

On Ōbaku's Joint Practice of Zen and Pure Land

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To the Edo-period Japanese Zen monks, one of the most striking aspects of Ōbaku practice was the practice of reciting the Buddha's name (*nenbutsu* 念仏) within their teaching and training practices. For an accurate assessment of the Ōbaku school's true stance on the practice of the *nenbutsu*, however, it is necessary to investigate the writings and teachings of the school's founding masters, the very figures who established and codified what came to be seen as standard practice: Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (J. Ingen Ryūki, 1592-1673), Muan Xingtao 木菴性瑫 (J. Mokuan Shōtō, 1611-1684), and Jifei Ruyi 即非如一 (J. Sokuhi Nyoitsu, 1616-1671). It was the Japanese reaction to this practice that led to the accusation that the Ōbaku monks were practicing an adulterated form of Zen that was contaminated by Pure Land elements. It remains, however, that much of the misunderstanding regarding *nenbutsu* practice can be assigned to the Japanese unfamiliarity with the doctrinal underpinnings of the Ming Buddhist models that the Ōbaku monks brought to Japan. (Mohr 1994: 348, 364) This paper will attempt to clarify the *nenbutsu* teachings of these three foundational Ōbaku masters.

Zen and Pure Land Practices in China

One thing that should be kept in mind when considering the Zen style of the Ōbaku monks is that they were steeped in the Buddhist culture of the Ming period, replete with conspicuous Pure Land aspects. (Hirakubo 1962: 197) What appeared to the Japanese Zen community of the mid-seventeenth century as the incongruous marriage of Pure Land devotional elements within more traditional forms of Zen practice had already undergone a long courtship in China that had resulted in what seemed to the Chinese monks as a natural and legitimate union. Recitation of Amitābha's (C. Amitābha, J. Amida) name has an established place in some of the Zen school's most fundamental practices and institutions. Already in the *Chanyuan qingui* 禪苑清規,¹ regarded as the earliest Zen monastic code still in existence,

This paper is a slightly expanded version of the article "The *Nianfo* in Ōbaku Zen: A Look at the Teachings of the Three Founding Masters" published in *Japanese Religions* Vol. 33 (1&2) pp. 19-34. While my symposium presentation focused on *jiriki* and *tariki* thought within Zen and Pure Land during the Meiji period, my research brought me back to the early modern

the chanting of the Buddha's name was already a standard practice at the funeral of a monk.² This work became the basis of later monastic codes, and thus stands in a solidly unassailable position from the perspective of standard monastic practice.

Yongming Yanshou 永明延寿 (J. Yōmei Enju, 904-975),³ a Zen monk of the Fayanzong 法眼宗 (J. Hōgenshū), made prominent use of the *nenbutsu* within Zen training. (Baroni 2000: 109) He also asserted that the Pure Land is to be sought in the mind only (*yuishin jōdo* 唯心淨土), a theme that had appeared well before his own lifetime. (Sharf 2002: 313) Yongming could perhaps be considered the first to self-consciously formulate the compatibility of the two practices, evidenced in the attribution of the “fourfold summary” [of Zen and Pure Land] to him, a concise formula that relates the harmony of the two practices.⁴ Another conspicuous figure who inherited and elaborated upon this practice is Zhiche 智徹 (J. Chitetsu,?-1310) whose own awakening was said to have been spurred by the conundrum “Who is it calling the name of [meditating upon] the Buddha” *nianfo shi shei* 念仏是誰, which

foundation of this thought; that is, the Edo period and the Ōbaku school where the discourse of the joint practice of Zen and Pure Land reached one of its high points in Japan.

¹ While this monastic code is the earliest one still in existence, it is not thought to be the first monastic code. The *Baizhang qinggui* 百丈清規 is posited as the first example of a monastic code, although it is not extant, and even doubted by some to have existed at all. For an annotated translation of the *Chanyuan qinggui* with extensive commentary, see Yifa (1996).

² (Yifa 1996: p.333,p. 338) Throughout the funerary ceremony, there are several occasions upon which ten recitations of the Buddha's name are performed. The number ten is also a significant Pure Land influence since in the *Guanwuliangshou jing* (J. *Kanmuryōjūkyō*) 觀無量壽經 Pure Land Sūtra, one of the three foundational scriptures of the Pure Land school, Amida's eighteenth vow also puts forth “ten recitations” or “ten contemplations” *shinian* 十念 as the prescription for birth in his Pure Land. There is also the question as to the interpretation of *nian* 念 which early on meant to visualize and only later came to be used in the context of an oral recitation. For more on the early history of mixed practice in China, see Kōchi, 1972 and Hattori, 1971.

³ *ZGDJ* I:111d, s.v. Enju.

⁴ (Shih 1987: p.118) Even if this attribution is spurious, it nonetheless demonstrates the position that Yongming is perceived to have held in this Zen/Pure Land dialectic. Shih quotes the “fourfold summary” as:

“With Ch'an but no Pure Land, nine out of ten people will go astray. When death comes suddenly, they must accept it in an instant.

With Pure Land but no Ch'an, ten thousand out of ten thousand people will achieve birth [in the Pure Land].

If one can see Amitābha face to face, why worry about not attaining awakening?

With both Ch'an and Pure Land, it is like a tiger who has grown horns. One will be a teacher for mankind in this life, and a Buddhist patriarch in the next.

With neither Ch'an nor Pure Land, it is like falling on an iron bed with bronze posters [i.e., one of the hells].

For endless *kalpas* one will find nothing to rely on.” (Shih 1987: p.118) Shih borrows this translation, with minor changes, from (Yü 1981: p.52).

thereby provided the start for the formal practice of *nenbutsu kōan* 念仏公案. (Zhang 1975: 386)

In China, the two practices of Zen meditation and the calling of the Buddha's name were natural parts of any monks' Buddhist practice, such to the extent that Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (J. Chūhō Myōhon, 1263-1323)⁵ would comment "Zen is the Zen of the Pure Land and the Pure Land is the Pure Land of Zen" *Chanze jingtu zhi chan, jingtu zhe Chan zhi jingtu* 禪者淨土之禪、淨土者禪之淨土. (Zhang 1975: 386) Mingben was a prominent Yuan-period monk who contributed in large measure to the Zen/Pure Land synthesis. (Satō 1981: 233) Regarding this combined practice, Konggu Jinglong 空谷景隆 (J. Kūkoku Keiryū, 1392-?) described the *nenbutsu* as "the most important shortcut method of training" *nianfo yimen jiejing xiuxing zhi yao* 念仏一門捷徑修行之要, and Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (J. Kanzan Tokusei, 1546-1623), considered one of the great masters of the Ming period, expounded on the *nenbutsu* saying, "The single practice of the *nenbutsu* is the true *wato* 話頭 ("head word"), the supremely easy [method] of gaining succor in [this world] of dust" *weidu nianfo shenshi de huatou, chenlao zhongjiyi de li* 唯独念仏審實的話頭、塵勞中極易得力. (Furuta 1960: 23) Chinese Buddhism has changed little in this regard, as Holmes Welch noted in his study of early twentieth-century Chinese Buddhism. He reports that monks in the monasteries he visited jointly practiced meditation and recitation of the Buddha's name. (Welch 1967: 399-400) Certain monks echoed Mingben's words above by asserting that Chan and Pure Land practice not only complement each other, but even more so cannot be practiced apart from one another. (Welch 1967: 400)

One of the most conspicuous figures in Ming Buddhism is Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (J. Unsei Shukō, 1535-1615). This Chan monk of the late Ming is foremost known for his joint practice of meditation and *nenbutsu*, but he also promoted the compatibility of the Three Teachings (of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism) and produced morality books (*shanshu* 善書) for his disciples as well as a more general audience for the purpose of inculcating moral values in the readership. (Yü 1981: 102) Yunqi was the object of considerable scorn from the Japanese monk Hakuin Ekaku 白隠慧鶴 (1685-1768), who in his *Oradegama* 遠羅天釜 described

⁵ Zhongfeng is in a pivotal position in the history of combined practice, standing between the late Song masters who engaged in mixed practice, and Yunchi, the Ming-period champion of incorporating Pure Land within Zen. (Satō 1981: pp.233-34) It is also Zhongfeng's dharma line that flourished and would come to include the Ōbaku monks. While Yunchi contributed in good measure to the popularity of the *nenbutsu* among Zen practitioners, the codification owes much to Zhongfeng (Nishio 1985: p.52).

Yunqi as having “abandoned the ‘steepness’ technique of the founders of Zen...advocated strongly the teachings relating to the calling of the Buddha’s name, and displayed an incredibly shallow understanding of Zen.” (Yampolsky 1971: 147-48)

Yunqi played a defining role in the formation and final codification that crystallized in the joint practice of Chan and Pure Land teachings during the late Ming period. Yunqi was not the only monk of the late Ming period to promote this style of practice, but he was perhaps the most emphatic when it came to asserting that the practice of the *nenbutsu* was the most suitable and efficacious method in the era of Degenerate Law (*mofa* 末法) for both attaining awakening in this life, for those so able, or for achieving birth in the Pure Land. (Yü 1981: 57) He interpreted the invocation of the Buddha’s name in Chan terms in the sense that when one concentrates on the recitation of the name in a single-minded manner, one is simultaneously cultivating the bodhisattva path as well as achieving the mindfulness necessary to shatter illusion and break through to awakening.⁶

At this point it may prove instructive to say a word about the nature of the *nenbutsu*. In broad terms, the *nenbutsu* can refer to two separate practices: 1) to visualize Amitābha Buddha, recalling his merit and form, and; 2) to chant aloud the name of Amitābha in order to attain birth in his Pure Land (also called *shōmyō nenbutsu* 称名念佛 in Japanese). (Onda 1974: 1) While the former meaning describes the *nenbutsu* practice of early Chinese Buddhism, from the time of the Chinese monk Tanluan 曇鸞 (J. Donran; 476-542), standard *nenbutsu* practice increasingly came to refer to the latter meaning. (Nakamura 1999: 1801, Mochizuki: V:4158a-4160b) As Baroni points out, the great Tang monk Zongmi 宗密 (J. Shūmitsu; 779-841), a recognized master in both Huayan and Chan, interpreted

⁶ Yü translates a passage from Yunqi’s four-volume work *Foshuo Amitābhajing shuchao* 仏説阿弥陀經鈔 (J. *Bussatsu Amida kyōsho* in which he expounds on his belief that through the practice of “Buddha-invocation with one mind” one is also training themselves in the six perfections of a bodhisattva: “Now if a person practices *I-hsin nien fo* [Buddha invocation with one mind], he will naturally stop clinging to external objects; this is the perfection of giving. If he practices it, he will naturally stop all evils; this is the perfection of discipline. If he practices it, his heart will naturally be soft and pliant; this is the perfection of patience. If he practices it, he will never retrogress; this is the perfection of vigor. If he practices it, no extraneous thoughts will arise; this is the perfection of meditation. If he practices it, correct thoughts will appear distinctly; this is then the perfection of wisdom.” (Yü 1981: p.58).

nenbutsu practice in such a way that included two additional categories to those listed above: 1) to concentrate on a physical representation of the Buddha, and; 2) to identify oneself with Amitābha. (Baroni 2000: 110) Together these four varieties of practice include nearly the whole of Pure Land praxis as it developed in China. While there is little doubt that Pure Land-related practices flourished in China from early in Buddhism's history in that country, there is much room for debate whether it can be said that a "Pure Land school" existed at all. This is touched upon below.

Recent scholarship has increasingly called into question whether it is appropriate to use the term "Pure Land" to refer to a self-conscious school in China.⁷ Robert Sharf investigates the problematic formation of the "Pure Land patriarchs," as well as the pervasiveness—of both lay and monastic—of what may be termed "Pure Land practices" throughout Buddhism in China, and through his deft analysis, concludes that the origin of the Pure Land patriarchy, and the formulation of Pure Land as a separate school was a Japanese contribution, specifically by Hōnen Shōnin 法然上人 (1133-1212). He demonstrates that early Tang-period Chan masters did not reject the *nenbutsu*, but rather emphasized a Mahāyāna approach in accord with such ideas as detachment, nonduality, and emptiness. (Sharf 2002: 308-309) What Chan masters did discourage was a "simple-minded" approach to Pure Land teachings (examples of which might include the belief in a physical rebirth upon a lotus blossom in the Pure Land), and insisted that the Pure Land was to be sought here and now in the purity of one's own mind. (Sharf 2002: 314) This theme of the Pure Land as synonymous with a "pure mind" will appear repeatedly when we turn to the teachings of Yinyuan, Muan, and Jifei. We start with Yinyuan below.

Zen and Pure Land in Yinyuan's Thought and Practice

Yinyuan stands as the undisputed founder of the Ōbaku school in Japan. Although he spent the majority of his life in China, having come to Japan when he was sixty-two, his tireless activity in both Nagasaki and then later in the capital area was directly responsible for the establishment of Manpukuji. Fortunately for those Ōbaku scholars investigating his religious thought and practice, his philosophy and

⁷ See Sharf: 2002. In this informative article Sharf looks at the written records of the Zen patriarchs in order to highlight their own use of the *nenbutsu* as a viable practice within training. Much of what these Tang Zen masters wrote will be echoed in the passages of the Ōbaku masters below. Yinyuan, Muan, and Jifei's practice of *nenbutsu* and Zen was substantiated by centuries of practice in China and only in Japan did any cognitive dissonance result.

teaching style is faithfully recorded throughout his voluminous writings, in the form of verse, letters to disciples, and his dharma talks.

In order to understand Yinyuan's approach to Zen and Pure Land, it may be instructive to look at his own master in China, Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通用 (J. Hiin Tsūyō; 1593-1662). Feiyin, as many monks during his time, extolled meditation on Amitābha and the Pure Land; however, it was strictly metaphorical:

Always residing in the Resplendent Pure Land, without giving rise to a single thought [one] attains a vision of the true nature of Amitābha; without moving a single step [one is] born into the Pure Land of the Mind. This mundane world is not [even] separated by a hair's breadth from the Western Land ten trillion worlds [away]. (Morimoto 1960: 76)

A sharp distinction should be drawn between Feiyin's understanding of the *nenbutsu* and that of Yunqi. As is evident in the above passage, Feiyin extols the Amitābha and the Pure Land solely as a manifestation of the mind, and not in the devotional or salvific sense that Yunqi did. For Feiyin, even a single repetition of the *nenbutsu* is unnecessary, since simply by seeing the true nature of Amitābha in every moment one is born in a Pure Land of the mind, which thereby transforms this world into the very Pure Land. Yinyuan also advanced the importance of reciting the *nenbutsu*, describing the state of the "One-mind Pure Land" 一心淨土 which is attained through this very practice. (Morimoto 1960: 76) There are also instances in Yinyuan's own writings where he explains the *nenbutsu* in a manner more than mildly reminiscent of a typical *kōan*-like exchange. In his collected works (*kōroku* 広録) when the cook (*tenzo* 典座)⁸ asked Yinyuan to elucidate the true meaning of the recitation of the Buddha's name, Yinyuan's response in the ensuing encounter stands very much in line with the type of exchanges found within the classic *kōan* collections. The exchange runs thus:

On ascending the hall during the winter solstice: The cook asked, "Reciting the name of the Buddha out loud is not the correct method of practicing the *nenbutsu*. Silently reciting the Buddha's name is not the correct method of the *nenbutsu*. What is the correct method of practicing the *nenbutsu*?" Yinyuan said, "A broken ladle." The monk made obeisance. Yinyuan said, "Come and return the ladle to me." The monk was speechless. Yinyuan struck him, and

⁸ In a Zen monastery, the *tenzo* is the monk in charge of preparing the food. See ZGDJ, II:895a.

thereupon said, “If you desire to know the meaning of Buddha nature, you must see through to the correct time and conditions. When the time arrives, then it will be clear all of itself.” (Hirakubo 1979 I:79)

In the response to the monk's question, Yinyuan does not directly address the issue with an unqualified response, but rather uses the indirect and non-discursive didactic method characteristic of the type of Chan exchanges typified in the vast kōan literature. The recitation of Amitābha's name is of secondary importance compared with trying to halt and redirect the thought patterns that result in the posing of such a question in the first place. In the above exchange, the *nenbutsu* that appears in the question itself is a *hōben* 方便—an expedient means—within the larger didactic context. Unfortunately, it is difficult to get a holistic picture as to what extent the *nenbutsu* was used in kōan practice as well as what was its specific didactic rationale in the Ōbaku school. This is owing to the dearth of specific information that relates to the Ōbaku kōan curriculum and how it differs from that of the contemporaneous Rinzai tradition in Japan. (Mohr 2000: 255) The written records of the foundational Ōbaku masters are our only tool for investigating what they had to say about the practice of the *nenbutsu* and its place in Chan training.

While no one would take issue with the fact that Yinyuan was comfortable with the practice of reciting the Buddha's name within the monastic setting, evidenced from the practices that crystallized in the Ōbaku monastic code, the *Ōbaku shingi* 黃檗清規, and also judging from the paucity of instances in Yinyuan's writings that elaborate on, or praise the salvific merit of the *nenbutsu*, it becomes apparent that he differed greatly from Yunqi in regard to its importance. For Yunqi, even if he asserted that on a certain level the *nenbutsu* was no different from Chan, this was not to say that the two should be practiced simultaneously, or even that Chan was the equal of Pure Land practice. (Yü 1981: 62) Yinyuan, on the other hand, does not promote the recitation of the Buddha's name to attain anything other than what are mainstream “Chan goals”—the calming of the mind and focusing of attention—practices that were professed by numerous masters during the Ming period.

Found within Yinyuan's dharma talks are examples when he instructs a follower by constantly asking the question “who is it (reciting the *nenbutsu*)” (*shi shei* 是誰; J. *kore tazo*). Although it is obvious that Yinyuan is referring to his interlocutor when he asks such, the irrational obviousness of the question is intended to spur an awakening. An example runs:

Who was it that during your early years first gave rise to the mind [striving for awakening]? Who was it that practiced and investigated [the meaning]? Who was it when you had not yet the power of discernment? What I wish is that when free and busy, moving or at rest, all the while walking, abiding, sitting and lying, without forsaking your original training, always investigate thoroughly [this question]. (Hirakubo 1979 V: 2174)

If Yinyuan's disciples may stand as a measure of his teaching style, then it will prove instructive to look at Dokushō Shōen 独照性円 (1617-1694),⁹ one of Yinyuan's few Japanese dharma heirs. In a teaching addressed to a female lay believer, Dokushō specifically takes up the topic of the *nenbutsu kōan* and expounds at length. He says:

This mountain monk will teach you the *nenbutsu kōan*. Endeavor in this practice. Taking up the holy name of six characters of Namu Amida Butsu, meditate upon it when walking, also when residing, also when sitting, and also when lying. [Practice] this while taking your meals, your tea, when in the depths of profound meditation, and when your mind is dispersed, meditate upon this [Amida's name]. Meditate when coming, meditate when going, [while] walking, you will not see walking, abiding, you will not see abiding, [while] sitting, you will not see sitting, [while] lying, you will not see lying, when eating your meal you will not know the [taste of] the food, when drinking your tea, you will not know [the taste] of the tea, Your whole being will be nothing more than this single [recollection of] Amida Buddha. [If you want] to meditate on it with additional flair, try calling out the name with your voice, once, twice, or three times, and finally, meditate as to who it is exactly that is [reciting the name of Amitābha]. When you arrive at the contradiction of whose name it is, you will at last come to see that this original self is the Buddha. (Hirakubo 1962: 193)

Dokushō simply exhorts his audience to constantly recall the Buddha to the extent that one loses all sense of discrimination. Although Dokushō does not ask who it is that is recalling the Buddha, he reveals in the last line that when one comes

⁹ Dokushō, in addition to Yinyuan, also studied under some of the most famous masters of the day such as Takuan Sōhō 沢庵宗彭 (1573-1645) and Isshi Bunshu 一絲文守 (1608-1646). OBJ pp.274b-75a.

to practice in this way, the practitioner will come to the realization that the meditator/intoner is none other than a Buddha, thereby expressing the concept of non-duality; namely, that from the awakened perspective, just as there is no distinction between ignorance and awakening, neither is there a distinction between self and Buddha. As we have seen, Yinyuan and his disciples made ready use of the *nenbutsu* in their teaching activities, but it was not the preferred method of instruction. As follows below, we get a clearer picture of the place of *nenbutsu* practice in Yinyuan's teachings.

In looking at the Pure Land elements of Yinyuan's practice, it is plainly revealed in his writings that the *nenbutsu* is only an expedient for those of lesser abilities who cannot measure up to the steep and demanding lifestyle of a Zen meditator. Yinyuan explains this thus:

It has been ten years since this old monk has come East to this land [of Japan]. During that time I have practiced [and taught] only the Way of Rinzai. Unfortunately, concerned by the low ability of the people of the times, [I see that] they are not able to bear the burden [on their own]. [Therefore] the only recourse is to have them practice the *nenbutsu*. Truly this is akin to prescribing the correct medicine in accordance with the illness. Who can find fault with this? (Hirakubo 1979 VII:3319-20)

This explicit admission is a clear indication that Yinyuan, as the most central and representative Ōbaku master, employs the *nenbutsu* solely in the capacity of an expedience, and that it is relegated to an inferior position compared with meditation. This emphasis on reaching out to those of lesser abilities by means of *nenbutsu* practice is consistent with the Ming emphasis on lay Buddhism, the Buddhist milieu in which Yinyuan and the other foundational masters came of age. (Baroni 2000: 112)

So far we have seen how Yinyuan's *nenbutsu* practice, which steeped in the Buddhist culture of Ming China, appeared quite different from Buddhism as it was practiced in contemporaneous Japan. The accretions that had come to characterize Buddhism during the Ming period had given it a new appearance, one that did not accord with Japanese sensibilities. This was the cause of the Japanese perception that Ōbaku practice was a corruption of a "pure" Zen. It should be noted, however, that the increasing vitriol that came to characterize evaluations of the Ōbaku school and its practice by members of the Rinzai and Sōtō schools were later additions by

those that had no direct dealings with the Ōbaku school or even Ōbaku monks. The original assessment of the Ōbaku school according to Japanese eyes was by Kyorei Ryōkaku 虚糧了廓 (1600-1691),¹⁰ a Myōshinji monk who had direct contact through his observance of Yinyuan and the Chinese assembly during the Winter Retreat of 1654-1655. In his overall sanguine appraisal, he concludes that although in a general sense Ōbaku practice may look like Pure Land on the outside, the inner is like Zen. (Tsuji 1970: 322-325) As the exposure and popularity of the Ōbaku monks increased, however, certain Japanese monks attempted to staunch the flow of the unchecked enthusiasm that followed Yinyuan and the Ōbaku monks in their early and startling success in Japan. The story does not end with Yinyuan, however, for as we shall see below, his disciples Muan and Jifei continued to carry the torch of Ōbaku practice, which illuminated a path for the spread of late Ming/early Qing Buddhist models throughout the Japanese religious landscape.

The Nenbutsu in Muan's Writings

Muan Xingtao 木菴性瑫 (J. Mokuan Shōtō; 1611-1684) was a prominent disciple of Yinyuan during their time in China, and after Yinyuan's arrival in Japan Muan would make the journey himself in order to be by his master's side. While Yinyuan was the one directly responsible for the establishment of Manpukuji in Uji, and hence the start of the Ōbaku school in Japan, it was his disciple Muan who brought this work to fruition in terms of both the human and physical resources of the school. When Muan inherited the abbacy of Manpukuji from Yinyuan in 1664, he took control of a fledgling monastery that was still in the earliest stages of institutional development. Under his leadership the Ōbaku school centered on Manpukuji was transformed into a Zen establishment of national importance that had networked into the military capital of Edo and the surrounding Kantō provinces. Reared in the Buddhism of the late Ming period, both Yinyuan and Muan were instrumental in bringing contemporaneous Chinese Buddhist models to 17th century Japan.

One of the striking attributes of late Ming Buddhism was the permeation of Buddhist practice into the population at large. (Yü 1981: 64-65) The Ōbaku monks were also active in serving the lay community, most prominently by administering precepts as well as addressing sermons to householders. Within this two-tired

¹⁰ Kyorei never changed allegiance to the Ōbaku school and remained a Rinzai monk in the Myōshinji line throughout his life. He merely made his way to Nagasaki in order to ascertain the way of practice of the newly arrived Yinyuan. OBJ: p.84a.

pedagogic framework of monastic and layperson, the *nenbutsu* was broadly applicable, capable of being adapted to the needs or abilities of either audience. While instructing someone in Japan who adheres to the practice of the *nenbutsu*, Muan says:

On Teaching a Practitioner of the *Nenbutsu*

In every thought-instant and movement of the mind, simply recite the Buddha's name daily without ever forgetting. When you face the end of your life you will be born in the Pure Land. (Hirakubo 1992 V:2119)

A word should be said here about the nature of *nenbutsu* practice in Japan. Since the time of Hōnen, the founder of the Japanese Pure Land school, the *nenbutsu* has been practiced as the means *par excellence* to gain birth in the Pure Land. It was believed that the greater the number of recitations brought with it a greater amount of merit. As we see in the Zen practice of the Ōbaku monks, however, the *nenbutsu* is merely a means to concentrate the mind in meditation, and not a salvific practice intended to achieve birth in Amitābha's Pure Land. Buddhism, however, as a teaching that openly employs the concept of expedience as one of its prominent didactic methods, can thereby subsume what would superficially appear to be opposing or contrary approaches to practice. The above passage is addressed to a practitioner of the *nenbutsu*, thus suggesting an adherent of the Pure Land school, and Muan would appear to personalize his teaching to the tastes of his audience. Muan not only encourages him to engage in the practice of reciting the Buddha's name, but to do so in a focused and intent manner, upon which he will be born in the Pure Land. Although the Pure Land may be used in a metaphorical sense within Zen practice and thought, rarely does one come across passages that directly refer to birth in the Pure Land. Even making allowances for expedient means, however, at first glance there is little in Muan's words that may seem to represent a Zen-like element in his teaching. Upon closer reflection, however, one sees that Muan's emphasis on the single-mindedness regarding the practice of reciting the Buddha's name subtly suggests a Zen approach. Considering that Muan addressed this teaching to one who was not a Zen practitioner, someone who would most likely have little to no understanding of Zen matters, Muan's exhortation to continually practice nothing but the *nenbutsu* would produce the focused and concentrated frame of mind that is not so different from the mental state that is sought after through the "Zen" practice of seated meditation. Looked at in this manner, Muan

instructs his pupil within his own framework without making direct recourse to Zen concepts and practices.

Recurrent themes in the Zen teachings of Muan that are explained through the medium of the *nenbutsu* are: a constant recitation that conduces for a Zen-like meditative trance; and the equivalence of the Pure Land with the mundane world. The following passages present these themes further adorned with Pure Land imagery:

On Teaching the Good *Nenbutsu* Practitioner

The practicing of Zen and the recitation of the Buddha's name [should] never depart from your mind. Suddenly awakening to your own mind, stop seeking it outside [of yourself]. All of the myriad worlds are originally the Pure Land. . . Important to keep in mind for the practitioner of the *nenbutsu* is to unceasingly [focus] all your thoughts [on recitation of the Buddha]. While reciting the Buddha's name, when you suddenly arrive at the point where you forget your recitations, lotus blossoms with flow forth and a [sweet] scent will suffuse your mouth. (Hirakubo 1992 III:1152)

The above passage explicitly states that when engaging in Zen training one should continually practice the *nenbutsu*, and that by doing so one will awake to his own mind, thereupon realizing to stop searching on the outside for that which exists inwardly. Whether it is Amida's Pure Land or awakening itself, there is nowhere to look for it except in one's very mind. The practitioner perseveres in the intoning of the *nenbutsu* until the act of reciting is forgotten and one arrives at a state of absorption in which subject and object have been transcended. This is the state aspired to by Zen meditators, and in this passage Muan simply employs the *nenbutsu* as the means to attain this condition. Another example runs as follows:

To Zen'na of the Gokurakuji who used the practice of the recitation of the Buddha's name as the means [to discover] his original nature. Questioning Muan [about this] he produced [a] *gatha* in explanation.

One should engage the mind in unceasing recitation of the *nenbutsu*. [When] reciting and arriving at the state of no-mind, do not seek it outside. Awakening to [the fact that] originally your nature is none other than

Amitābha, you will come to clearly transcend the past and the present.
(Hirakubo 1992 VI: 2699)

This passage echoes what has been included in every passage examined so far except one: the emphasis on the continual recitation of the Buddha's name. Whereas a Pure Land devotee may engage in protracted periods of continual recitation for the attainment of merits believed to accrue through the greater number of recitations, Muan's insistence on unceasing practice of intoning the Buddha's name is wholly intended to lead the practitioner to the state of mind sought after through meditation. Muan does not posit the goal of birth in the Pure Land, but rather the state of Zen awakening.

In looking at the above examples, it is apparent that the *nenbutsu* was a powerful and versatile pedagogic tool for Muan that allowed him to extend his teachings to a wider swath of the monastic and lay population than would have been possible for a contemporaneous Japanese Zen monk. He could effectively instruct a Pure Land monk just as easily as a lay practitioner of the *nenbutsu* by appealing to their religious preferences in his use of Pure Land terminology and concepts to explain traditional and fundamental Zen ideas and practices such as Buddha nature and meditative absorption. Jifei, the third of the foundational masters, also practiced and promoted the *nenbutsu* in a manner similar to Muan and Yinyuan. This will be investigated below.

The *Nenbutsu* in Jifei's Teachings

Jifei Ruyi 即非如一 (J. Sokuhi Nyoitsu; 1616-1671) was another prominent disciple of Yinyuan's from their time in China. He arrived in Japan in 1657 at Yinyuan's request that he help with serving the needs of the community in Nagasaki. Although Jifei never officially ascended to the abbacy of Manpukuji, he nonetheless remains a crucial figure in the early Ōbaku school, foremost for his unique teaching style. Although Jifei spent the majority of his fourteen years in Japan unsuccessfully attempting to return to China, and although his collected works are half as long as Muan and a third as long as Yinyuan's, since Jifei is foremost known for his dynamic teachings, we shall pay particular attention to his words on the *nenbutsu*.

When discussing the *nenbutsu* in the teachings of the Ōbaku monks it is important to keep in mind that it is almost always simply a means of training intended to lead or assist the practitioner to the "higher" or "desired" state of meditative absorption, the Zen practice *par excellence* that is to lead to an intuitive understanding that then

results in the attainment of the ultimate goal, awakening. In this regard, it fulfills the same function as a kōan, and indeed as we have seen, is sometimes used as one.

By reading the *goroku* or “collected sayings” of the Ōbaku monks and considering their words on the *nenbutsu* it becomes clear that although it is practiced within the context of a kōan, for the most part the *nenbutsu* appears predominantly as a concentrative device, used to induce or aid in the state of absorption. In addition, the Pure Land and Amitābha are presented metaphorically as a state of mental purity to which the meditator aspires in his practice. Jifei’s words below echo this theme:

Inquiring about the Buddha Amida, [one asks] “As for that which we here call Amitābha, where does he presently reside? If you do not know the answer, this mountain monk will turn to the second teaching and expound at length. If in one thought you attain [the state of] no birth, then in each thought-moment Amitābha manifests. If in one speck of dust you are unmoved, then each speck of dust [is none other than] the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. As it says in the sutra, “When the mind is purified, then the Buddha manifests in the world.” It also says, “If the mind is pure then the Buddha Land is also pure. One should understand that the countless worlds do not exist outside of the single mind (一心). Listen to and consider this verse. If within this [verse] you attain immeasurable life (無量寿), then you have understood all the kōan of the patriarchs. (Hirakubo 1993 I:157)

As a variation on the theme as to who it is that is reciting the name of Amitābha, Jifei’s interlocutor asks instead about Amitābha’s whereabouts. Jifei responds that like all things, Amitābha and his Pure Land are a state of mind—providing his correlative paradigm that posits the Buddha and the Pure Land manifesting only when the mind is pure, that everything, the “countless worlds” do not exist outside of the mind, and when this is understood, all the kōan in Zen (of the Patriarchs) are grasped. As we have seen before, while the Ōbaku monks do indeed take up Amitābha and the Pure Land in their teachings and writings, it is almost always used to describe a state of mind, or the *nenbutsu* is practiced as the means to achieve such a state.

In the following passage from Jifei’s *goroku* we can see how he presents the recitation of the Buddha’s name as being compatible with Zen practice, and also as being equally efficacious as a means of realizing religious truth. Jifei states it thus:

Question: A student has become fixated on the practice of the *nenbutsu*. I [humbly] desire that you offer a teaching on this.

The master answered saying, “At all times and at all places focus all your energy on taking up the one phrase “Amida butsu ” and reflect on who it is that is reciting the Buddha’s name. In your practice you will arrive at the place where reliance [on the other] will cease and you will break away from this body as if suddenly awakening from a dream. At that instant, it is crucial that you understand that training is none other than the recitation (念), and the recitation is none other than training (參). Birth is thus no birth, and no birth is thus birth. Zen and the Pure Land teachings are two ways of achieving the same result. This is the true *nenbutsu*. This is its highest meaning. Endeavor [in this practice]. (Hirakubo 1993 I:441)

Granted, there should be some context provided for this passage, since the question that is posed to Jifei concerns one who has become attached or fixated on the single practice of the *nenbutsu*, and since attachments are never desirable in the Buddhist worldview, the questioner requests a few words of advice from the master on this matter. In accordance with the student’s condition, Jifei does not advise that he change what he is doing or try to find a substitute or balance—rather, he encourages him to endeavor single-mindedly in his practice of the *nenbutsu*. Jifei reassures the student that by persisting in this way he will “suddenly awake from a dream” upon which he will realize that Zen training is none other than the recitation, and the recitation is none other than Zen training.” When Jifei explicitly states that Zen and the Pure Land practices are two ways of achieving the same result, he heralds this as the “true *nenbutsu*” and its “highest meaning.” Jifei’s emphatic and unequivocal assertion of the equivalence of Zen and the *nenbutsu* is a clear indication of the high degree of assimilation that characterized these two practices within the Ming Buddhism propounded by the founding Ōbaku masters. It was this vision that was at odds with what the contemporaneous Japanese Zen world would inveterately see as the disparate practices of Zen and the *nenbutsu*. As will be shown below, it is far from the truth to assert that the practice of the *nenbutsu* is incompatible with or a corruption of Zen as it was formulated and practiced in China, and in fact, the appearance of the *nenbutsu* within cherished and established institutions is with clear precedent. An example where the *nenbutsu* appears in a Zen

context can be seen in the monastic code, *Chixiu baizhang qinggui* 勅修百丈清規 (J. *Chokushū hyakujō shingi*).¹¹ This will be further discussed below.

The *Chixiu baizhang qinggui*

The Yuan-period monastic code *Chixiu baizhang qinggui* stands as one of the formative monastic codes in both China and Japan. In particular, it leveled a profound influence on Japanese codes within the *Gozan* system, which at one time stood at the apogee of the Japanese Zen world. Based on this alone, its stance on the *nenbutsu* warrants investigation since it can be assumed that the entire content of the text would have been intimately known and studied within the great *Gozan* monasteries. A particularly revealing section regarding the *nenbutsu* appears in a section entitled, “Recalling [the Buddha] When a Monk is Ill” *Bing seng niansong* 病僧念誦 (J. *Byōsō nenju*).¹² The passage in part runs as follows:

...If the monk is gravely ill, then they [the assembly] should make ten recitations of [the name of] Amitābha Buddha. At the time of reciting, they should first clearly praise [Amitābha] saying, “Amitābha Buddha of a pure golden color has no equals in his beautiful aspects. The tuft of white hair between his eyes [ūrna-bhrū] form into the five peaks of Mt. Sumeru. His deep blue eyes are clear and bright like the sun [over] great oceans. The manifestation Buddhas [that reside] in his effulgence are without number. The assembly of manifestation Bodhisattvas are also without limit. The forty-eight vows save all sentient beings, and the nine-tired Pure Land causes all to ascend to the other shore. This morning, since such and such a monk is ill, it is necessary to eradicate the defilements of many lifetimes, and to atone for countless eons of transgression. He should only bring forth the greatest sincerity, and respectfully trusting in the pure assembly [of monks], he should praise the name of the Buddha and thereby wash away the deeply rooted sin. Respectfully trusting in the intonations of the honorable assembly, there should be one hundred recitations of *namo Amitofo* [praise to Amitābha Buddha], and ten recitations of [the name of Amitābha’s attendents] the

¹¹ T48 no. 2025. For Mujaku’s learned commentary on this work, see Yanagida Seizan ed., *Chokushū Hyakujō shingi sakei* v. 8 (*jō-ge*) *Zengaku sōsho* 禪学叢書 (Kyoto: Chūbun shuppansha, 1979).

¹² Baroni also refers to this example. See Baroni 2000: p.111.

bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and the assembly of bodhisattvas of the pure great oceans.

In the Transfer of Merit ceremony, it follows,

Praying in prostration, such and such a monk is ill. If his many ties [to this world] are not yet at an end, he should quickly endeavor to achieve relief [from this world]. Since the ties of life are difficult to escape from, he should immediately [find] birth in the Pure Land. [Praise] the ten directions and the three worlds etc.

When reciting the name of the Buddha, the assembly should focus and purify their minds, and should not be distracted by random thoughts. (*Chixiu baizhang qinggui* T48: 1147b-19-29)

The part of the *Bing seng niansong* that precedes the above section describes the practice for when a monk is ill (C. *bingseng*, J. *byōsō* 病僧). This is in contradistinction with the section translated that specifies the prescription for when a monk is *gravely ill* (C. *bingzhong*, J. *yamai omoku shite* 病重). When the monk is simply “ill” after receiving his friends and offering candles and incense, the assembly is to chant the name of Rocana 盧遮那 Buddha ten times. When the monk is “gravely ill,” however, a slight yet crucial difference appears in the routine. In accordance with the increased severity of the illness is the need for an increased salvific power, and thus it is the name of Amitābha that is chanted, and not ten times, but one hundred. Considering Amitābha's role as the Buddha of the Western Pure Land, where he welcomes his departed devotees, the recitation of his name in this situation would fulfill the role of a death-bed ritual. This inclusion of Amida in this context is a clear indication of the belief in his heightened salvific power as well as the particular reverence that was accorded to him within the Chan school in Yuan China.

Hakuin Ekaku and the Nenbutsu

Hakuin Ekaku is known primarily as Edo Rinzai's great reformer. Tireless in his efforts to return Rinzai to doctrinal purity before laxity and Ōbaku's Ming models corrupted it, Hakuin's line eventually became the dominant one in Rinzai, to the extent that not only do all Rinzai masters trace their lineage to him, the present-day Ōbaku school also is in the Hakuin lineage. All Ōbaku abbots up to the thirty-third generation abbot, Ryōchū Nyoryū 良忠如隆 (1793-1868), could trace their lineage to one of the first-generation Chinese Ōbaku masters. With Ryōchū, however, this

stream dries up and another starts to flow in its place. Ryōchū's dharma was inherited from Takujū Kosen 卓洲胡僊 (1760-1833), a dharma grandson of Hakuin, and the founder of the Takujū lineage 卓洲下, one of the two lines of Rinzai Zen to which all Rinzai masters trace descent.¹³ Takujū received the transmission from Gasan Jitō 峨山慈棹 (1727-1797), a direct disciple of Hakuin. With Ryōchū, from a certain point of view, it can be said that Ōbaku Zen officially became Hakuin Zen. The perception remains, nonetheless, that Hakuin was staunchly opposed to the Ōbaku method of practice with its incorporation of *nenbutsu* within Zen, and Hakuin's scathing critique of Yunqi as the most conspicuous proponent of this Ming-era corruption has been mentioned above.

In what is perhaps Hakuin's masterwork, the *Orategama* 遠羅天釜, he presents his views on the practice of reciting the Buddha's name, some of which at first glance may seem contradictory. The reason for the apparent discrepancy is that without always clearly alluding to the fact, Hakuin is discussing *nenbutsu* practice in relation to the householder grouped together with the Pure Land devotee as well as the Zen monk. Looking at both Hakuin and Yinyuan's writings on this subject, one finds that their respective views are not as divergent as one may imagine.

In the *Oradegama*, while discoursing on Pure Land practice, Hakuin says: "If the mind is pure then the Pure Land is pure. What's the use of studying the *Records* of the Patriarchs? People of this kind are miserable, moronic heretics who have yet to attain anything, but say that they have attained it, have yet to gain awakening, but say that they are awakened."¹⁴ At another instance, when discussing the deleterious effects of *nenbutsu* practice, Hakuin says:

With this these teachings spread throughout China, overflowing even to Japan, and ultimately reached a state where nothing could be done about them. Even if Lin-chi, Te-shan, Fen-yang, Ts'u-ming, Huang-lung, Chen-ching, Hsi-keng, and Miao-hsi were to appear in the world of today, were to raise their arms, gnash their teeth, spit on their hands, and proceed to drive these teachings out, they would not be able to undo this madness.¹⁵

¹³ The two lines which encompass all modern Rinzai masters are: the Takujūka, based on the teachings of Takujū Kosen, and the Inzanka 隱山下, based on those of Inzan Ien 隱山惟琰 (1751-1814), himself a dharma grandson of Hakuin. Inzan received the transmission of the dharma from Gasan Jitō. See *Zen Dust*, pp.220-24.

¹⁴ Yampolsky, *The Zen Master Hakuin*, p. 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

It may appear difficult to reconcile the above with other instances of Hakuin's teaching, such as when he asserts the equivalence of the *nenbutsu* and koan practice. On the equality of these practices, Hakuin says:

It must be understood that the koan and the recitation of the Buddha's name are both contributing causes to the path that leads to the opening up of the wisdom of the Buddha. The opening up of the wisdom of the Buddha is the main purpose for the appearance of the various Buddhas in this world. In the past the Buddha established expedients; one was called 'rebirth in the Pure Land,' another 'seeing into one's own nature.' How can these be two different things! Zen people who have not penetrated to this understanding look at a Pure Land practitioner and think that he is a stupid and evil common person who knows nothing about the Great Matter of seeing into one's own nature.¹⁶

At another turn, discussing the same theme, he continues:

It should be known that those who think that the *Mu* koan and the recitation of the Buddha's name are two different things belong to the class of evil heretics. How sad it is that the Pure Land practitioners today are unaware of the basic aspiration of the many Buddhas. They believe only that the Buddha is in the Western Land and are unaware that the Western Land is the basis of their own minds.¹⁷

There is no shortage of passages like those presented above that recount Hakuin's approbation for the *nenbutsu* as a practice not inferior to his own preferred method of koan. The crucial distinction is that this only applies to the householder who is already a devotee of the *nenbutsu*, or the realized monk who sees through the expedient of both *nenbutsu* and koan and has attained enlightenment. Hakuin's leniency regarding the practice of the *nenbutsu* does not apply for the monk who is engaged in the life or death struggle entailed by the Zen approach to enlightenment. Yinyuan and the other founding Ōbaku masters, however, for the most part share Hakuin's pedagogic framework. We saw earlier how Yinyuan, Muan, and Jifei were willing to instruct Pure Land adherents in familiar terms, all the while attempting to instill basic Zen concepts within those teachings such as the focusing of the mind

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 127-28.

and the equivalence of a pure mind with the Pure Land. It should also be remembered that although Yinyuan may have been willing to instruct a Pure Land devotee in his readily understandable and preferred language and concepts, he nonetheless originally opted to introduce even to the lay follower only the steep way of Zen. We saw how Yinyuan admitted this much when he said that he originally taught only the way of Linji Zen, but because of the low ability of the people of the times, the only recourse was to teach the *nenbutsu*. In contrasting Yinyuan's words above with those of Hakuin, we see that there is very little divergence. Interesting to note is that Hakuin, perceived as the most adamant Rinzai opponent of the *nenbutsu* in Zen training, should share common views with the Chinese Ōbaku monks on this most conspicuous of themes. This serves to illustrate that the charges leveled against the Ōbaku monks as practicing an adulterated Pure Land hybrid was based more on fiction than fact, a fiction based on a shallow and inaccurate understanding of the true face of Ōbaku practice.

Ōbaku's Zen and Pure Land Discourse in the Modern Period

While Obaku was indeed criticized during its early years in Japan for incorporating the *nenbutsu* into its curriculum, it was only during the Meiji period that the association of Ōbaku as “*nenbutsu* Zen” became firmly established. During the Edo period, the Ōbaku school flourished precisely because of the lavish support of the Tokugawa house. This asset, however, became a liability during the Meiji period with the restoration of imperial rule and the ensuing rise of State Shinto—an ideology that had no place for the “foreign” import of Buddhism. In addition, the former shogunal support became an equally large burden, as the Tokugawa regime was perceived as inimical to the flourishing of the emperor, who for the most part languished under the Tokugawa shoguns. In this milieu the Ōbaku school faced a crisis on two fronts.

It was during this time, that is, in the early Meiji period, that the Buddhist schools were encouraged to clarify matters of doctrine as they groped for a modern identity. The government was inclined to only recognize religious organizations that had done such, and in this way much of what is seen as “traditional Buddhism” was in fact codified during the early years of the Meiji period. Although Zen is perceived as prizing an experience that “does not rely on the written word” and that “is transmitted outside of scriptures,” the dictates of surviving modernization necessitated a doctrinal platform. In the Ōbaku case, it just happened that this time corresponded to the tenure of the 38th Manpukuji abbot, Hayashi Dōei 林道永

(1836-1911). Hayashi has an interesting background, as he was born into a household in the True Pure Land (Jōdo Shinshū) tradition, and he enthusiastically studied and embraced Shinshū doctrine. He is also the author of the text *Ōbaku zaike anjin hōgo* 黄檗在家安心法語, which was a statement on Ōbaku doctrine, one written, it seems, to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Although this text is attributed to Duzhan Xingying 独湛性瑩 (J. Dokutan Shōei; 1628-1706)¹⁸, the 17th century Chinese Ōbaku monk most patently associated with Pure Land practice, it is generally accepted that Hayashi is the real author. Hayashi's Pure Land preferences are evident throughout the text. While it is difficult to gauge the influence of this particular text both within and outside of the Ōbaku school, that the abbot of the head monastery at the time authored it suggests that it was not lost on both scholars and officials of the time.

Conclusion

The initial reaction of certain segments of the Japanese Rinzai school to the arrival of the Ming monks was one of guarded suspicion that transformed into active opposition. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that the Ōbaku monks openly represented latent trends in Japanese Zen, such as the *nenbutsu* and the newfound emphasis on precepts that was causing concern for the Rinzai leadership centered on the Myōshinji. By the Edo period, for the most part Japanese Zen had divested itself of overt Pure Land practices, which were associated with Tendai, Jōdo, and Jōdo Shinshū. (Sharf 2002: 322) In actuality, as Sharf points out, the Ōbaku monks' style of practice, replete with its Pure Land elements, was in many ways still closer to the Zen of the Song dynasty than what was practiced in contemporaneous Rinzai or Sōtō monasteries. (Sharf 2002: 322) In addition, as we have seen, Hakuin's own teachings on the *nenbutsu* largely echo those of the Ōbaku monks we examined, and the Zen that Hakuin is credited with "reviving" such as meditation, precepts, and kōan practice, had always been part of the Ōbaku curriculum. Finally, modern figures, influenced by Jōdo shinshu such as Hayashi Dōei further strengthened the association of Ōbaku and *nenbutsu* practice, although in the final analysis, Ōbaku practice with its "Pure Land aspects," was, and continues to be, nothing more than orthodox Chinese Chan in Japan.

¹⁸ Duzhan took recitation of the Buddha's name to an extreme, from a Zen perspective. It seems that this characteristic had been part of his practice from his time in China, but it came more pronounced in Japan. He freely mixed with monks from the Jōdo school and composed numerous poems on the Pure Land. He is referred to as "nenbutsu Dokutan." For more on Duzhan, see OBJ pp.278-79.

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