

AN ANALYSIS OF OLD BIOGRAPHIES OF SAINT HONEN

by

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One hundred years after the death of the Saint Honen (法然) (1133-1212), his biography in which his eighty years of life was written had increased in number more than ten. These were written by different people in different times. Some of them were written in Chinese, some in Japanese, some were explained by pictures and explanatory notes etc. The explanation on the hero, Honen were also very much different according to those writings. Now it is my trial to explain easily those different biographies of Saint Honen.

“GENKU-SHONIN-SHINIKKI” (源空聖人私日記): “SHINIKKI”;
One volume; writer is unknown.

“GENKU-SHONIN-SHINIKKI” is written in Chinese. It is not long. There is an old copy of His diary copied by Shinran (親鸞) in 1256 (康元2年). It is “SAIHO SHINANSHO” (西方指南抄) preserved at the SENSYUJI temple in Takada, Mie prefecture (三重縣高田專修寺). Professor Encho Tamura (田村圓澄) said that the biography was written before 1227, because about the persecution of KAROKU (嘉祿) is not written in it. Mr. Zenshin Santa (三田全信) pointed out seven doubtful points, some of which were the most important events in Honen's life, were not written and that it was not written chronologically and that it was written with unnecessary ornamentation. Even if it is to be corrected on some points it has the original significance and it has much influenced other biographies of Honen.

“*ICHIGO MONOGATARI*” and “*BETSUDENKI*” (一期物語と別傳記). “*DAIGOBON*” (醍醐本) One volume; the writer is unknown.

These books are written in Chinese. The contents are “*ZENSHOBO to no MONDO*” (禪勝房との問答), question and answer between Honen and his deciple, Zenshobo (禪勝房), “*SANJIN-RYOKEN*” (三心料簡) the psychological attitude to Amita Buddha, “*GORINJU-NIKKI*” (御臨終日記), 39 days diary before Honen’s death, “*SANMAI HOTTOKU KI*” (三昧發得記), Honen’s religious experience. These stories are a part of “The Biography of the Saint Honen”. This book was copied by GIEN (義演) (1558-1628). It is preserved at the DAIGO SANBO-IN temple (醍醐三寶院) in Kyoto. It is not known who wrote “*ICHIGO MONOGATARI*” but it was edited by Seikanbo Genchi (勢觀房源智), Honen’s deciple, after hearing other’s stories and seeing the old documents. Later this was included in “*JYODO-ZUIMON-KI*” (淨土隨聞記) edited by Bouseiro Ryoe (望西樓了慧) in 1274 (文永11年). “*JYODO-ZUIMON-KI*” is a first volume of “*SHUI-KURODANI-SHONIN-GOTOROKU*” (拾遺黒谷上人語燈錄), the collection of Honen’s words. “*JYODO-ZUIMON-KI*” is faithful to the events which had happened in Honen’s life. So this book gave many valuable materials of study to the scholars on the Jodo sect and they refer to this book often. The time when it was written is not known, but it seemed it was written during 1216 to 1227. This is because about the death of Koin (1145-1216), a deciple of Honen, is written and because persecution of Karoku is not mentioned in it.

The writer of “*BETSUDEN-KI*” is also unknown. It is shorter than one forth of the “*SHINIKKI*”. All the other biographies of Honen mention that the vital motif of his entering the priesthood depends on his father’s miserable death. But it is to be noted that in this book it is mentioned that his father’s death happened after he had entered the priesthood. Shokobo Denjo, his deciple, said that Honen had told him, “I did not have any partifular reason when I decided to be a priest, but since I was young

I had been struck by the religious zeeling.” This saying coincides with the above mentioned writing in the book.

“HONEN-SHONIN-DENBOE” (法然上人傳法繪): “SHIKAN-DEN” (四卷傳); Four volumes; written by Tanku (執空詞) painting by Kanku (觀空繪)

“DENBOE” is the first biography illustrated by drawings and notes. It is written in Japanese. It was finished in 1237 (嘉禎33年) with drawings by Kanku and written by Tanku. Though Tanku (執空) has the same sound Tanku (湛空), the Chinese character is different. Tanku must be the Tanku (湛空) (1176-1253) of the NISON-IN temple (二尊院) in Saga, Kyoto. The book contains many new events like the persecution of Karoku, Honen’s relationship with the SHAKA-DO (釋迦堂) in Saga etc., in the four volumes. There are such copies of this book. One is the “HONEN-SHONIN-DENBOE” (法然上人傳法繪) copied by Kenchi (顯智) in 1296 (永仁4年), second volumes, kept by the SENSYUJI temple in Takada, Mie prefecture (三重縣高田專修寺). Second is the “HONCHO-SOSHIDENKI-EKOTOBA” (本朝祖師傳記繪詞) copied in the Nanboku era, preserved by the ZENDOJI temple in Mii, Fukuoka prefecture (福岡縣三井善尊寺). Third is the “HONEN-SHONIN-DENBOE-RYUZU” (法然上人傳法繪流通). 2nd volume, copied most probably in the Kamakura era. After the Second World War this book was divided into parts and they are preserved by some temples here and there.

“HONEN-SHONIN-DEN” (法然上人傳): “ZOJYOJI-BON” (増上寺本); Two volumes; a writer is unknown.

This book is written in Japanese and is unfinished. It is presumed that the book was written during the Kamakura era. Mr. Ryugen Ogawa (小川龍彦) says that this book is the oldest biography of Honen among his biographies which exist today. The writer is unknown, but the “ZUGA-ICHIRAN” (圖畫一覽) tells that the words were written by the Emperor Gonjōin (後二條院) and the Kajii-no-miya Kusho

Hoshinno (梶井ノ宮空性法親王) and that the pictures were drawn by Yoshimitsu Tosa (土佐吉光). It explains about the death of Honen's father and the discussion held at Ohara (大原) in Kyoto between Honen and Kenshin and other Buddhist scholars. It was written at the same time when the "DENBOE" (傳法繪) was written and it was before the "KOTOKUDEN" (古德傳) and the "RINNABON" (琳阿本).

"HONEN-SHONIN-E" (法然上人繪): "GUGAN-BON" (弘願本); Four volumes; a writer is unknown.

This book is his biography written in Japanese. It is in the form of illustrations and notes. It is presumed that the book was written by a member of the Jyodo-Shin-Shu. It has almost the same contents as the "DENBOE". According to professor Tamura, in this book there are many similar descriptions as in the ones in the "NANAKAJI-SEIKAI" (七箇條制誡), "JUUKAJI-MONDO" (十一箇條問答), "KENKYU KUNEN KI" (建久九年記), etc., which are included in the "SAIHO SHINANSHO". The first three volumes are kept by Mr. Domoto (堂本) and the fourth volume is kept by the CHIONIN temple (知恩院). There is a signature in each book signed "Gugen". It seems it does not show the writer nor the editor but the owner or the copyist.

"SYUI KOTOKUDEN-EKOTOBA" (拾遺古德傳繪詞); "KOTOKUDEN"; nine volumes, written by Kakunyo Syusho (覺如宗昭).

It is written in Japanese and is illustrated by drawings and notes. According to the book of "ZONKAKU ICHIGO-KI" (存覺一期記), this book was written by Kakunyo at the request of a believers of the Jyodo-Shin-Shu, who was living in Kashima, Ibaragi Prefecture (茨城縣鹿島). At that time Kakunyo was 32 years old. The time was 1301 (正安3年). He wrote all the nine volumes within 17 days. "SYUI" means that the things about Shinran was added for the first time. Shinran is the founder of the Jyodo-Shin-shu. From this fact it is known

that the Jyodo-Shin-shu sect is getting to be stronger. The picture was drawn by Hogen Tosa (土佐法眼) and the nine volumes are preserved by the JOFUKUJI temple in Urizura, Ibaragi prefecture (茨城縣瓜連淨福寺). There is another "KOTOKUDEN". One volume exists which was painted by Mitsunari Tosa (土佐光業) and was written by Gyo-shun (行俊).

"HONEN-SHONIN-EKOTOBA"; "RINNABON"; Nine volumes; writer is unknown.

The book is written in Japanese, illustrated with pictures. A complete set is preserved by the MYOJOIN temple (妙定院) in Shiba, Tokyo. It was copied in the Tokugawa era. The 7th volume, like that of the MYOJOIN temple's, is preserved by a believer. It was copied during the Nanboku era. In each book of MYOJOIN, at the head of the chapter, such signature is there: "KOUFUKUJI-RINAMIDABUTSU". It seems it is not writer's sign, but the owner's or the copyist's. The time when it was written is not known, but from the book of the believer, the writing is surely of a period of the Nanboku era.

"HONEN-SHONIN-DENKI": "KUKAN DEN"; Nine volumes; writer is unknown.

It is written in Japanese. There are nine volumes but one volume is divided into two, so altogether there are eighteen separate books. The original books were preserved by the NYUSHININ temple (入信院) which belonged to the CHIOIN temple. Later they were removed to the NISHIGOKURAKUJI temple of Suma in Hyogo prefecture (兵庫縣須磨西極樂寺). But they were burnt down during the War. According to the preface, the book was written 100 years after the death of Honen. Also it is clear that the successors of the Jodo sect quarreled at that time. Professor Tamura points that the "KUKANDEN" was written by the group of SHOKOBO BENJO (聖光房辨長) one of the powerful groups of HONEN's successors.

“HONEN-SHONIN-GYOJO GAZU” (法然上人行狀畫圖): “SHI-JU-HACHIKANDEN”; Fourty eight volumes; written by Shunsho (舜昌).

This biography of Honen is written in Japanese. It took more than ten years to finish the book, starting from 1307 (德治2年). They mostly depend upon the “KUKANDEN” and also refer to other biographies of Honen to make a collection of all these. Moreover it is not only about Honen, but also about his deciples and the faithful. It is written that the writer is SYUNSHO in “JYUKKAISHO” (述懷抄). It seems that the retired emperor Gofushimi (後伏見上皇) ordered him to write the books. Anyhow these books show that the group of Shokobo Benjo (聖光房辨長) settled in CHIONIN in Kyoto. The original books are preserved by the CHIONIN temple and the copies are preserved by the OJOIN temple in Taima, Nara prefecture (奈良縣當麻往生院). In “GODEN-ENGI” (御傳緣起) by Nincho (忍澈), the names of both the painters and writers are written. The writers are Emperor Fushimi (伏見法皇), the Emperor Go-Fushimi (後伏見法皇), the Emperor Go-Nijo (後二條天皇) and some other aristocrats. The painters are from the Tosa school. Mr. Syujiro Shimada said that the drawings of this book were based on the “KUKANDEN”.

“KURODANI-GENKU-SHONIN-DEN”: “JYUROKUMONKI”; One volume; by Seikaku. (黒谷源空上人傳)

This book is written in Japanese. According to its preface, the book was written in 1227, (安貞元年) by Seikaku, a deciple of Honen. But professor Tokujo Oya (大屋徳城) says that the writer's name is not true. Some scholars agree with the professor and think that the book was written before “SHI-JU-HACHIKAN-DEN”. The writings are in old style and are not so refined, but are simple and lucid. Specially the description about the Mt. Hiei where Honen spent half of his earlier life is very expressive. There are sixteen chapters that tells us about Honen's life.

“CHION DEN” (知恩傳); Two volumes, writer is unknown. .

It is written in Chinese. At the end of the book it is mentioned that the book was written at Boseiro (望西樓). So Ryoe (了慧) must be the writer. It may not be proper to say that the book is a biography of Honen. But it is like a collection of notes from the books which were already completed. Some people say that this book is the original of “JYUKKAN DEN”. They were preserved by Gizan (義山) of NYUSHININ temple (入信院) and by professor Shogon Takase (高瀬承嚴) of TAISHO University (大正大學). But these books were burned down during the War.

“HONEN-SHONIN-DEN” (法然上人傳); “JYUKKAN DEN”; Ten volumes; writer is unknown.

It is written both in Japanese and Chinese. The writer is unknown. But it was written long time after the death of Honen. Because about the sects of Shoko (聖光), Shoku (證空), Ryukan (隆寬), Shinran (親鸞) are written in it. At the end of the first volume it is signed, ENGON CHITAN (厭欣智湛). He was the projector of the copy. The copying was completed in the beginning of 16th century. It was preserved at the HOZOJI temple in Yamanaka, Aichi prefecture (愛知山中法藏寺) but its present whereabouts are unknown.

I have written about twelve kinds of biographies of Honen. There are other ones like the “SHOGEN MYOGI SHO” (正源明義抄); writer is unknown; nine volumes, the “HONEN-SHONIN-HIDEN” (法然上人祕傳); by Ryukan (隆寬); three volumes, the “HONEN-SHONIN-HIDEN-ONRUKI”; writer is unknown; two volumes. But about these books, there are not many chronicles. There is another biography which does not exist today. It is the “KURODANI-SHONIN-DEN”; one volume. The writer was Keisaibo Shinzui (敬西房信瑞), who was the disciple of Shinku (信空). Shinku was the disciple of Honen. Shinzui became a disciple of Ryukan after Shinku was dead.

According to the "SHIJU-HACHIKAN-DEN" it is written that in 1262 (弘長2年) Shinzui went to Kanto. He presented the priest Toki-ori (時頼) his book, "KURODANI-SHONIN-DEN". He wrote the "MYOGI-SHINGYO-SHU" (明義進行集), three volumes. The first volume does not exist but other two are preserved at KONGOJI temple in Amano, Osaka (大阪府天野金剛寺). It is presumed that the first volume must have been about Honen's biography.

In 1254 (建長6年), Nariki Tachibana (橘成季) wrote the "KOKON CHOMON SHU" (古今著聞集). In its third volume, the biography of Honen is written briefly. It is like the "SHINIKKI".

In 1257 (正嘉元年), the "SHIZYU-HYAKUINNENSHU" (私聚百因緣集) was edited by Gukan Zyushin (愚勸住心). In its eight volume, the biography of Honen is written. Zyushin was an itinerant monk. It is to be noted that he wrote the biography of Honen in Kanto only a half century after Saint Honen's death.

The research theses on the old biographies on Saint Honen.

After the world War II the active research works on Honen's biographies are done by many people. Here I will introduce some of the works done after 1951 (昭和21年).

1. Encho Tamura:

Historical Observations on the Various Versions of the Life of Honen. The Bukkyo Shigaku (The Journal of History of Buddhism), Vol.II, No.1-3, Jan., May, Sept., 1951.

2. Encho Tamura:

Problems in the Biographies of St. Honen. The Bukkyo Bunka Kenkyu (Studies in Buddhism and Buddhist Civilization), Number 1-2, June 1951, Sept. 1952.

3. Kenmyo Nakazawa:

Observations of the Various Versions of the Life of Honen. Shinshu-Genryu-Shiron, Nov. 1951; Feb. 1952.

4. Jyokei Ikawa:

- On "Chion-Den". The Journal of Bukkyo University, No.27.
5. Shunyu Ohashi:
On the biography of St. Honen, selected by Shinzui. Geisin, Vol. IV, No.2, April, 1953.
 6. Hideo Suda:
The Biography of St. Honen (ZYUKKANDEN): Background and its contents. Jyodo-Gaku-Kiyo 3. 3. 1954.
 7. Shunyu Ohashi:
Problems of the Shiju-Hachikan-Den.
 8. Kyoshun Todo.
"On the publication of "Biography of St. Honen" by Gukan Jyushin. Journal of Higashiyama High School, I. December 1954.
 9. Zenshin Santa:
The Biography of St. Honen: "Daigo Bon", "Private Diary of St. Genku". The Journal of Bukkyo University, No.34. March 1958.
 10. Masatake Nakahashi:
On the Circumstances of the Making of the "Honen Shonin Gyojo-Ezu" (An Illustrated Life of St. Honen). The Otani Gakuho (The Journal of Buddhalogy and Cultural Science). Sept., 1958.
 11. Kyoshun Todo:
A Comparative Study of Various Kinds of "The Life of Honen". The Bukkyo Daigaku Kenkyu-Kiyo, 36. March 1959.
 12. Bunsho Agawa:
Some Observations on "Shiju-Hachikan-Den". Academic Journal of Jodo, No.27, May 1960.