buddha-mentation. The impact of Hōnen's legacy, following the argument mentioned above, appears to have been such that among those considering themselves members if not representatives of the movement that carried his name, the orthopraxis based on *nenbutsu* was now restricted to that achieved by means of uttering the sound of the Buddha's name in reverence. And this new rule appears to have been broken by the *ichinengi* leaders to the ire of others in the movement. The paradox, of course, is that the attainment of *nenbutsu samādhi* happens in the form of a sudden shift in consciousness, even if it occurs in the midst of repetitive invocations of the Name.

#### ON THE MEANING OF NENBUTSU

There is a veiled criticism of the *ichinengi* doctrine in the following comment by Benchō (1162–1238) found in another of his works, the *Jōdoshū yōshū*, on the subject of Gyōkū. As the Chinzei line eventually reached a position of preeminence within the post-Hōnen organization, the views of Benchō

and Ryōchū gained an unassailable orthodox status in the Jōdo school, and this particular composition is today studied as a handbook defining their philosophical positions on some eighty topics. Benchō writes:

Hōhonbō (= Gyōkū) says that *nen* [of nenbutsu] means to think on, or to read. This position denies [*nen*] as vocal recitation.<sup>25</sup>

Apparently the denigration of recitation practice was one of the serious errors of Gyōkū. The above passage was written in 1237, when the political situation for Benchō was such that the organization was still recovering from a massive persecution ten years earlier that had been triggered by Ryūkan's successful attack on the reactionary Tendai cleric Jōshō (n.d.), who had written an anti-Hōnen polemic. A 1227 persecution led to another series of exiles, and despite the origin of the conflict residing between Ryūkan and Jōshō, it was not only Ryūkan who faced exile but Kōsai as well. Benchō's slight reflects the fact that the removal of both Gyōkū and Kōsai from the capital did not mean the end of the appeal that the rival *ichinengi* "movement" presented to the public. After all, Gyōkū had been exiled eighteen years earlier in 1207.

Even less is known about Gyōkū than Kōsai, but he appears to have been Kōsai's elder.<sup>26</sup> The two are frequently mentioned as pairs in connection with the *ichinengi* doctrines, but after the 1207 crackdown led to his exile to Sado Island, he no longer appears in any extant historical record and is presumed to have died there. All of Gyōkū's writings have been lost or destroyed, and we only have secondary explanations of his interpretations in sources from the much later Edo period (1605–1868). If we are to believe these descriptions, and the most explicit comes from an eighteenth century statement of Chinzei orthodoxy called *Chinzei myōmoku mondō funjinshō*,<sup>27</sup> Gyōkū asserted there were two aspects to the Pure Land, one of form (*sō* 相) and one of principle (*ri* 理). In Kōsai's language, these would be called two distinct Pure Lands available as the object of Birth, with one clearly superior to the other. Again, similar to Kōsai's position, there are correspondingly two forms of nenbutsu as well. Gyōkū calls these recitation nenbutsu (*shōnen* 称念), and essence or ideational nenbutsu (*rinēn* 理念). Those who practiced recitation nenbutsu only reached a shallow understanding and hence were born in the "Pure Land of form" (*sō no jōdo* 相の浄土); those who practiced the ideation nenbutsu were rewarded with Birth in the "Pure Land of essence" (*ri no jōdo* 理の浄土)."

Within the Jōdo school itself, the *ichinengi* stance reflects what we might call the strong side of *tathāgatagarbha*-based interpretation on the relationship between personal efforts and efforts of the sacred other, expressed by some with the rubrics of *jjiriki* and *tariki*. For example, if my faith assures me that I will be sitting before a buddha in a paradise after I die, regardless of my

inability to lead a sinless life here and now, and regardless of my ability to accomplish *samādhi* or any other difficult meditation, why should I be too concerned with the appropriateness of my practice, or even what happens in the secular dimension of my life? After all, the Pure Land sutras assure me that the Buddha has not only promised but fulfilled his promise to override whatever negative karmic residue I might have that would prevent such an exalted rebirth for me under the usual laws of causality. The similarity of the Chan/Zen position—that my mind is originally pure and this purity is unaffected by anything I do—is not a coincidence, of course, for the Pure Land discourse arises from the same Mahayana religious principles that deconstruct the traditional rules of causality. The famous stories in Ch’an of monks burning Buddhist images to keep warm or Nanquan slicing a cat in two express the same amoral position that truth transcends any notion of good and bad, and that even improper actions such as striking someone are justified if they serve the cause of awakening to truth. In Pure Land language, this is usually expressed in the notion that the power of the Buddha is sufficient to override all other karmic considerations for the *kleśa*-ridden individual. The famous Shinshū doctrine of *akunin shōki*, which states that the Buddha’s vows are specifically directed toward evil men and women, manifests this same viewpoint, and stands as an example of how close Shinran stood to the *ichinengi* position.<sup>28</sup>

To be fair, the Shinshū understanding of the *akunin shōki* doctrine is not that the Buddha condones evil behavior—quite the contrary—but that the universality of his compassion is so great that it seeks out those furthest from the truth, those with the least chance of attaining liberation on their own. But the implications of *akunin shōki* clearly suggest that moral and ethical purity are not requirements for salvation, a position that could easily lead to the inference that such concerns are not at issue in “the great matter” of religious emancipation. Shinran’s own abandonment of his monastic status confirms this view, and it should be noted that this decision was endorsed by Hōnen, confirming that monastic status was not required to reach the Pure Land. Shinran was quite explicit that he felt it impossible for him to suppress his sexuality. There is no evidence of Kōsai taking a similar position on the monastic precepts, but one of the criticisms of the *ichinengi* movement was unrestrained sexual behavior.

The above description of Gyōkū’s view of *nenbutsu* is remarkable in that it would have been unthinkable even a generation earlier. Here one is reminded of Bakhtin’s statement that

a word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant.... Each and every word expresses the ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other.’ I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the

community to which I belong.... A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by speaker and his interlocutors.<sup>29</sup>

That is, a word derives its meanings and parameters of propriety from the results of how its usage is accepted in interaction with other interested parties. What Benchō's document tells us is that the social context of the rhetoric of nenbutsu had, by 1237, changed to the point where the word nenbutsu defined as recitation had become established as the new orthodoxy, at least within the Pure Land school. In other words, Hōnen's message was no longer being argued; within at least the Chinzei lineage it had become the new standard of measure. And insofar as those professing *ichinenji* refuse to restrict their use of nenbutsu to recitation, they are deemed by Benchō as to be violating these new rules. As none of Gyōkū's writings are extant, we cannot confirm how precisely he used this sacred term, but if he did refer to the experience of nenbutsu in a way that did not imply recitation of the Name, he certainly has centuries of precedence behind him. Also ordained and trained in the Tendai tradition, Benchō was well-aware of that precedent; his statement is a testimony rather to the new struggle over whose word the nenbutsu now is, and who has the authority to determine what "the point of view of the community" will be. And if history is our judge, then the word ultimately belonged to Benchō.

But unlike Gyōkū, we do have certain fragments of Kōsai's writings, which raises the question of what precisely was Kōsai's standpoint on nenbutsu. There are only two extant primary sources of Kōsai's thought: the quotes and discussion by Gyōnen that appear in the *Jōdo hōmon genrushō*, and one section of Kōsai's sub-commentary on Shandao's *Guanjing shu* called the *Gengibunshō*. Writing in the early fourteenth century, Gyōnen's account is unique in that it quotes from three otherwise lost Kōsai texts accompanied by Gyōnen's own analysis of the key issues in Kōsai's doctrine. In the Gyōnen presentation, the only *nen* that is discussed is the all-important single *nen* of realization. Gyōnen explains that Kōsai understood this as a kind of mystic meeting of the mind of the individual and the mind of the Buddha. It is the detailed focus of this moment that is considered the heart of the doctrine, and since it is sudden and momentary, it is called *ichinen*. But there is no reference as to what this *nen* is signifying. In Gyōnen's description, *nen* is used as if it represented a single moment of perception, much like the abhidharmic sense of *citta*.

Let us now turn to how Benchō himself uses the same term *ichinen* in his own writings on *samādhi* experience. In a text called *Nenbutsu sanjin yōshū*, Benchō repeatedly affirms "the great event of Birth [attained] in a single nen[butsu] (*ichinen*)."<sup>30</sup> And in his *Jōdoshū yōshū* quoted above, he makes this statement about the importance of *ichinen* in his chapter on attaining *nenbutsu samādhi*:

Question: When [someone talks about] putting forth a single *nen* (*ichinen*), what kind of *nen* is this?

Answer: Putting forth the single *nen* refers to the *ichinen* of perceiving the Buddha [in *samādhi*]. Practice means the single practice of reciting the Name, in which the various thoughts are removed. Everything outside of this single *nen* [should be] considered “other thoughts” (*yonen*).<sup>31</sup>

In the Dingshanyi section of his commentary on the *Guanjing*, Shandao wrote: “Because one sees a buddha’s body, he therefore sees a buddha’s mind.”<sup>32</sup> The term “perceiving the Buddha” (*kenbutsu*) is the standard expression denoting *buddha-anusmṛti samādhi* so, like Hōnen, Benchō regards *ichinen* as denoting the mental experience of *samādhi*. Now look at Gyōnen’s description of what Kōsai meant by the term *ichinen*:

When [Kōsai] spoke of a “single *nen*” (*ichinen*) he meant one thought-moment of Buddha wisdom, pointing precisely to the buddha-mind. It is this mind that is being referred to in [his use of] *nenbutsu*. The mind of faith (*shinjin*)<sup>33</sup> of an ordinary being is in complete accord with the wisdom of the Buddha [in that moment]. It is this singular *nen* of Buddha wisdom that is the Original Vow of Amida Buddha.

When the believing thoughts (*shinnen*) of someone engaged in practice correspond to the mind of the Buddha, the mind [of that person] becomes congruent with an [associated] single thought-moment (*ichinen*) expressed in the force of the Vows issuing from the Buddha’s wisdom. Subject (the buddha-mind) and object (the sentient being) are not two. Faith and wisdom are one and the same. As these continue, thought after thought (*nennen*), one’s Birth is assured.

Just how one manages to achieve this mystic unity between the mind of the practitioner and the mind of the Buddha is never stated; indeed this may come through recitation *nenbutsu* practice. And notice that despite the frequent use of *nen* in this passage as both noun and verb, nowhere is it clarified that this refers to recitation practice. If anything, the psychological description seems to steer the reader away from that inference. Although in this description of *ichinen* Gyōnen does not mention *samādhi*, it is clear that Kōsai is not referring to a normal perceptual event. Benchō clarifies the fact that *nen* in other situations refers to practice—presumably recitation *nenbutsu*—but *ichinen* refers to the *samādhi* of attaining a vision of the Buddha.

Notice also the striking similarity between Hōnen's phrase "*nenbutsu samādhi* is the Original Vow" and Kōsai's "It is this singular *nen* of Buddha wisdom that is the Original Vow." In that we can assume that Kōsai's singular *nen* of Buddha wisdom denotes a *samādhi* experience, I would assert that, aware of Hōnen's pronouncement, Kōsai is providing a gloss. That is, in carrying the label *ichinenji*, in effect Kōsai is consciously representing his approach as being focused on that which was the defining moment for Hōnen and indeed the entire point of his religious doctrine. While Hōnen did not describe *nenbutsu samādhi* or *kenbutsu samādhi* in quite the way that Kōsai did, neither did Benchō, Shōkū, Ryōchū, Shinran, Ryūkan, Seikaku, Ippen, or any of the other influential Pure Land leaders at this time. But the difference in understanding of what constitutes the psychology of *nenbutsu samādhi* alone certainly is not sufficient to brand his line as unorthodox or heterodox, and hardly justifies banning the *ichinenji* interpretation from the Jōdo movement.

The core problem with using *nenbutsu samādhi* as the centerpiece of a soteriological scheme in Pure Land Buddhism is that it implies difficulty of praxis, working against the core message of universal accessibility to the Buddha's Pure Land as goal. This contradiction has led some to discount Hōnen's record of his *samādhi* attainment in the *Sammai hottokki* as apocryphal. This also explains why, despite the fact that Shinran frequently extols *nenbutsu samādhi* in his *Kyōgyōshinshō*, quoting scriptures to justify its position as "the true supreme and profound gate,"<sup>34</sup> the topic does not occupy a place of central concern in what evolved to become Shinshū orthodoxy in the post-Shinran era.<sup>35</sup> Kōsai is well aware of this problem, and offered this rationalization in Gyōnen's words:

If the practitioner is Born there, it is not due to the self-power (*jiriki*) of this ordinary person working on his own. An ordinary person is burdened with the weight of mental afflictions (*kleśa*) and restrained by his own sins. It is because the Tathāgata in his Land of Reward cuts off a [significant] portion these [hindrances].

This position is identical with the Daocho-Shandao-Hōnen position, reflecting what had become the standard Pure Land doctrine of why, through the Buddha's intervention, ordinary beings could attain a buddha-land in which the Buddha is in a *sambhogakāya*. Putting aside the question of how one achieves this *samādhi*, it is the mechanism whereby the Other Power doctrine called *tariki* becomes the "hidden" reason why Birth is possible at all. Once again, standing clearly within this orthodoxy, Kōsai also uses this rationale to explain the experience of *nenbutsu samādhi*. And he does it in a way that also clarifies the superiority of this form of *buddhānusmṛti samādhi* to the visualization form that Hōnen excluded from his *panjiao*. More on this from Kōsai's Gengibunshō:



[When Shandao states that] *nenbutsu samādhi* is the doctrinal message [of the *Guanjīng*], he means that the *nenbutsu* which invokes the Name of the true-body is the core doctrine.... The *Commentary* discusses this from ‘part five’ ... down to ‘what is broadly revealed is the *nenbutsu samādhi*.’ The gist of the three [Pure Land] sutras is indeed centered on recitation *nenbutsu*, [explained] broadly in terms of continuation over time, the difficulty of practice.... From beginning to end, the text and meaning of the three sutras is [ultimately] focused on the doctrine of the sacred name (*myōgō*). That is, the outward form of the true body [of the Buddha] is in the karmically good meditative practices, and the sacred name of the true body is the focus of the karmically good non-meditative practices. Both doctrines are of the true body, the abandonment of meditative practice and establishment of non-meditative practice, the rejection of an array of practices, and the extolling of *nenbutsu* is the core of this [*Guanjīng*] sutra, itself the backbone of all three sutras. It is not confined to the three [Pure Land] sutras, but many sutras also preach the same. It is not confined to what is praised by the one buddha Śākyamuni, but many buddhas have done the same. Although [the doctrine of contemplation-*samādhi* (*kanbutsu-zammai*) is widely proclaimed,] the single doctrinal focus of *nenbutsu samādhi* is not yet widely known among many teachers.... And in that [Shandao has] analyzed this one sutra in terms of these two doctrines [of *samādhi*], the Buddha’s hidden hermeneutic has been revealed. And what is that hidden hermeneutic? It is to put aside the contemplation-*samādhi* and close down [the practices of] the various paths of this temporary doctrine [of expediency] and establish the *nenbutsu samādhi* [as the way] to open the door to the orthodox path of the true [Pure Land] school (*shinshū*). Without rejection, we cannot establish [something new]. Without closing [something], we cannot open [something new]. It is for this reason that the various buddhas have confirmed [this reading] and what this one monk has pointed out is precisely this teaching of rejection and establishment.<sup>36</sup>

The first passage connects recitation of the Name to different Pure Lands inhabited by Amida in different bodies, a theory that appears to have been an invention of Kamakura Pure Land thought. Hōnen does not express this view, and it may be that Kōsai is the person who introduced this interpretation into the discourse. Pertinent to this discussion is the psychological preparedness the passage urges upon the practitioner. The Shandao-Hōnen paradigm compares the practitioners who can do the difficult visualization exercises described in the *Guanjīng* with those who can only do recitation *nenbutsu* with a mind incapable of such concentrated meditation, and

concludes that the Buddha actually favors those who can only do the non-meditative recitation practice. Kōsai is also extolling recitation practice, but he adds the requirement of a certain intentionality in the way one keeps the Buddha in mind during the invocation of his Name. Thus for Kōsai, recitation is not rejected as a mode of nenbutsu, but he is urging his followers not to simply walk into the practice without psychological preparation, reducing their praxis to a ritual without focus, for that will lead to Birth, but a second-class form of it.

The second explanation above taken from the *Gengibunshō* also compares the two categories of practice, but here he cleaves to the Hōnen doctrine more explicitly by valuing *nenbutsu samādhi* and endorsing Hōnen's hermeneutic approach of rejecting one doctrine in order to affirm another. It is yet another example of Kōsai standing within the Hōnen orthodoxy. Taking all these Kōsai passages together, including the one which explicitly values mental nenbutsu practice over oral recitation, this leads to the inference that while he accepted recitation nenbutsu as an orthopraxis, it remained only a means to an end. That is, nonverbal nenbutsu ultimately became the goal of his system but only in the sense that it meant the attainment of a *samādhi* that confirmed Birth in the Pure Land. And it is in speaking from the perspective of *samādhi* attainment that the valorization of ichinen brings forth Kōsai's statement that recitation, as the vehicle that brought him to that realization, is to be jettisoned.

Returning finally to the meaning of *nen* in nenbutsu, it appears that what we are left with is the inevitable conclusion that *nen* is a polyglossic expression that in toto encompasses various forms of what we might call "buddha-consciousness," including reciting his name, imagining his form, concentrating on his qualities, and ultimately obtaining a transcending momentary vision of the Buddha. In its religious significance, then, it would not be going too far to compare the *nen* of the *ichinen* with the epiphany associated with *munen* (Ch. *wunien*) or the mental state of "no-thought" in Ch'an or Zen, which the *Platform Sutra* extols as the core principle of Ch'an. But as the fountainhead of the Kamakura period discourse in Japan, all of these meanings associated with the term *nen* in the Pure Land tradition are included in nenbutsu.

There are passages in which Kōsai's own use of nenbutsu rather than simply *nen* or *ichinen* can be seen. These serve as further examples of how Kōsai's positions could be viewed as certainly close enough to those of Hōnen as to be considered orthodox, if somewhat unusual. Here are two passages that refer to nenbutsu in which the sacred Name is clearly designated and its recitation extolled as well. First from the *Jōdo hōmon genrushō*:

Contemplation of the true body of the Buddha (the ninth contemplation in the *Guanjīng*) is, properly speaking, [an experience of] a true

body; this is the Buddha in his Reward-body. When holding this name in mind, one is practicing the true and proper nenbutsu. If one recites a nenbutsu to a buddha in his Transformation-body, he/she receives the reward of womb birth as someone born in a Pure Land of a buddha incarnate in a Transformation-body. If one recites the nenbutsu to a buddha in his Reward-body of glory, however, one receives the reward of a Birth by transformation in a Pure Land of a buddha [manifest] in a Reward-body. The holding in one's mind of [provisional] images [as in the eighth contemplation] is merely complying with the Original Vow of that [provisional] buddha; it is not aligned with the Original Vow of the actual Tathāgata. If one recites [the Name of] a buddha in this Reward-body of glory, one will be properly aligned with the Original Vow [of the actual Tathāgata]. As the direct cause by which one transcends [one's spiritual status as] an ordinary [person], this wondrous practice [boosts one to] the first bodhisattva stage.<sup>37</sup>

This doctrine links recitation nenbutsu practice to specific visualization practices in the *Guanjing*, and is based in the interpretation that the eighth contemplation entails visualizing a buddha as he would look in a Transformation-body, that is, as flesh and blood, while the meditation described in the ninth contemplation directs the mind toward the Buddha in his Reward-body, a fantastic manifestation beyond samsara. What Kōsai has done here is take the hermeneutic tradition that assigned different shades of meaning in the visualization experiences obtained while cultivating the eighth and ninth contemplations in the *Guanjing* and used that line of thinking as the basis of his creative assertion that recitation practice itself—by then thoroughly established as the orthodoxy of the new Pure Land “school”—was not uniform in its significance, but to be distinguished based on this same distinction between the two forms of visualization practice. This shows us that for Kōsai the nenbutsu was not a free-floating concept, but there were a variety of discreet forms, each based on a specific practice or doctrine.

## CONCLUSION

Because of the paucity of extant materials, there is very little about the *ichinengi* movement that can be known with certainty. We know that people associated with this form of doctrinal interpretation produced distaste and even enmity among some social classes of their contemporaries, but without any written statements on the apparent social-moral-political tension created by some within this “movement,” we are left with only fragments of their doctrinal formulations on *ichinengi* thought. The crimes

allegedly committed by these monks and their followers center around two basic issues: distortion of Hōnen's doctrines and preaching a form of antinomianism. We are left with the tasks of not only reconstructing the *ichinengi* doctrinal system, but also of critically imagining how ideas that were labeled unorthodox could have given rise to behavior held to be so immoral and iconoclastic that suppression and even violence arose from its detractors.

I have tried to show how, with so much similarity in the interpretations of Hōnen and Kōsai, the banishment of Kōsai and Gyōkū strongly suggests factors other than ideological purity were at work. We know that the process of institutionalizing Hōnen's new religious paradigm after his death in 1212 led to a messy squabble over the next two or three generations when competing lineages struggled to seize the reigns of authority and thereby define what the new orthodoxy and orthopraxy would be. And out of that struggle the rhetorical categorization of *ichinengi* versus *tanengi* emerged by the 1250s in an array of contexts, becoming the standard if rather parochial analytic tool for centuries to come. Even scholarship in the first part of the twentieth century relies heavily upon these convenient categories. There are a great many difficulties, however, in the application of this frame to the extant religious literature from this period, just as there is in trying to apply the term *hongaku*, or original enlightenment, to this or that Buddhist thinker. Indeed there is much in the *ichinengi* perspective to suggest a *hongaku* orientation, but I will defer that discussion to a different venue.

But one thing appears to be certain. Aside from Gyōnen's neutral use of *ichinengi* in his discussions of Kōsai's thought, as a general rule the term elicited some form of criticism in this and later periods. When we see such, we must ask, Does this stem from the social/political dimension of the *ichinengi* "problem," or from its doctrinal challenge to the Jōdo orthodoxy being established at the same time? We have not looked at the Jōdoshin school in detail here, but the phrase of Hōnen discussed above, "faith in one nenbutsu" (*shin no ichinen*), functions as a kind of statement of orthodoxy in Shin doctrine,<sup>38</sup> and is particularly prevalent in the letters (*Ofumi*, *Gobunshō*) of Rennyo in the fifteenth century. As the stigma surrounding *ichinengi* stubbornly persists even today, Shinshū scholars have been at pains to affirm their doctrine of *ichinen* while denying their standpoint represents the discredited dogma of *ichinengi*.<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, it all seems to come down to what one means by nenbutsu. It does appear that Kōsai left behind Hōnen's episteme when he said that mental nenbutsu is superior to verbal nenbutsu. But I have tried to show that in a more fundamental way, in his creative justification of the doctrine of *nenbutsu samādhi*, Kōsai deserved to uphold the banner of Hōnen's fledgling Pure Land school as much as any of this other disciples. These two views of nenbutsu are not necessarily mutually exclusive if we remember that when Kōsai spoke of a single nenbutsu he was not saying that this is the only

form of nenbutsu, but rather that this was the *defining* form of nenbutsu. What Kōsai valued most was a special moment of practice that perhaps should not even be called practice, since it indicates a moment of attainment rather than the “cultivation of causes” for awakening.<sup>40</sup> It is a moment that is internal and therefore quiet, it is “sudden,” and it is characterized by the epiphany of feeling touched by the universal compassion of the Buddha’s wisdom, a moment that indicates the attainment of *samādhi*. Kōsai’s *ichinen* is therefore a nenbutsu of realization, just as Hōnen and Shinran also called the moment of attaining faith *ichinen*. It is a *samādhi* attainment that does not necessarily result from any visualization exercises in the *Guanjing*. As a nenbutsu without visualization we can term it *mukan*, and we can also call it *munen* when *nen* means recitation nenbutsu because there is none, but also when *nen* means the object of one’s willful focus because all individual thoughts are put aside for one thought-moment of the Buddha’s mind in this instant. Emphasizing that this is not praxis in the usual sense, one of Kōsai’s disciples called the doctrine *munen*.

I have tried to show how in rhetoric and methodology, Kōsai remains far closer to Hōnen’s standpoint than he has been given credit for by the judgment of history so far. Yet, in his focus on the experience of realization and accompanying abandonment of the religious primacy of recitation nenbutsu, as well as his disrespect for what were essentially ritualistic nenbutsu services, Kōsai emerges as an iconoclastic mystic with probably no small degree of personal charisma. If Weber’s principle about charismatic founders is correct, then with Hōnen’s death the process of institutionalization of the movement he founded allowed little room for new charismatic leaders among its ranks. And with Japanese society in political upheaval and the truly explicit sexual practices continuing underground in the Tachikawa branch of Shingon at this time, it is not hard to imagine how the authorities, both secular and sacred, could see Kōsai’s ideas as pernicious. But that does not mean we should.

## NOTES

1. See Kōsai in the *Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezu*, ch. 29, in *Jōdoshū zensho* 16.446. He is also listed in all the early lineage texts of the Jōdo-shū, such as the *Renmon shūsha*, unknown author, unpublished, 1548 manuscript, p. 18; and the fifteenth century *Hossui bunrūki*, ed. Bukkyōshi Gakkai (Kyoto: Bukkyōshi Gakkai, 1918), p. 10.
2. *Hossui bunrūki* has 1198, the *Chokuden* has 1208. The former states that he died at the age of eighty-five in 1247.
3. See the *Shiju hyaku innenshū* at *Dainihon bukkyō zensho*, 1913 ed. (vol. 148), p. 116.
4. One the cardinal orthodoxies of the Pure Land path is that it is easy to tread. To label a form of Pure Land practice difficult is to imply heterodoxy; to call it austere or ascetic implies heresy.
5. Translated from the *Jōdoshū myōmoku mondō* by Benchō, in *Jōdoshū zensho* 10.413b.
6. Fujiwara Nagakane, *Sanchōki*, in *Zōho shiryō taisei* (Kyoto: Rinsen, 1965), 31.88 and 96.
7. Also known as Hōhonbō [also Hōbō], Gyōkū is the fortieth name on a list of 190 students of Hōnen signed to the Nison'in recension of the *Shichūkaikō kishōmon*, a document written in 1204 to counter charges of immorality among Hōnen's movement. Gyōkū's name appears along with Kōsai (as Jōkakubō) in the *Sanchōki*. See *Zōho Shiryō Taisei Kankōkai, Zōho Sanchōki* (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1965), 88b.
8. As Hōnen is designated as the first patriarch of this Chinzei line, Benchō, the actual founder of the lineage, is designated as the second.
9. The two biographies asserting Kōsai's excommunication are the *Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezu* by Shunjō (1255–1335), at *Hōnen Shōnin den zensho* (Kyoto: Hōnen Shōnin den zensho kankōkai, rev. ed., 1977), p. 318, and the Daigoji held text called simply *Hōnen Shōnin denki*, at *Hōnen Shōnin denki zensho*, 430.
10. *Jōdoshū zensho* 10.375.
11. *Kōteiki-shō*, author unknown, at *Hōnen Shōnin denki zensho*, 973. See *Kōteiki shō* entry for second year of Kenei 建永 (1207), twenty-eighth day of the eighth month, in *Gunsho ruiju* (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruiju Kanseikai, rev. ed., 1960), vol. 3. Translation modified from *Hōnen: The Buddhist Saint* (Kyoto: Chionin, 1925), p. 606.
12. Sueki Fumihiko, *Bukkyō: Kotoba no shisō-shi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten,

1996), pp. 75–97. As Sueki points out, there are really two different senses in which the phrase *yinien* is used in sutra translations—*ekacitta* and *ekakṣana*—and the issue is further complicated by the fact that the phrase *yinien* does appear in non-Buddhist literature as well, though apparently in the psychological sense.

13. Sueki mentions that *ichinen* is found in the *Ōjōjūin* by Eikan (1033–1111); the Heian period *Ōjōden*; in the works of Chinkai (1092–1152); in poems contained in the *Ryōjūin hishō* compiled by Emperor Go-Shirakawa by 1198; and in the twelfth century *Sanjū-shika no kotogaki*, compiled by the Tendai monk Kōkaku (n.d.), discussed below in n. 16.

14. Included as part of the compilation called *Tendai shōbushū shaku*, in *Dainihon bukkyō zensho*, 1913 ed. (vol. 24), p. 57.

15. Translated from the *Saihō shinanshō*, in *Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, p. 636; see also p. 464.

16. *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu-shū*, Taisho No. 2608, 83.16a9.

17. *Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, pp. 537–538.

18. *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu-shū*, 4b21.

19. The *Shin jōdoshū jiten* by Etani Ryūkai (Tokyo: Kōbunkan, 1978), p. 311, and the *Jōdoshū daijiten* (Tokyo: Sankibō Shoten, 1976), edited by Jōdoshū daijiten hensan iinkai, 2.153, both cite Nichiren as the source of this formula, but acknowledge it as representative of Hōnen’s method. The latter work comments that Nichiren identified what Hōnen was doing, but didn’t understand its “true significance.” The phrase occurs frequently in Edo period sectarian scholarship of the Jōdoshū without pejorative implication. And Nakamura Hajime’s first gloss of this term in his *Bukkyōgo daijiten* expresses this clearly:

The assertion of Hōnen’s teaching: abandon the mind which practices in a *jiriki* fashion, close the gate of cultivating merit through meditation, put aside all contrivances, and give up [the goal of attaining] wisdom in all things (p. 607).

20. [Ed.: “*nītārtha*” refers to “texts”—in this case the “text” of the nenbutsu—that have explicit or definitive meaning, expressing ultimate truth. These are distinguished from texts that are “*neyārtha*,” whose meanings are implicit, expressing only conventional truth, or which are provisional in the sense of being expedients intended for a particular individual or group.]

21. *Gengibunshō*, at *Nihon daizōkyō* 90.392a1.

22. In the *Sanjū-shika no kotogaki* by Kōkaku, at *Tendai hongaku-ron* (in *Nihon shisō taikai* 9.179). This text also discusses how there is an “original” *ichinen* that is unchanging.



23. There are four different recensions of the *Sammai hottokki*, but the oldest are those found inside the *Saihō shinanshō* compiled by Shinran and in the biography of Hōnen called *Genkū shinikki* found at Daigoji. The text can be found now at *Hōnen Shōnin zensho*, p. 863.
24. See the *Guanjing* (*Foshuo guan wuliangshou jing*) at *Taisho* No. 365, 12.346b9–14.
25. *Jōdoshū yōshū* in *Jōdoshū zensho* 10.228a.
26. Gyōnen gives no details about Gyōkū's life or thought. The theory that he was Kōsai's senior is based on Matsuno Junkō's reading of the account of their movement in the *Sanchōki*; see Matsuno, *Shinran* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1959), p. 116.
27. *Chinzei myōmoku mondō funjinshō*, by Myōzui (d. 1787), *Jōdoshū zensho* 10.431.
28. A case has also been made to show that Hōnen himself took a position no different from *akunin shōki*. See Kajimura Noboru, *Akunin shōki setsu* (Tokyo: Daitō Shuppan, 1993).
29. M.M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), p. 86.
30. *Jōdoshū zensho* 10.395.
31. *Jōdoshū zensho* 10.220
32. *Guanjing shu* T 37.268a28.
33. Shinjin has come to be a technical term for the realization of faith in Jōdoshin writings, but it enjoyed wide usage prior to Shinran, by Tanluan, Daocho, Shandao, Genshin, Hōnen, and others.
34. *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 39.
35. The term *nenbutsu samādhi* occurs twenty times in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, yet the *Shinshū jiten*, p. 616, compiled by Nishimura Shichibei (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1935), for example, concludes its explanation of *nenbutsu samādhi* by explaining that the attainment of the *samādhi* in which one perceives the Buddha's face or his virtues is a symbol of the principle of universal suchness. Then it concludes with: "In Shinshū, this meaning is not utilized."
36. *Gengibunshō*, in *Nihon daizōkyō* 90.378b16.
37. *Taishō* No. 2687, 84.197b10. On how the type of *nenbutsu* practiced affected the type of Birth one receives, see Sumita Chiken, *Jōdo genrushō* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1972), p. 282
38. This phrase is particularly popular in Shinshū materials. For Hōnen's usage, see the *Saihō shinanshō* at *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 4.208.
39. This problem is not merely "academic" in Shinshū. In 1806 there was

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a major disturbance at the Nishi Honganji Temple over a splinter group's insistence on the *ichinen* of faith as the center of Shinran's doctrine, a position which confronted a church orthodoxy at that time which stressed the primacy of good works as the key to Birth. In the end, the government had to intercede to resolve the dispute, eventually won by the *ichinen* group.

40. For example, see *Gengibunshō*, in *Nihon daizōkyō* 90.371a4.