

“Books of the Past”

Japanese Buddhist Death Registers

日本の仏教の過去帳

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The content of this video, as well as the thoughts, views, and opinions expressed herein belong solely to the creator and do not necessarily reflect the views of FamilySearch International and RootsTech.

Target Audience

- Anyone with Japanese Buddhist ancestors
 - Generally limited to 本家 (honke – “main line”) and/or descendants of 長男 (chōnan – “oldest son”)
 - May also be available for 分家 (bunke – “branch line”), but will be likely be limited to ancestors after the honke/bunke split

Notes 1

- Kakochō are a secondary information source.
- Primary information source is koseki (family register) documents
- For background on how to request koseki, please refer to 3-part series from RootsTech 2022

(<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/series/how-to-request-japanese-koseki-family-registers>)

Notes 2

- Religious discussion – Japanese Buddhism
 - Religious concepts explained at a very basic summary level for beginners
 - No offense is intended by any omissions or oversimplification in the explanation

Buddhist Vocabulary – 1

- 仏教 (Bukkyō - Buddhism)
- -宗 (-shū – Buddhist sect)
 - 天台宗 (Tendai-shū “Tendai Esoteric Buddhism”)
 - 真言宗 (Shingon-shū “Shingon Esoteric Buddhism”)
 - 臨濟宗 (Rinzai-shū “Rinzai Zen Buddhism”)
 - 曹洞宗 (Sōtō-shū “Sōtō Zen Buddhism”)
 - 浄土宗 (Jōdo-shū “Pure Land Buddhism”)
 - 浄土真宗 (Jōdoshin-shū “True Pure Land Buddhism”)
 - 日蓮宗 (Nichiren-shū “Nichiren Buddhism”)

History of Japanese Buddhism

- Introduction of Buddhism from Korea (mid-6th century)
- Establishment of capital in 奈良 [Nara] (Nara Period – 710 to 784)
 - Six Nara schools (Chinese and state-run)
- Establishment of capital in 京都 [Kyōto] (Heian Period – 794 to 1185)
 - Heian Esoteric Buddhism – Tendai and Shingon
- Establishment of military shogunate in 鎌倉 [Kamakura] (Kamakura Period – 1185 to 1333)
 - Zen Buddhism – Rinzai and Sōtō
 - Pure Land Buddhism – Jōdo and Jōdoshin
 - Nichiren Buddhism

Buddhist Vocabulary – 2

- 過去帳 (kakochō – Buddhist necrology (death register))
- 仏壇 (butsudan – Buddhist altar)
- お墓 (o-haka – gravesite)
- 位牌 (ihai – Buddhist mortuary tablet)

Types and Formats of Kakocho

- Types
 - Temple kakocho traced back to Kamakura period
 - Household kakocho started near beginning of Edo Period (1603-1868)
- Formats
 - Dated (Day 1 through Day 31) – mainly for households
 - Undated (chronological) – mainly for temples

Notes 3

- Kakochō are religious items and should be treated with appropriate respect
- Kakochō were NOT designed to be genealogical records
- Kakochō cannot be requested like koseki family register documents
- Religious practices associated with kakochō vary by:
 - Buddhist sect/school/temple
 - Country
 - Individual

過去帳の内容 (Kakochō Contents)

- 歿年月日/没年月日 (“botsunengappi” death date)
 - Death year expressed in Japanese 年号 (“nengō” era)
- 戒名 (“kaimyō” posthumous Buddhist name)
 - Specific term may vary by sect
- 俗名 (“zokumyō” secular name)
- 享年 (“kyōnen” age at death)

~~• Birth date~~

~~• Place names~~

戒名の構成 (Structure of Kaimyō)

- 院号/院殿号 (ingō/indengō – title of respect)
- 道号 (dōgō – Buddhist pseudonym)
- 戒名 (kaimyō – Buddhist posthumous name)
- 位号 (igō – Buddhist rank)

Basic structure – varies by sect

Sect can often be identified by structure

院号 (ingō – title of respect)

- Optional
- Originally for elite individuals only
- 3-4 kanji – ◇◇院 (in)
- Occasionally 院殿 (inden) is used
- Rarely 軒 (ken) or 庵 (an) is used (Zen sects only)

道号 (dōgō – Buddhist pseudonym)

- Not given to minors, children, toddlers, infants, stillborn
- 2 kanji – □□
- Kanji for places, personality, residences are often used
- Inauspicious (and auspicious!) kanji are avoided

戒名 (kaimyō – Buddhist posthumous name)

- Name to be called in the next life
- 2 kanji (1 from secular name; 1 from Buddhism) – ○○
- Inherited kanji often used
- Inauspicious kanji, kanji linked to Imperial family and celebrities, and bad sounding kanji readings are avoided

位号 (igō – Buddhist rank)

- Varies depending upon age, gender, social standing, devoutness
- 2-3 kanji – △△
- Not used by every sect

位号 (igō – Buddhist rank) – Adult

Type	Rank (kanji)	Rank (romanized)
Elite (male)	大居士	Daikoji
Elite (female)	清大姉	Seidaishi
Devoted (male)	居士	Koji
Devoted (female)	大姉	Daishi
Normal (male)	信士	Shinshi
Normal (female)	信女	Shinnyo

位号 (igō – Buddhist rank) – Children

Type	Rank (kanji)	Rank (romanized)
4-15 years (elite) (m/f)	大童子/大童女	Daidōji/Daidōnyo
4-15 years (m/f)	童子/童女	Dōji/Dōnyo
3-7 years (m/f)	幼子/幼女	Yōji/Yōnyo
2-3 years (m/f)	孩子/孩女	Gaiji/Gainyo
1 year (m/f)	嬰子/嬰女	Eiji/Einyo
Stillborn (m/f)	水子/水女	Suiji/Suinyo

臨濟宗/曹洞宗 (Rinzai-shū/Sōtō-shū)

Basic structure

Kaimyō (戒名) = ◊◊院□□○○△△

- 院号 (ingō) – ◊◊院
- 道号 (dōgō) – □□
- 戒名 (kaimyō) – ○○
- 位号 (igō) – △△




天台宗/真言宗 (Tendai-/Shingon-shū)

Bonji + Basic Structure

Kaimyō (戒名) = ◎◇◇院□□○○△△

- 梵字 (Bonji – Sanskrit letter) – ◎*
- 院号 (ingō) – ◇◇院
- 道号 (dōgō) – □□
- 戒名 (kaimyō) – ○○
- 位号 (igō) – △△

梵字 (Bonji – Sanskrit)

- Sanskrit used to represent Buddhist deities
- ‘a’  Dainichi-nyorai in Tendai or Shingon
- ‘kilik’  Amida-nyorai in Tendai
- ‘ka’  Jizō-bosatsu in Shingon (children)

日蓮宗 (Nichiren-shū)

Basic structure

Hōgō (法号)* = ◇◇院□□日○ △△

- 院号 (ingō) – ◇◇院
- 道号 (dōgō) – □□ (法[hō]□* – M, 妙[myō]□* – F)
- 日号 (nichigō) – 日[nichi]○*
- 位号 (igō) – △△

浄土宗 (Jōdo-shū)

Basic structure

Kaimyō (戒名) = ◇◇院 □ 誉 ○○ △△

- 院号 (ingō) – ◇◇院
- 誉号 (yogō) – □ 誉 [yo]*; some sects 空号 (kūgō) – □ 空 [kū]*
- 戒名 (kaimyō) – ○○
- 位号 (igō) – △△

浄土真宗 (Jōdoshin-shū)

Basic structure

Hōmyō (法名)* = ◇◇院釈○○△△

- 院号 (ingō) – ◇◇院
- 釋号 (shakagō – kanji for 釋/釈 – M, 釋尼/釈尼 – F)*
- 戒名 (kaimyō) – ○○
- 位号 (igō) – △△

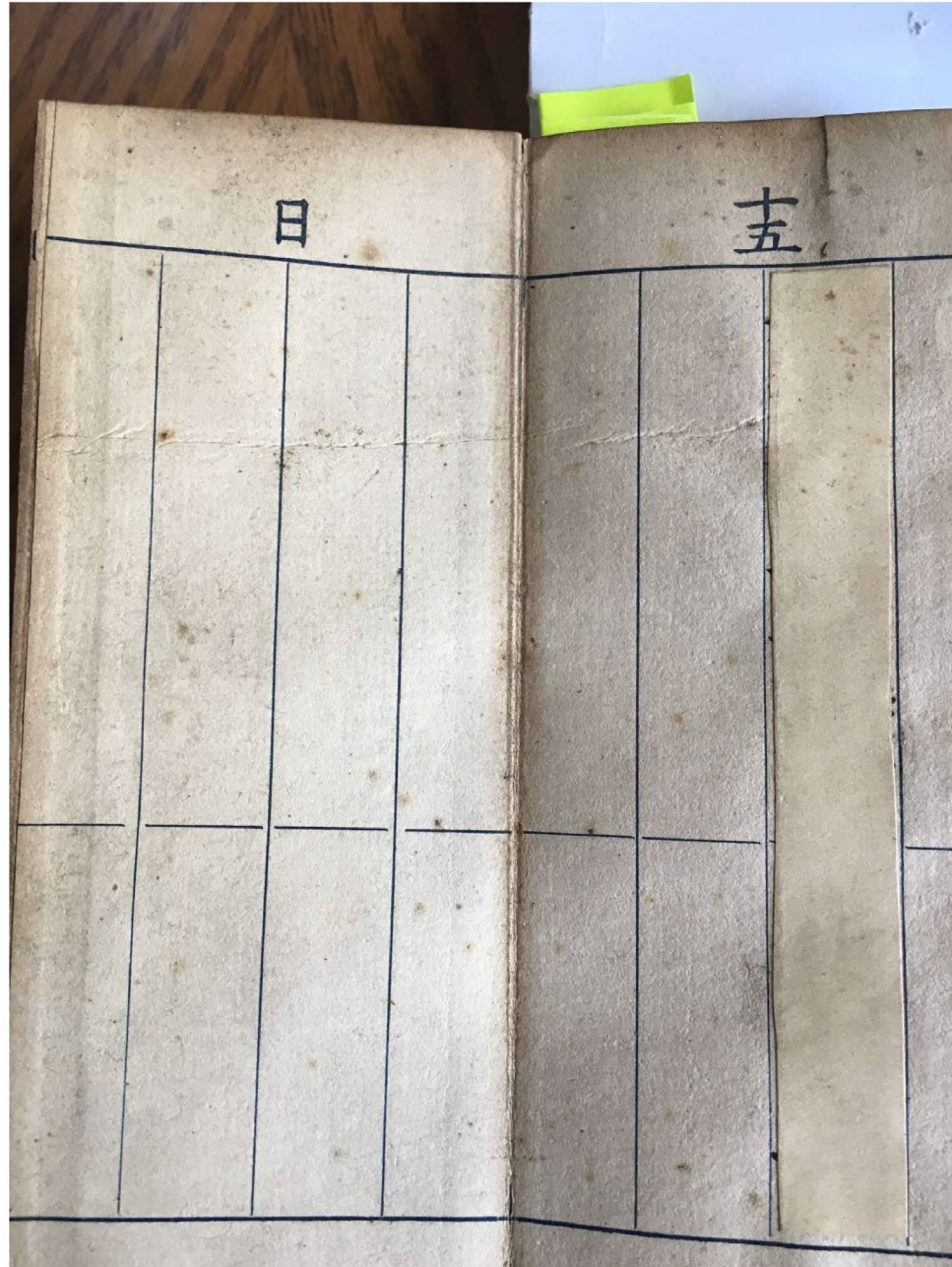
Notes 5

- Actual reading of the posthumous name is determined by the priest giving the name
- If the reading is not known, best guess is to use the 音読み (“on’yomi” borrowed Chinese reading) instead of the 訓読み (“kun’yomi” original Japanese reading)
- Multiple on’yomi exist:
 - 吳音 (“go-on”) (5th to 6th century)
 - 漢音 (“kan-on”) (7th to 9th century)
 - 唐音 (“tō-on”) (10th century and beyond)
 - 宋音 (“sō-on”) (10th century and beyond)

Example of On'yomi and Kun'yomi

- 下
 - on'yomi
 - KA - (“kan-on”)
 - GE - (“go-on”)
 - kun'yomi
 - shita, shimo, moto
 - kudaru/kudasu
 - sagaru/sageru
 - oriru/orosu
 - kudasaruru

Examples of Household Kakochō



15th day of the
month
– no deaths

日		六	
釋弘寬童子 弘化四年七月	釋曉源童子 文化九年正月	釋妙須信女 弘化二年六月	釋道壽法士 寬延元年七月
七代目市兵衛娘 七此久	六代目市兵衛伴 十兵衛	六代目市兵衛善 五此	三代目市兵衛
			釋清心信士 寬文三年六月
			釋尼安清 正徳元年十月
			元祖市兵衛妻 安清父

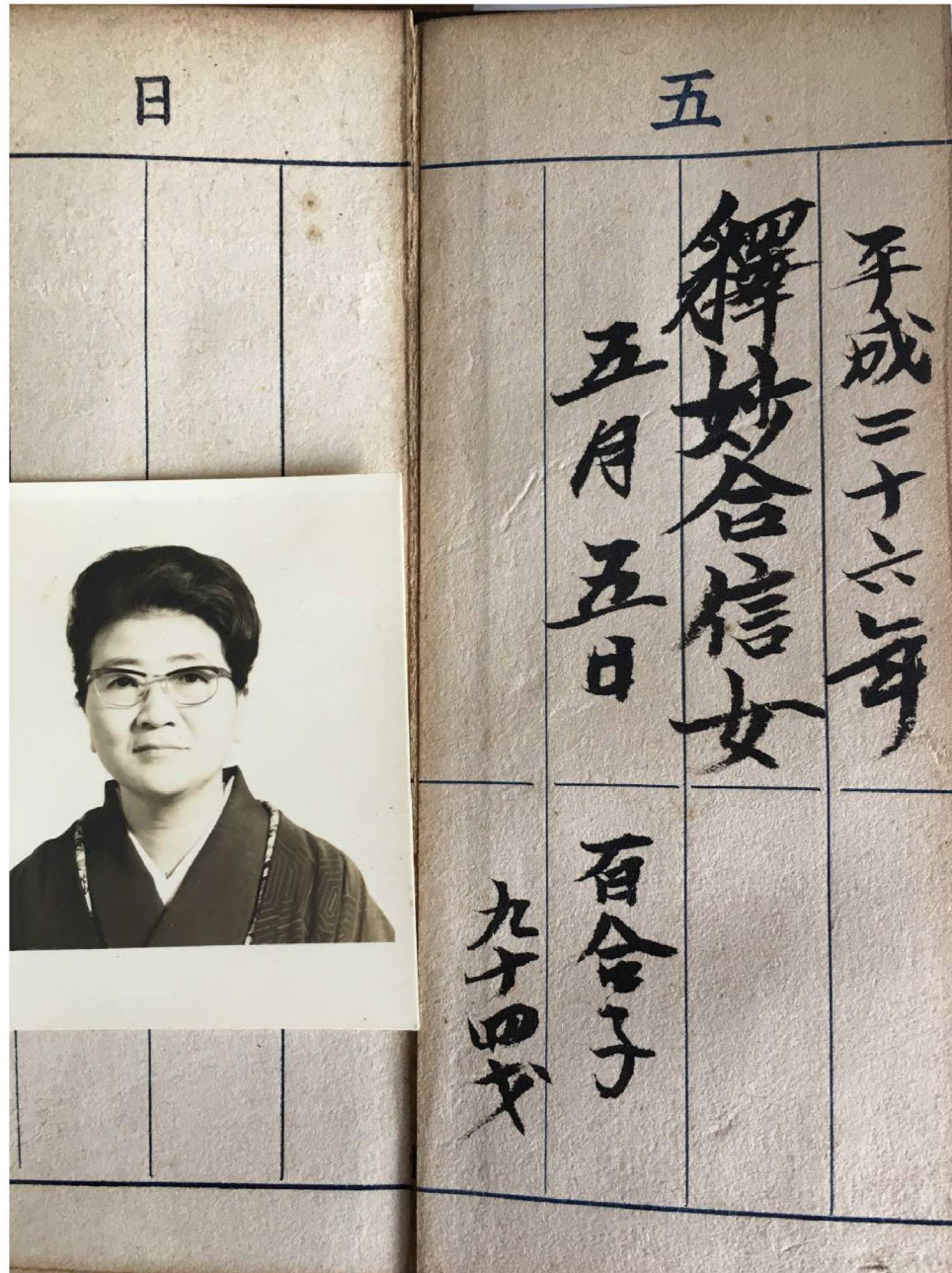
18th day of the month – deaths of 6 individuals

This is a copy
(not original
document)

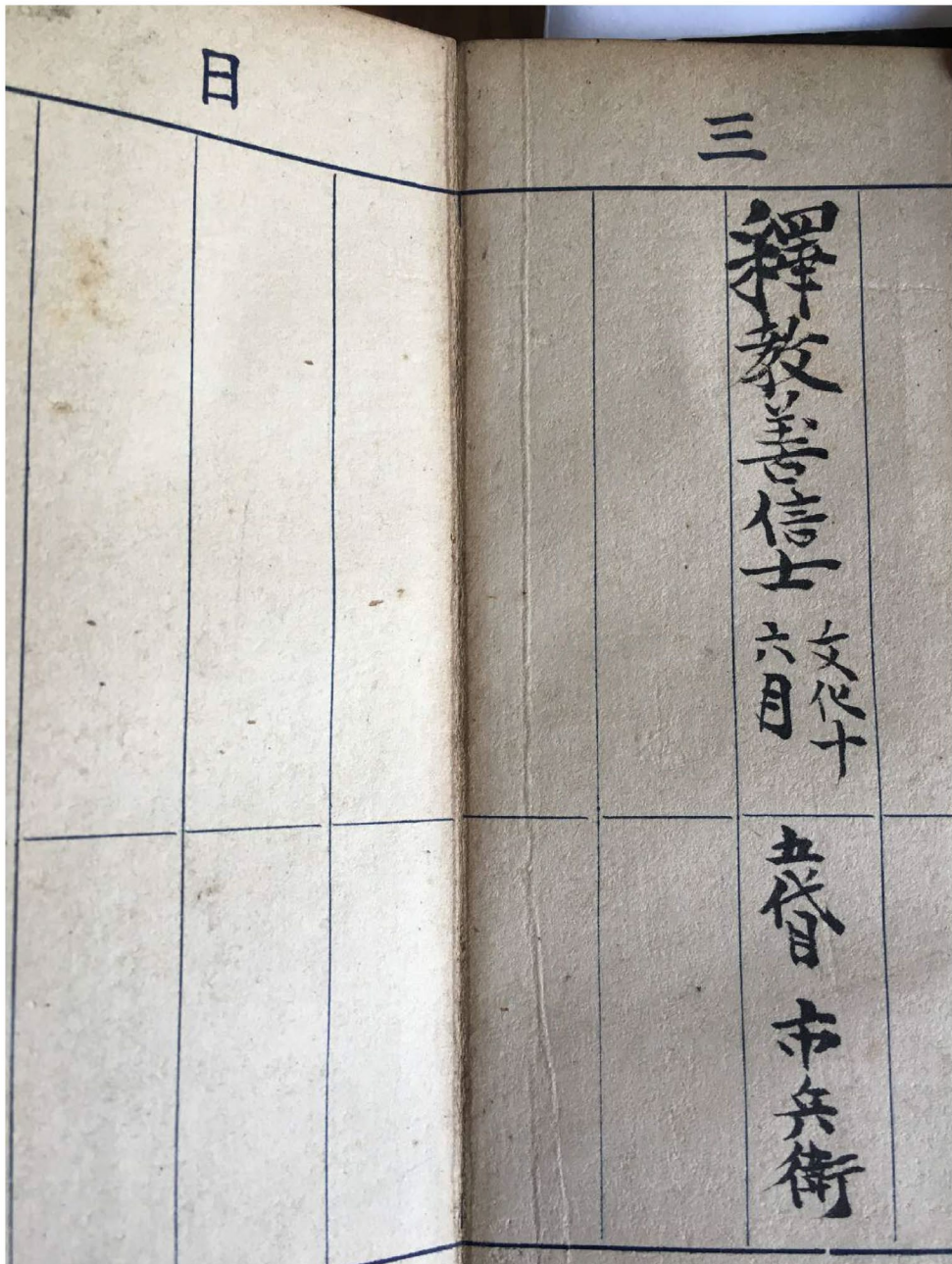
日	七
雅德院釋妙和大姉	釋道順信士 九月 <small>五治三</small>
七代目市兵衛 三女和歌景則喜	先祖道句又

Earliest death
(right hand
side) – 7th day
of 9th month
of the 3rd year
of Manji era
(1660)

Pictures are
unusual



Latest death –
5th day of 5th
month of the
26th year of
the Heisei era
(2014)



釋教善信士

Shakagō = 釋 (Shaka)

Kaimyō = 教善 (Kyōzen)

Igō = 信士 (Shinshi)

文化十(年)六月三日

3rd day of the 6th month of the
10th year of Bunka era (1813)

五代目市兵衛

Ichibee (5th generation)

釋慧秋童女

Shakagō = 釋 (Shaka)

Kaimyō = 慧秋 (Keishū)

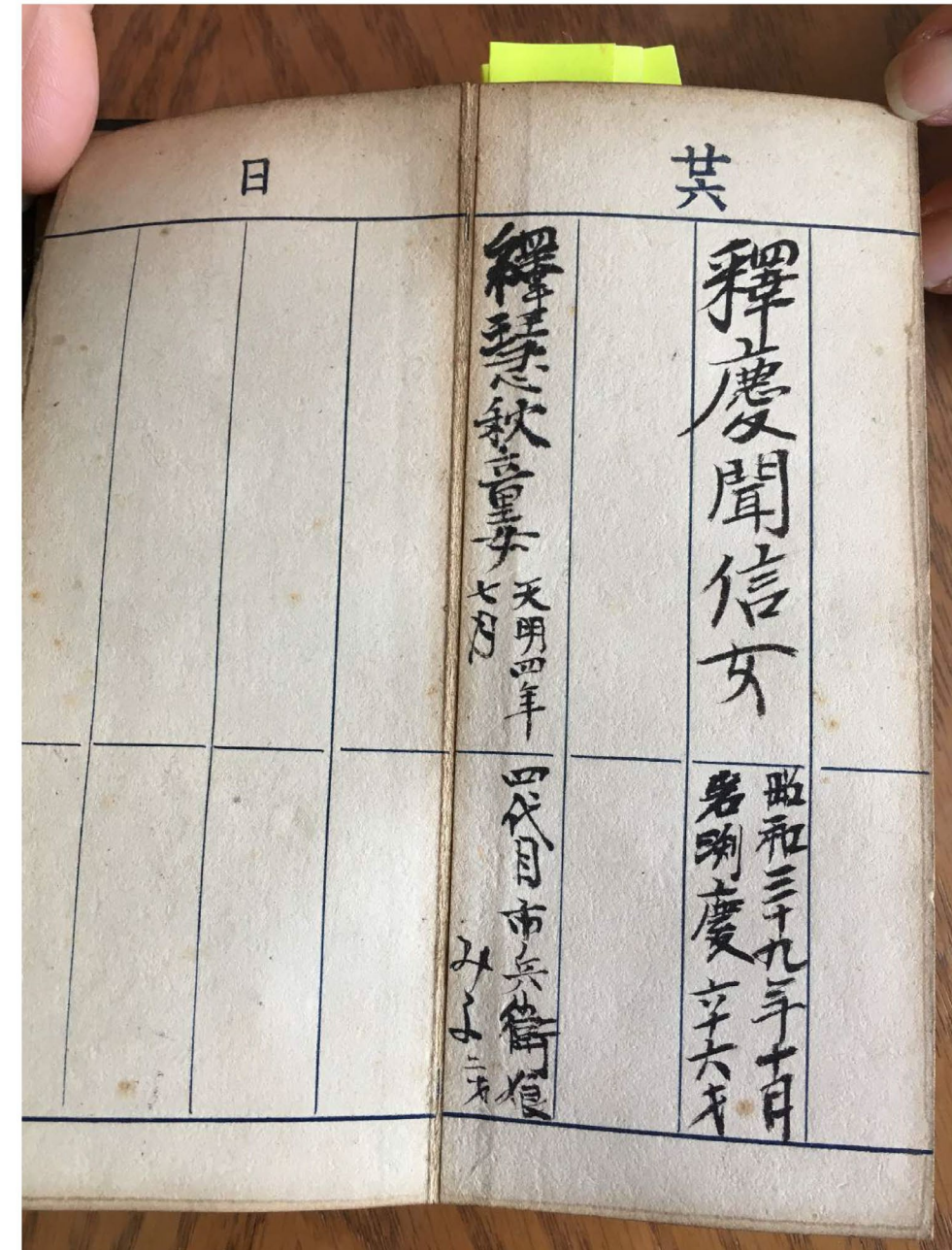
Igō = 童女 (Dōnyo)

天明四(年)七月廿六日

26th day of the 7th month of
the 4th year of Tenmei era
(1784)

四代目市兵衛娘みよ二才

Miyo – Daughter of Ichibee
(4th generation) – 2 years



雅徳院釋妙和大姉

Ingō = 雅徳院 (Gatokuin)

Shakagō = 釋 (Shaka)

Kaimyō = 妙和 (Myōwa)

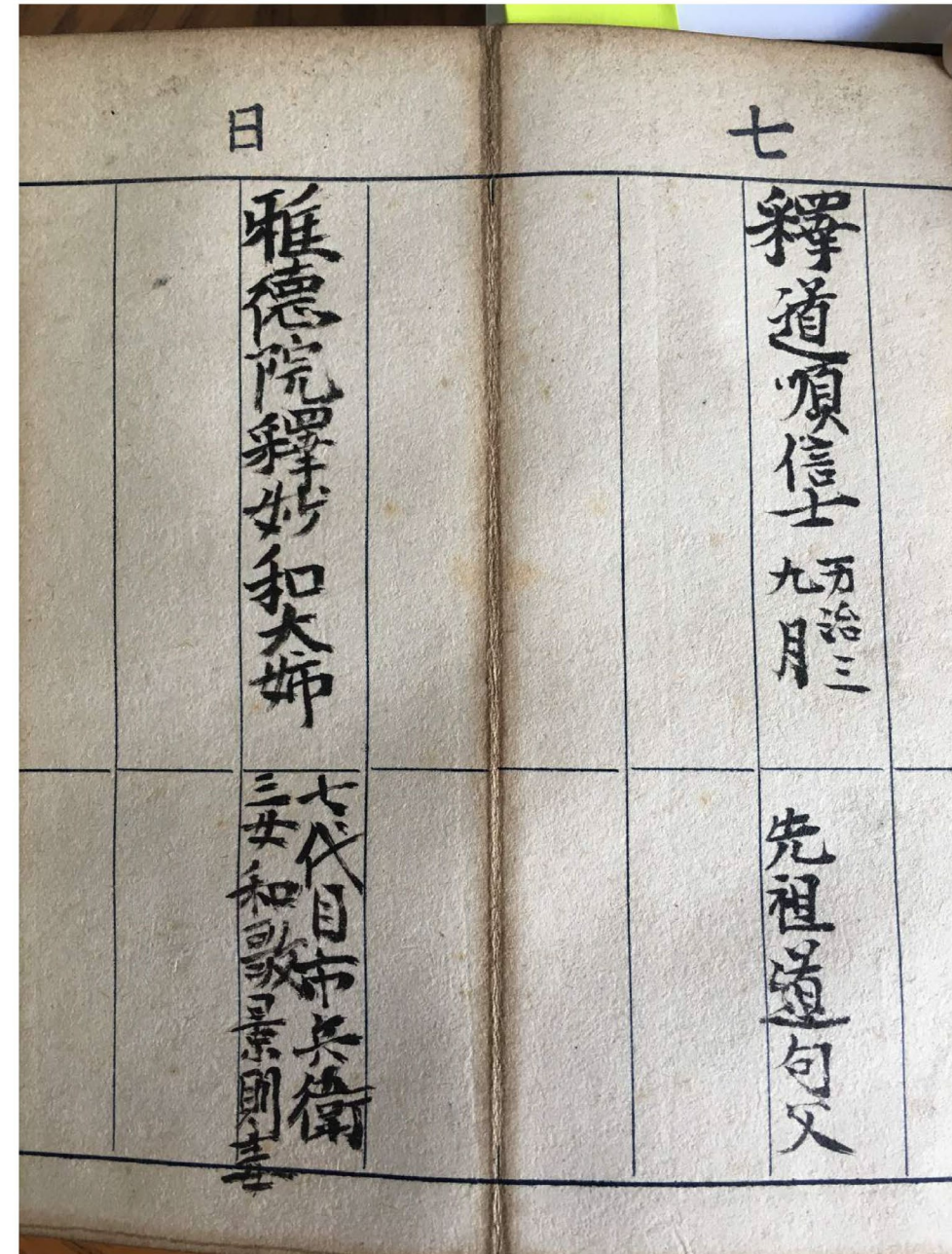
Igō = 大姉 (Daishi)

七日

7th day of unknown month,
year, and era

七代目市兵衛三女和歌景則妻

Waka – 3rd daughter of Ichibee (7th
generation) – wife of Kagenori



Notes 4

- Privacy – Japan
 - Temple kakocho in Japan are generally not available due to privacy concerns and laws
 - Any attempts to obtain temple kakocho in Japan should only be done through Japanese relatives who have existing relationships with the temple – “cold calls” should be avoided
- Privacy – U.S./Canada
 - Information in U.S./Canada temple kakocho can usually be obtained through formal written/email requests

Examples of Temple Kakochō (U.S.)

D E C E A S E D	俗名	木庭 伝			法名	細邦 52		
	NAME	KO BA TSUTOU			BUDDHIST NAME	家族より後継連絡あり JUN-PO		
	DATE OF BIRTH	12	29	1888	DATE OF DEATH	7	2	1975
	PLACE OF DEATH	SEATTLE, WA.			CAUSE OF DEATH			
	ADDRESS	4			MEMBER?	0		
原籍PERM. ADDRESS	熊本県			NATIONALITY	Japanese			
N E X T O F K I N	氏名	木庭 照雄			RELATION	長男		
	NAME	KOBA TERUO			MEMBER?	0		
	ADDRESS	4505 S. WILLOW 98118			PHONE	PA5-9769		
F U N E R A L	DATE OF FUNERAL	JULY 9 '75	7:30 P	PLACE OF FUNERAL	別院	MINISTER		
	CARE TAKER				CREMATION		CEMETERY	
R E M A R K S	・初七日は葬式に引き続きする ・脚通夜は JULY 8, '75 7:30 P.M AT Home ・オルガニスト Mrs. Kusakabe 式の時参列者は式が終ってから退場の時煙香する 式の初め家族は横の床より入場したことの事。						MONTH	
							YEAR	
							NAME	

部ノ年 1928 丁

第 番 號 536 第 番 號 534 第 番 號 533 第 番 號

名法	功勞	月日	名法	功勞	月日	名法	功勞	月日	名法	功勞	月日
昭和三年十月十一日	釋信教童子		昭和三年十月十四日	釋慈照信士		昭和三年十月十九日	釋妙願童女		昭和三年十月六日		釋深遊信女

年享	名俗所住	年享	名俗所住	年享	名俗所住	年享	名俗所住
三十一歲	井上 中心	八十二歲	渡邊 儀助	一日	菊池寛一郎二女無名	三十九歲	小林 千七 妻 節子

要 概 歷 經	要 概 歷 經	要 概 歷 經	要 概 歷 經
二十二年二月廿九日 ウチノ子ニシテ墓化埋葬	二十二年二月廿九日 ウチノ子ニシテ墓化埋葬	二十二年二月廿九日 ウチノ子ニシテ墓化埋葬	二十二年二月廿九日 ウチノ子ニシテ墓化埋葬

市道五ノ八ノ事録

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 - Japanese Family History (日本の家族歴史)
Facebook Group
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1076993109374556>)

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