The Formation of Funeral Ceremonies in the Shinshū Sect
—The Case of Rennyo—

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In this paper, the author takes up the funeral ceremonies and formalities for Rennyo, who was the restorer of the Honganji Temple and the organizer of the Honganji Order. Nevertheless, the author’s aim is not merely to reconstruct the actual funeral service of Rennyo as an individual. Kamakura-based new Buddhist orders, which gave instruction in a new Buddhist way heading towards organization of the general public, inevitably found themselves having to deal with the deaths of a great many believers. For the Shinshū sect, in particular, which teaches that death is an intrinsic moment, the problem was perhaps much more pressing. What kind of answer did they try to prepare with regard to death as an actuality, that was not the illusion of an easy passage into paradise? The author, starting from an awareness of this problem, verifies the following facts through the procedure followed at Rennyo’s funeral.

1. In the course of the funeral ceremonies, in which the body was disposed of, the ordinary procedures were carried out; however, the Buddhist masses during the Chūin (the period of mourning lasting seven weeks) were relatively simple. However, other Buddhist masses such as anniversary services, though not dealt with in this paper, can be seen to become more elaborate together with the establishment of the order.

2. Many stories of happy omen are often generated at the death of the leader of a religious order, and these are often concerned with his remains. Bearing in mind the fact that believers vied with each other in demanding Rennyo’s ashes, this is of great interest. However, the author does not touch upon it in this paper.

3. It has become clear that a category of priest called “Odōshū” played an important role in the funerals. The character of the “Odōshū” should be examined and compared with the “Dōshū” and “Saikaishū” found in esoteric and esoteric Buddhism.

4. Though Rennyo left many instructions regarding his own funeral, the actual funeral in many respects followed common customs. The relationship between the funeral ceremonies and the religious order still needs to be pursued.