

IPPEN

The Japanese Buddhist
“Sage Who Abandoned All”

Keiko Soda

Professor Dr., Department of History and Culture,
Showa Women's University

Translated by Sarah J. Horton



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Introduction to the English edition

Around 1973, I was a graduate student at the University of Calcutta in India. My advisor, Professor Shukomal Chaudhuri, often said it was a great shame that although there was nothing that could compare to the research of Japanese scholars on Buddhism, most of it was not known to scholars in the rest of the world because it was written in the Japanese language. I never forgot these words.

The Japanese edition of this book was published in 2013. In the history of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, Ippen is not as widely known around the world as Hōnen and Shinran. There are various reasons for this, but we cannot overlook the fact that Ippen's life and thought exerted enormous influence on Japanese culture and society. Until the flow of the tradition from Hōnen to Shinran to Ippen is completely understood, Japanese Pure Land teachings will not be fully appreciated.

We could say that Japanese Pure Land teachings completely took hold in Japan through the merging that Ippen preached of Buddhism with Japanese ideas of nature. Ippen's Buddhist thought changed with the four seasons, incorporating Japan's always fertile natural world, and his ideas were integrated into Japanese culture and accepted by the populace. I decided that I wanted to make at least part of Ippen's Buddhist thought known to the world.

Professor Fuji Yoshinari of Ryūkoku University kindly helped me fulfill this dream. Through him I was introduced to Professor Sarah Horton, who has conducted research in Japan and received a Ph.D. from Yale University. She has completed a careful and accurate translation. If I had not had the good fortune to meet Professors Fuji and Horton, I would not possibly have been able to complete this project. I thank them from the bottom of my heart. In addition, this work was supported by Grant-in-Aid for Publication of Scientific Research Results of JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 266002.

Regarding the publication of the book, I asked many things of Mr. Yukawa Shōshirō and Mr. Fukuhara Akira of BookWay Global, and they kindly heeded my requests. I wish to offer them my heartfelt gratitude. Without the encouragement and cooperation of a number of people, including my family members, I would not have been successful in completing this project. If this book serves to help people get to know Japan even a little better, I will be delighted.

Keiko Soda
November 30, 2015

Introduction

The Jishū (Ji school) is a school of Buddhist thought, begun by Ippen, which was prominent from the late Kamakura period to the Nanbokuchō period. This marked the last major development in Japanese Pure Land teachings. The exclusive *nembutsu* promoted by Hōnen had already produced many Pure Land believers, but Ippen further developed the ideas of Hōnen's top disciple Shōkū to form a unique understanding of the name of Amida Buddha. Some believe that by combining the distribution of amulets that were slips of paper (*fuda*) with the *odori* (dancing) *nembutsu*, Ippen raised Japanese Pure Land teachings to a new level. With Ippen, Pure Land Buddhism penetrated the deepest layers of Japanese thought. Because he combined Buddhist ideas with the unique Japanese *kami*, Buddhism penetrated deeply to the common people who were at the lowest levels of society. Buddhism formed the foundation of the livelihood of the Japanese people and became a way of life for them, thus coming to be established in Japan.

Ippen reached the realm of awakening at Kumano's Shōjōden hall. After that, he never again resided in one location. As if he were Śākyamuni come again, he wandered the entire country preaching the Dharma. Wherever he went, he distributed *fuda* and performed the *odori nembutsu*. He prom-

ised the populace that they would go to the Pure Land, and he responded to the suffering of those living in a time of political and societal instability. In this era when religion still had an active function in the everyday life of the commoners, people gathered together and achieved peace of mind by accepting *fuda* and performing the *odori nembutsu*.

However, currently Ippen is not as well-known a Pure Land figure as Hōnen and Shinran. In the history of Japanese Pure Land teachings, he is in the lineage of Hōnen and Shinran, so it would be appropriate for Ippen to be granted equal importance, but this has not happened.

One reason for this is that there are few extant historical documents concerning Ippen, so it is difficult for scholars to conduct research on him, and there have not been many opportunities for his name to become known. Moreover, as he said, he “abandoned all,” and he is known in the world as the “*hijiri* (wandering sage) who abandoned all.” He was not attached to the idea of leaving behind either a religious organization or his writings for later generations. On his deathbed, he disposed of all the writings he possessed by burning them with his own hands. Saying “I have exhausted the teachings of a lifetime; there is only Namu Amida Butsu,” and, “My teachings are only for this life,” he died. In this straightforward manner, he expressed his understanding that it was an impediment to awakening to have any desire for fame after death. Apparently he had no thought of forming a religious organization or of handing down his own *nembutsu* teachings to later generations. If founders of religious sects lack this intention, then these organizations cannot develop and continue, and it will be impossible to transmit their teachings to the populace. However, Ippen’s achievements in Japanese religious history cannot be overlooked.

Several years ago, I traveled to Kumano. At that time, I sensed that the trees on the mountains of Kumano were reverberating with energy. On the occasion of Ippen’s awakening, he attained faith in the *nembutsu* at the Shōjōden hall of Kumano’s Hongū shrine in the mountains of the Kii Peninsula. Kumano provides an extreme example of the heat and humidity that is characteristic of the natural world in Japan. In a sense, the Kumano area is the root of Japanese culture. High heat and humidity are gifts from nature that result in fertile agriculture, and they are also the origin of the divine blessing of water.

Being raised in the midst of this kind of nature is at the heart of the faith of the common people in Japan. They discovered the gods (kami) in the midst of this nature. Through the kami Kumano Gongen, who since ancient times had gained the faith of the populace, Ippen was made to understand the profound meaning of the original vow of other-power, and he hoped to unify Kumano Gongen with Amida Buddha. This means that what took place at the Shōjōden hall was a divine revelation that was necessary for Pure Land teachings to ultimately take root in Japan. In this way, Pure Land Buddhism was completely accepted in this country.

Ippen brilliantly combined the kami, who arose from the natural features of heat and humidity in East Asia, with Amida Buddha. Here for the first time the natural world that forms the foundation of Japanese culture was harmonized with the religious life of the populace, and Buddhism was made completely Japanese. Understanding that through Ippen's life and thought, Buddhism and the kami of Japan were united, is related to valuing, at last, the harmonization of human life with the natural world.

The problem we are embracing now is this: how can the naked desires of humans be harmonized with nature, and how can a sustainable global environment be maintained? This is an urgent topic for those of us who live in the world of the twenty-first century. Therefore, even now, learning about Ippen's life and thought is profoundly meaningful.

In the history of Japanese Buddhism, as time passed, the idea of an exclusive practice that had been advocated by Hōnen gradually evolved in new ways, due to the continuing emergence of important Buddhist figures. Among these, Ippen, who was active in the late Kamakura period, developed the ideas of Hōnen's leading disciple Shōkū into a unique understanding of the spoken name (*myōgō* 名号). By combining the distribution of *fuda* with dance, Ippen elevated Pure Land teachings to new heights. I will discuss Ippen's life and his religious ideas, relating it to both politics and Buddhist history, based on the *Ippen hijirie* and the *Ippen Shōnin ekotobaden*, which are foundational texts for the study of Ippen.



1 The statue of Ippen





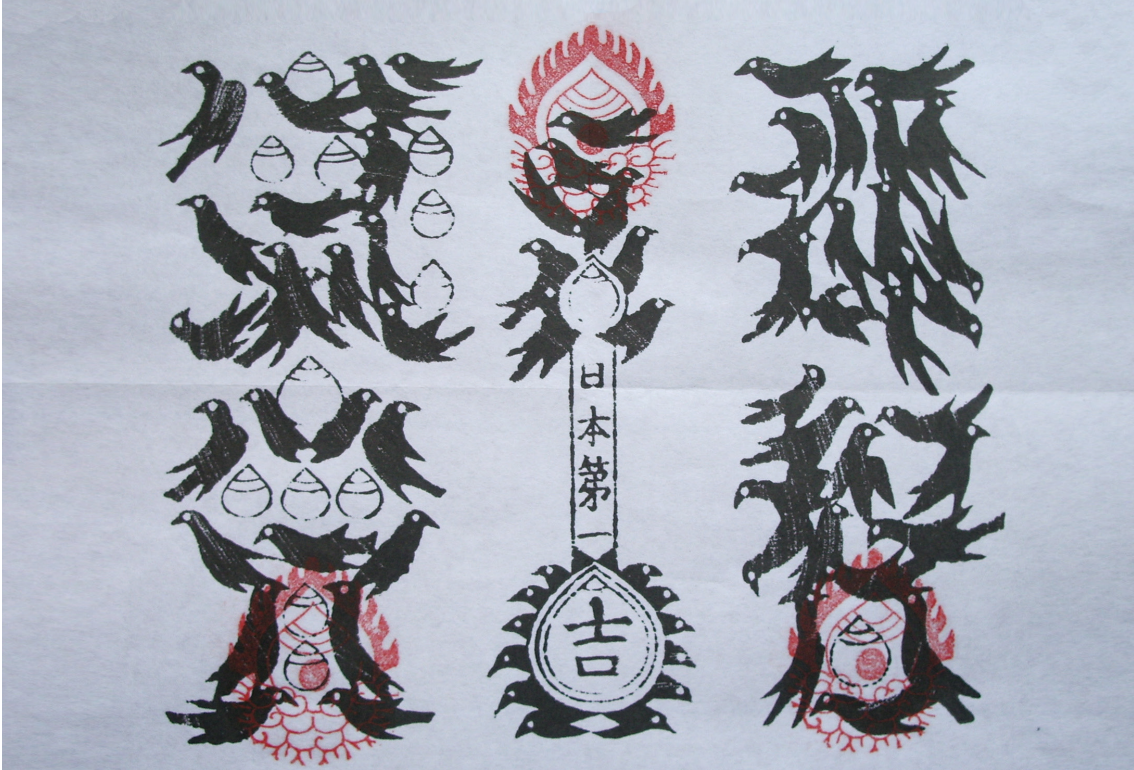
2 Hōgonji Temple (Ippen's birth place)



4 kakebotoke



3 hanging scroll of namuamidabutsu



5 gofuda



6 Kubono Hermitage



8 Fusan distribution (Ippen hijirie7-2)





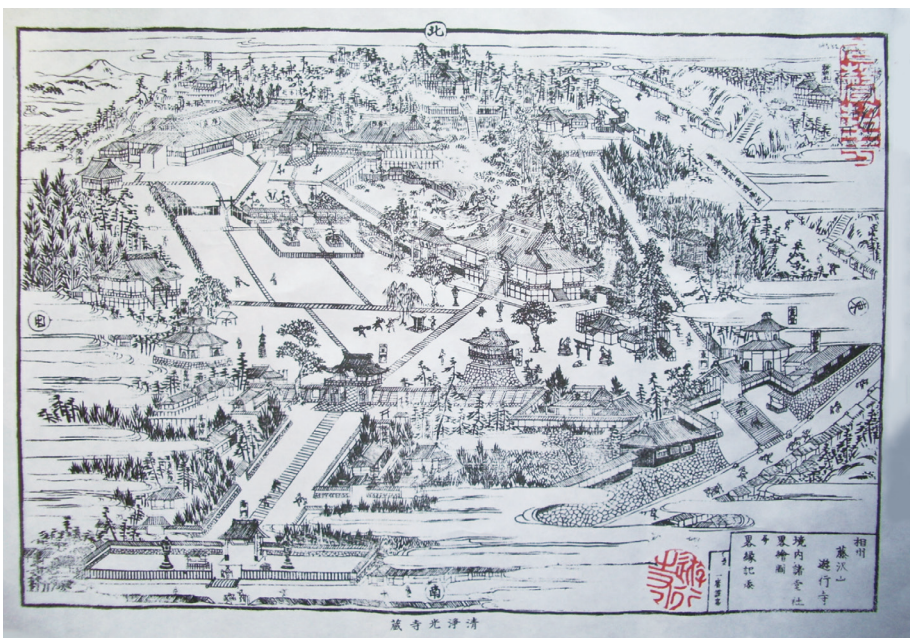
9 Kumano Hongū Shrine



10 Dancing Nembutsu (Ippen hijirie7-3)



11 Yūgyōji Temple



12 The Map of Yūgyōji Temple



13 Ippen's Grave



14 Dancing Nembutsu in Odagiri (Ippen hijirie4-5)







16 Deathbed of Ippen (Ippen hijirie12-3)

Chapter 1

Ippen's Life, Part 1



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Section 1

Ippen's Roots

1) The Kōno Family

The beginning of the *Ippen hijirie* records Ippen's origins, saying,

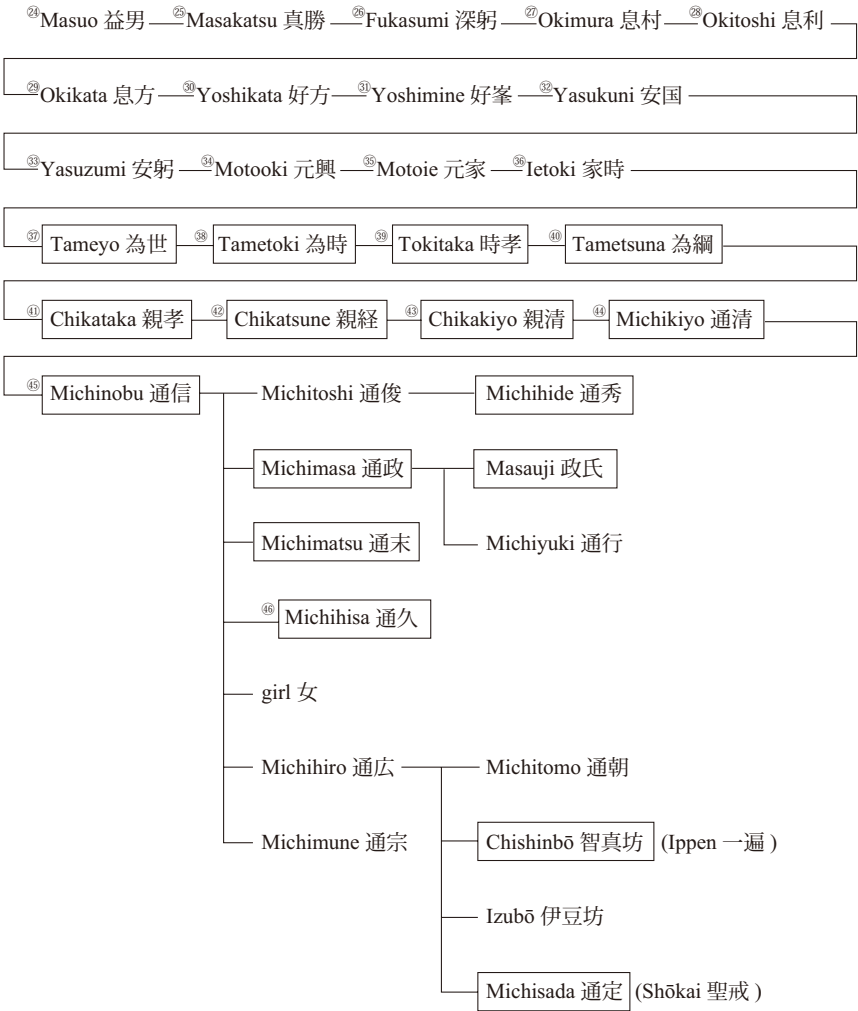
The *hijiri* Ippen was the grandchild of Kōno Shirō Michinobu of the Ochi clan. He was the child of the person with the secular name Shichirō Michihiro, who became a renunciant and took the name Nyobutsu. He was born in the first year of the En'ō era, *tsuchi no toi* (1239), in Iyo province.

The genealogy of the Kōno family (photo 1-1) is recorded in detail in the *Kōno keizu* 河野系図, the *Ochi keizu* 越智系図, the *Yoshōki* 予章記, and other works. Here, I will summarize his lineage by relying on the *Ochi keizu* contained in the *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, and I will provide additional explanations of important figures who merit further discussion.

According to the *Ochi keizu*, the first head of this clan was Prince Iyo. Prince Iyo was the third son of Emperor Kōrei, who was the seventh emperor of Japan. Prince Iyo was given the title Hiko Sashima no Mikoto. He suppressed uprisings in the southwest, built his imperial residence in the Kanzaki

Ochi keizu 越智系図

(The names in bold are those of figures the author will later discuss. Numbered names indicate the head of the family. The number itself is the number of generations descended from the founder of the clan, Prince Iyo 伊予王子.)…



region of the district of Iyo, and was called Prince Iyo. The eldest of the three sons of Emperor Kōrei, named Ōya, moved to Mishima in Izu. The next son, named Miyake, moved to Kojima in Bizen. The third son, named Ochi 小千, moved to Wakejima in Izu. The *Ochi keizu* explains, in the section on Minami of the sixth generation, the circumstances under which, at the time of the naval battle with Silla, a lacquered wooden tray with the Chinese character for the number three (三) was reflected on the surface of the water, and how this became the crest of the Kōno family.

The figure named Masumi, the sixteenth head of the clan, was a renowned practitioner of the martial arts, and at the time of Empress Suiko, when the Chinese invaded Akashi harbor in Harima province, he followed imperial command and drove them away. Because this was due to the divine protection of the kami Mishima Daimyōjin, this kami was invited to reside to the west of Ōkuradani in Harima province. The *Ochi keizu* records that because of his distinguished service in battle, Masumi was made governor of Iyo province. After that, Morioki, the twenty-first head of the clan, invaded Silla, following the command of Emperor Tenji. He spent three years in northern Japan, fathering a child named Tamaoki with a prostitute while living there. During Tamaoki's life, the characters 小千 for the family name Ochi were changed to the characters 越智. Moreover, the *Ochi keizu* states that Tamasumi, twenty-second head of the clan, lived in the foothills of Takanawa in the district of Kazahaya and changed the family name to Kōno.

For over ten generations after that, the Kōno family flourished in this area as a powerful clan. Tameyo, the thirty-seventh head of the clan, was called “Lord of Ukena.” Because both Tametoki, the thirty-eighth head of the clan, and Tokitaka, the thirty-ninth head, called themselves “Ukena,” which was the name of a geographical area, it is thought that at this time control of the entire mountainous district of Ukena came into the hands of the Kōno clan. Moreover, it was at the time of Chikatsune, the forty-second head, that the Kōno family began to build a relationship with the Minamoto family. The *Ochi keizu* records the following:

When he entered the way in Iyo, Yoriyoshi was serving as governor of that province. At that time, he had the same motivations as Chikanori, and built Yakushi temple halls in forty-nine locations, and Hachiman shrines in eight locations.

Minamoto no Yoriyoshi was at that time the governor of Iyo. Chikanori, the forty-second head, who with Yoriyoshi founded numerous temples and shrines, did not have a son to succeed him. Therefore, he took Yoriyoshi's youngest son as his son-in-law. This son-in-law was Chikakiyo, the Kōno family's forty-third head. The *Ochi keizu* states that Chikanori took this opportunity to make the Kōno clan part of Minamoto clan. In the section on Michikiyo, the forty-fourth head, the *Ochi keizu* explains that after Chikakiyo, who was sent by the Kōno clan's guardian kami Mishima Myōjin, the names of the sons of the Kōno clan all began with the character “michi” 通. Until this time, no ancestor had direct influence on Ippen's life. Next, however, I will discuss Ippen's grandfather, Michinobu, the forty-fifth head of the clan.

2) The Kōno Family and the Jōkyū Uprising

Regarding Ippen's grandfather Michinobu, the *Ippen hijirie* states:

When he arrived at the village of Esashi in the north, he visited the grave of his grandfather Michinobu. No people lived there, and there were no houses there. All that remained were the traces of the smoke of the cremation in the autumn wind in the willow. The rain at dusk on the green mound rivaled the dewy tears. He removed the brambles and conducted the filial rites of gratitude, circumambulated the grave, and accumulated the merit of reciting sutras and the *nembutsu* (*Ippen hijirie*, fascicle 5).

Next, I will briefly outline the political situation at that time.

In Jishō 4 (1180), Minamoto no Yoritomo, who had been banished to Hirugakojima in Izu province, relied on the influence of his wife Masako's father Hōjō Tokimasa to gradually strengthen his own power. Kōno Michikiyo, the lord of Takanawa castle, taking advantage of the fact that his grandfather Chikatune was a Minamoto, fought the Taira forces at Iyo. His eldest son Michinobu was fighting the Taira clan in Kyūshū. After that, Michikiyo died in battle, but Michinobu became lord of Takanawa castle, and as commander of the Kōno navy, he gained power over the Inland Sea.

As this text indicates, because Michinobu became Hōjō Tokimasa's son-in-law, he was bound to Yoritomo as members of the same family. The legend of the lacquered tray relates that Yoritomo greatly trusted both his father-in-law Hōjō Tokimasa and Michinobu. To prove this, as a reward to Michinobu for driving away the Taira, Yoritomo made him the official constable of the seven districts of Dōgo.

However, in Jōkyū 1 (1219), when Minamoto no Sanetomo was assassinated, the real power of the Kamakura bakufu was seized by the Hōjō family. In Jōkyū 3 (1221), the Jōkyū uprising began, and Michinobu's position became difficult. Michinobu had many sons. The *Ochi keizu* lists them as Michitoshi, whose mother was the daughter of the Taifu who belonged to Taifu Tamauji in Nii; Michimasa; Michimatsu; Michihisa, whose mother was one of Hōjō Tokimasa's daughter; Michihiro; Michimune, whose mother belonged to the Nikaidō clan; and others. They each were supported by different parties. Michihide, the son of Michitoshi, and Michimasa became samurai who were guards in the court of the retired emperor Gotoba. Masauji, the son of Michimasa, and Michimatsu achieved a rank in which they were permitted to enter the imperial palace, and Michimatsu was granted an imperial princess and made her his wife. Therefore, both Michinobu and some of his sons were able to build a strong relationship with the nobility, but the Jōkyū uprising ruined Michinobu's good fortune. In Jōkyū 3 (1221), retired emperor Gotoba commanded that Hōjō Yoshitoki be conquered.

In the end, Michinobu allied himself with the Imperial Court. This is also made clear in the *Ochi keizu*, which states, "There was a quarrel between husband and wife, and he was driven out of Kamakura and headed toward

the capital.” Michinobu was exiled to Hiraizumi in the north, where he died at the age of sixty-eight. According to the *Ippen hijirie*, Ippen mourned at the grave of his grandfather Michinobu in Esashi, so it appears that Michinobu’s body was moved to Esashi from Hiraizumi.¹ Even Michinobu, who drove away the Taira clan as commander of the Kōno navy and wielded power as governor of Iyo, in the end died in tragic circumstances.

The actions taken by Michinobu’s son Michihiro in the Jōkyū uprising are unclear. However, in contrast to his father, he seems to have allied himself with the bakufu. This was perhaps because his mother was not one of Hōjō Tokimasa’s daughters, so it was advantageous for him to take this side. Michihiro was Ippen’s father.

3) Birth

Ippen was born the second son of Michihiro at Hōgonji temple (photos 1-2, 3, 4, 5) in Iyo province’s Onsen district, in the Okudani area of Dōgo, eighteen years after the end of the Jōkyū uprising, when the fortune of the Kōno family had been completely lost.² He was born on the fifteenth day of the second month of En’ō 1 (1239), and his childhood name was Shōjumarū. Because his father Michihiro was granted the title Befu Shichirōzaemonnojō, it is thought he took the Kōno village of Beppu as his headquarters. When Ippen was born, his father became a renunciant at Dōgo’s Hōgonji temple and was given the Buddhist name Nyobutsu. At Hōgonji temple there is now a stone marker that reads “Historical Site of Ippen Shōnin’s Birth.” It may have been

1 In Kōan 3 (1280), when Ippen was forty-two, he visited the grave of his grandfather Michinobu, who met his end in Esashi in northern Japan, falling in the Jōkyū uprising. Michinobu initially had been exiled to Hiraizumi, but later he was moved to Gokurakuji temple in Esashi. There his life ended, at the age of sixty-eight, in the fifth month of Jōō 2 (1223). Today, Michinobu’s grave and a stone monument may be found in the middle of a grove on a small knoll after you descend the left bank southeast of Kitakami Station. After passing through a field of susuki grass, you see the grave rise up out of a pine grove. The exact same setting is described in the *Ippen hijirie*.

2 According to its temple history, Hōgonji temple was founded in Tenji 4 (665) and has been famous since ancient times. It appears to have been a Tendai temple in the Heian period. Ippen’s father Michihiro was given the monastic name Nyobutsu and secluded himself at this temple, and Ippen was born there. After Ippen’s death, it prospered under his successor, the monk Sen’a, as a training center for the Okutani sect of the Ji school. It had twelve sub-temples, but only Ringōan remains today.



1-1 The crest of Kōno Family



1-2 Inside the Hōgonji Temple



1-3 The stone monument of Ippen's birthplace



1-4 The stone monument of Ippen's "Namuami dabutsu"



1-5 The stone monument of Ippen's poem tanka

erected because of the tradition that Ippen's father lived there. When I visited this temple, I climbed a gentle slope to find the marker in a deserted and quiet place that surely resembled its state in former times as well.

When reflecting on both Ippen's distant ancestors and on those such as his grandfather Michinobu, one cannot help but think that the circumstances of the human condition, in which a powerful family must inevitably sink into the recesses of history, must have heavily influenced Ippen's own life. His mother was a daughter of the Taifu of the Tamauji in Nii, and was thus from the same family as the Ochi clan.