

The invention of tradition in the transmission of the *Mitsugon*-school *go-eika*: the Buddhist mission in the early *Showa* period

SHIMBORI Kanno

This paper explores the process of establishing the transmission system of *go-eika*, focusing on the *Mitsugon* school. *Go-eika* is a genre of hymns sung in Buddhist temples. In this genre, monks instruct devotees in the way of singing the various hymns. The transmission of *go-eika* is a means of the Buddhist mission.

Buddhist sect members began to transmit *go-eika* during the early *Showa* period. They learned *go-eika* as secular songs passed down orally by non-sect members. The sect members decided that *go-eika* were the “traditional” hymns derived from *Shomyo*, the sacred Buddhist ritual music. They then established their own *go-eika* school called *Mitsugon* and formed the new transmission system as follows.

First, the sect members invented a new notation for *go-eika*. This was constructed from the *Shomyo* notation because the sect members aimed to illustrate that *go-eika* was derived from *Shomyo*. Second, they established the hierarchical structure of *go-eika* singers. In this hierarchy, when singers passed the examinations for *go-eika* techniques, they could be awarded a higher level of proficiency. These grades were modeled on the hierarchy of monk. The hierarchical structure of *go-eika* singers was similar to the *Iemoto* system which was characterized by “traditional” Japanese arts.

Through the above transmission system, *go-eika* could be regarded as “traditional” hymns equal to *Shomyo*. In addition, it became possible to hand down *go-eika* firmly and universally. Therefore, the sect members who became *go-eika* singers increased. Consequently, *go-eika* became authentic Buddhist music for missions and found a place between sacred ritual music and secular songs.