

*Bringing Śākyamuni to Japan:
The Japanese Reception of the Hikekyō
and the Medieval Fabrication of Myth*

十二世紀初頭から、末法の世に釈迦が「大明神」として示現するという典拠を示す『悲華経』は、インドで書かれ、奈良時代までに日本に伝わった釈迦を讃える経典であるが、本来「大明神」という表現は表れないことがいえる。本発表では、「大明神」が『悲華経』の一句だと考えられた理由と、中世に見られる『悲華経』に関心を持つ僧侶が増えてきたことについて論じる。まず、平安末期の新しい歴史観である三国思想を考察する。「時間的」「空間的」比較を軸として仏教史観を考えた場合、印度から始まり、中国、日本に至った。「日本は仏教が栄えられる国」だと考えていた僧侶もいたが、印度と日本の間にある時間や空間などの相違で違和を感じた人もいたと言え、釈迦が中世日本の大明神として現ずるという解釈はその時間や空間の相違を否定するような解釈として理解できる。さらに、『悲華経』に見られる釈迦は、「救済する仏」であったことである。平安末期までの釈迦如来は、『絵因果経』で説かれる聖人伝のような釈迦、『法華経』と『涅槃経』で説かれる不変な釈迦であったが、どちらでも「救済する仏」ではないこといえる。そして、「大明神」として釈迦は、中世神話として解釈することができる。「大明神」として現れた釈迦という根拠を示す『悲華経』は、結果的に釈迦信仰を讃えるための典拠になってしまったことがいえる。

“Śākyamuni said, ‘After my death, in the final age of the Dharma, I shall appear as a *daimyōjin* 大明神 and save sentient beings.’” Beginning in the early twelfth century a number of Japanese monks and texts began to attribute this statement to the *Hikekyō* 悲華経, an Indian sūtra that had come to Japan early on but to which little attention was paid until the late Heian period. The *Hikekyō*, while clearly asserting the supremacy of Śākyamuni over all other buddhas, does not make this claim or even contain the term *daimyōjin*.

This inaccurate attribution tells us something about the Japanese reception of the *Hikekyō*: that it served as a source for a certain set of ideas about Śākyamuni. While Śākyamuni was central to many of the classical sūtras that served as foci for Japanese Buddhist traditions, none was as Śākyamuni-centric as the *Hikekyō*, and none emphasized Śākyamuni’s commitment to and power to save humans living in a time of darkness in the way in which the *Hikekyō* did.

In this paper I focus on the Japanese reception of the *Hikekyō* during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There are three points I want to make concerning this reception. First, this interest in the *Hikekyō* and in Śākyamuni should be understood against the backdrop of a new vision of history based on the *sangoku* 三国 framework. This model rendered history synonymous with the transmission of Buddhism from India to China, and thence to Japan. While clerics such as Annen and Kakuen believed that Japan was where Buddhism would come to full fruition, others felt a great anxiety about their geographical and historical distance from Śākyamuni’s India, a distance that was the logical conclusion of the *sangoku* view of history. The assertion that Śākyamuni would appear as a *daimyōjin* in the time of *mappō* can be understood as a means of closing that geographical and

historical gap. In addition, the broader interest in the *Hikekyō* reflects a new interest in Śākyamuni that was entirely unrelated to the importance of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Japan or to the early use of Śākyamuni for state protection.

Second, the *Hikekyō*'s portrayal of Śākyamuni is different from alternative portrayals available to the Japanese, and this is what made it attractive to certain clerics. More specifically, it was the *Hikekyō*'s emphasis on Śākyamuni's commitment to this world (as revealed in his vow made many lifetimes ago) and his salvific character and activity as described in the sūtra that distinguished the *Hikekyō*'s Śākyamuni from the Śākyamuni found in other scriptures. For those who wanted to turn back to Śākyamuni and reconnect with the founder of the tradition—a founder who in the *sangoku* view of things was very far away indeed—the *Hikekyō* provided the narrative that supplied them with a connection to Śākyamuni both in the past *and* in the future: in the past because the sūtra tells us that long ago Śākyamuni resolved to come to this defiled world for our sake, and in the future because the sūtra describes how Śākyamuni will save us in a future time when the world is without a buddha. In addition, the *Hikekyō*'s Śākyamuni was neither the hagiographical buddha of the *Eningakyō* and related texts (a figure who was alternatively a model for emulation or an object of worship), nor the transcendental, eternal buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra* and *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*. While not entirely historical (in the sense of being bound by time and place), the Śākyamuni of the *Hikekyō* was more firmly embedded in time than the transcendental buddha, and more salvific than the hagiographical buddha.

Third, the false attribution to the *Hikekyō* of the idea that Śākyamuni will appear as a *daimyōjin* should be understood in the context of medieval mythology and the use of authoritative sources to fabricate novel assertions. In the same way that the *Nihongi* became a symbol of sorts—an authority to which one could refer to make a number of related claims—so too did the *Hikekyō* become an authoritative text to which one could refer when making assertions about Śākyamuni and his salvific character.

The paper comprises four parts. In the first I introduce the *Hikekyō* and its central message. Here we see that above all this is a scripture that celebrates Śākyamuni and clarifies why he is superior to all other buddhas. In the second section I focus on Jōkei's use of the *Hikekyō* in order to show why the *Hikekyō* would be attractive to monks who hoped to reconnect with the founder of the Buddhist tradition. The third section then turns to medieval elaborations of the *Hikekyō*. It is here that we see the idea that Śākyamuni will appear in Japan as a *daimyōjin*. Finally, in the fourth section, I locate the Japanese reception of the *Hikekyō* in three contexts: the emergence of a new sense of history, a new vision of Śākyamuni as a historical figure from whom the Japanese were historically and geographically separated but with whom a (re)connection might be established nonetheless, and finally the production of new myths in the medieval period (*chūsei shinwa*).

The *Hikekyō*

The *Karuṇā-puṇḍarīka sūtra* is Buddhist Sanskrit work composed or compiled sometime in or before the fourth century. Central to the *Hikekyō*'s message are four assertions. First, Śākyamuni is superior to all other buddhas. Second, what makes him superior is his compassion. Third, Śākyamuni is the buddha of this world, a point highlighted in particular by the fact that Śākyamuni did not end up here by accident but rather chose to become a buddha in this defiled world rather than a pure land. Fourth, Śākyamuni will save you in the future. While the sūtra serves to reveal the past lives of a number of other buddhas and bodhisattvas, the logical conclusion that one draws from reading it is that Śākyamuni is sufficient for salvation, and that he is linked to us both through his compassionate

vow made in a previous life *and* through his salvific actions to be performed at some point in the future.

The central narrative of the sūtra is the story of a king named Mujōnen 無諍念 and his grand minister Hōkai 宝海 (being Śākyamuni in a previous life). Minister Hōkai has a son who becomes a renunciate and eventually becomes the buddha Hōzō 宝蔵. After King Mujōnen, his sons, and Hōkai become disciples of Hōzō, Hōzō reveals the existence of various pure and impure lands each with its own buddha. King Mujōnen asks Hōzō how it is that one attains buddhahood in a pure land or impure world, and Hōzō explains that it is a bodhisattva's own original vow that determines this, and that the strength of this vow is determined by the extent of the bodhisattva's compassion. Having heard this, the king and his princes each in turn vow to be reborn in a pure land, in response to which Hōzō prophesies that that Mujōnen will eventually become Amida and that each of his sons will become this or that buddha in this or that pure land.. Finally Hōkai's turn arrives, but instead of vowing to become a buddha in a pure land, he makes "500 vows" (*gohyaku daigan* 五百大願) and prays to be reborn in a defiled world (*shaba* 娑婆). Hōzō then reveals that Hōkai will become the buddha Śākyamuni.

Hōkai also tells of the future miracles that his relics will perform after his (i.e., Śākyamuni's) death. Of central importance here is that his relics will function as a buddha: they will ensure that all sentient beings advance along the Buddhist path toward awakening. This, then, is not the traditional Buddhist exhortation to abandon this world of suffering and strive for the goal of unconditioned nirvāṇa, but rather a guarantee that Śākyamuni himself (in the form of relics) will be coming to save us in the final age.

There are four points here that are central to the *Hikekyō* and to the Japanese interpretation of it. First, it is a bodhisattva's *own intention* that determines whether the will become a buddha in a pure or defiled world. This is related to the second theme: what distinguishes the bodhisattva who vows to be reborn in an impure world (such as ours) from the bodhisattva who sets his sights instead on a pure land is the former's *compassion*. These two points are evidence for the third point: Śākyamuni's compassion is greater than that of other buddhas and this led him to choose us; thus, we are his people and he is our buddha. Just as Hōnen's interpretation of the theory of Buddhist declension led him to the conclusion that Amida is the most appropriate buddha for humans living in the final age, anyone taking the *Hikekyō* at face value has to conclude that it is in fact Śākyamuni who is the most appropriate buddha for us, since it is he with whom we have a special relationship. The final point is that Śākyamuni will save us in the future in his capacity of miracle-performing relics.

Jōkei and the *Hikekyō*

The *Hikekyō* was of little consequence in Japan prior to the late Heian period. It is listed in both Sengyou's *Chusanjang jiji* 出三藏記集 (c. 515) and Zhisheng's *Kaiyuanshijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 (730), but few early references to it survive outside of catalogs (Narita 1972: 230). However, beginning in the twelfth century there arose an interest in this sūtra and works that drew upon this scripture. This shift can be seen in the work of a number of clerics, the three most representative being Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213), Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232), and Eison 叡尊 (1201–1290). In addition, two trends emerged as part of this new interest. One was the appearance of texts that enumerated Hōkai's "500 vows," while the other was the habit of attributing to the *Hikekyō* the idea that Śākyamuni will appear in Japan as a *daimyōjin* during the time of mappō to same sentient beings. I

want to focus first on the way in which the *Hikekyō* influenced one of these individuals (Jōkei), and then turn to the two aforementioned trends.

Jōkei's use of the *Hikekyō* can be seen in his explicit use of the story about the minister Hōkai and in his views of both Śākyamuni and relics. The story of Hōkai, in portraying Amida as the paradigmatic example of one who chooses the inferior path (of choosing a pure land over a defiled world due to a deficiency of compassion), the *Hikekyō* could demonstrate to Jōkei's contemporaries why they should focus on (or at least give greater weight to) Śākyamuni rather than Amida. The *Hikekyō* provides a scriptural basis for countering those who would place Amida rather than Śākyamuni at the center of Buddhist soteriology.

Perhaps more importantly, the *Hikekyō* both contains the story of Śākyamuni's original vow (*hongan*) and presents him as a salvific figure. Due to the rising popularity of pure land practices during Jōkei's lifetime, both the original vow and the figure of the buddha who comes and saves sentient beings during the period of Buddhism's decline had become particularly important.

Other possible scriptural bases for Śākyamuni devotion lacked a vision of a Śākyamuni who possessed both these credentials. The *Lotus Sūtra*, for example, says nothing about Śākyamuni's original vow. And while it provides the reader or listener with guarantees that praising the *Lotus Sūtra* will result in a plethora of boons, it presents no vision of a salvific Śākyamuni who intervenes to save us. Furthermore, it is only the people who praise the *Lotus Sūtra* who will benefit. This is quite different from the *Hikekyō*, which paints a picture of a salvific figure who does not discriminate between those who have praised the *Hikekyō* and those who have not. Further highlighting the salvific nature of Śākyamuni is the *Hikekyō*'s claim that Śākyamuni will save people during a time of crisis. The *Lotus Sūtra*, in contrast, completely lacks this link between salvation and a time of crisis.

The fact that these two features—the original vow and a salvific character—had come to be seen as integral to the figure of a great buddha via a century-and-a-half focus on Amida meant that any alternative to Amida was going to have to exhibit these two features if it was going to command the attention of Jōkei's contemporaries.

Jōkei uses the story of Hōkai in particular to emphasize that Śākyamuni is unique and superior vis-à-vis other buddhas because he was the only one with compassion great enough to overcome an aversion to this defiled world. This view places Śākyamuni at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In addition, Jōkei's appropriation of the story is used to point out that Śākyamuni is unique in the realm of human-buddha relationships because he is the one who chose to come save us, who chose to be the buddha of a defiled world. This intimate link between humans and this world means that we should prefer Śākyamuni to other possible objects of worship.

Jōkei's emphasis on Śākyamuni's unique character is made clear in his *Tōshōdaiji Shaka nenbutsu ganmon* 唐招提寺釈迦念仏願文, a liturgical work he penned in 1202 as the liturgy for the Shaka nenbutsu e ritual that he held at Tōshōdaiji in the autumn of the following year. In this text Jōkei explains Śākyamuni's decision to be born among the likes of us.

The [other] buddhas did not appear but rather rejected this *sahā* world characterized by the ten vices. In this final [age] sentient beings find it difficult to release themselves from their addictions. Only our main teacher—Śākyamuni Tathāgata—roams this intolerable land. He alone saves these stubborn beings. His great compassion is such that he takes pity on even the most evil. His principle vow is to help this defiled world.

Śākyamuni's blessings and virtues are great: [one] cannot even begin to describe their origin. Thus, although the waves of the Irāvātī [River, next to which Śākyamuni entered *parinirvāṇa*,] are far away, my tears of love wet my sleeve. The firewood [for Śākyamuni's funeral pyre] in the *śāla*

grove was quickly consumed by fire, and yet my thoughts of adoration [for the Buddha continue to] burn in my chest. (DBZ 49: 77a4–9)

This, then, is the *Hikekyō* story about Hōkai and tells us that Śākyamuni alone chose this world. This passage also depicts Jōkei's yearnings for the Buddha. While Jōkei's confessions of grief never matched those of his contemporary Myōe, he clearly found his temporal distance from Śākyamuni lamentable.

More important to Jōkei than Śākyamuni's superior compassion, though, was the fact that he is the buddha to whom we should direct our attention. In another passage of the *Ganmon* we read:

The merits of the various buddhas in the ten directions are equal. The world of the three jewels is not far away. Although one may fear undertaking this practice and first debate the relative value [of this practice], and fight with other groups [about it], this amounts to slander. So how should one choose? In fact, when you compare [the buddhas, you shall see that] Śākyamuni is this world's loving father and compassionate mother, is this epoch's teacher. (DBZ 49: 77b16–20)

These passages constitute an appeal to pragmatism and reason. Śākyamuni is the buddha of this world and thus the one to whom we should turn, runs the argument.

Considered together, the writings cited here demonstrate that the *Hikekyō* was important to Jōkei for at least two reasons. First, the sūtra's celebration of Śākyamuni as superior to all other Buddhist divinities gave Jōkei justification for turning towards Śākyamuni (and perhaps away from Amida). Of course Śākyamuni is also the central figure in the *Lotus Sūtra*. But as already mentioned, the *Lotus Sūtra* was concerned first and foremost with its own textual existence, not with Śākyamuni. In contrast, the *Hikekyō* is Śākyamuni-centric through and through.

Second, the *Hikekyō* demonstrated the strength of Śākyamuni's ties to this defiled world. The importance of this feature of the sūtra cannot be overstated, as this relationship provided Jōkei a link to Śākyamuni and thus to the Buddhist past. While some Japanese attempted to connect to Śākyamuni by planning voyage to India (e.g., Myōe), and others did so through the creation of lineages that linked the present to the Buddha through some number of patriarchs, Jōkei established this connection through attention to Śākyamuni's vow, made *kalpas* ago during his life as the minister Hōkai.

Turning to relics and their soteriological function, in the *Hikekyō* relics, rather than being a passive field of merit, are described as actively carrying out the salvific work of buddhas (*butsuji* 仏事), often in the form of wish-fulfilling jewels. Thus they serve a vital soteriological function for those in a world without a buddha. In one scene the buddha Hōzō tells Hōkai what will happen after his final death:

After your final passing [during your life as Śākyamini], the true Dharma will last for a full thousand years. When the true Dharma disappears, your relics, in accordance with your vow, will undertake the salvific work of buddhas, enduring in this world for a great length of time and benefiting sentient beings. (T 157, 3:218c10–c13)

Elsewhere, Hōkai himself makes explicit the link between relics and the spiritual well-being of sentient beings born into a world without a buddha:

After my final passing my relics will lead sentient beings and cause them to attain perfect

awakening. These sentient beings will, after a number of incalculable eons equal to the number of grains of sand in one thousand Ganges rivers, become buddhas in a countless number of worlds and come out into the world. They will all intone my name and praise me. (T 157, 3:212a 26–b1)

The passages quoted here leave no doubt as to the *Hikekyō*'s view that relics serve an important soteriological function after the death of the Buddha.

While Jōkei's devotion to relics was in no way unusual for his time, his focus on Śākyamuni's original vow indicates the influence of the *Hikekyō* on his thinking. In his *Seigan shari kōshiki*, Jōkei states:

The Buddha's primary vow (*hongan* 本願) says, "After my final passing, my relics will transform and guide sentient beings, fostering in them the aspiration to supreme awakening. When these sentient beings become buddhas and appear in the worlds in the ten directions, they will all call out my name and praise me." Furthermore, [the sūtra] explains that "in the distant past there was a buddha, a world-honored one, named Śākyamuni. That buddha's relics performed various miracles for our sake. It is for that reason that we aroused the desire for awakening and now have awakened." (JKS: 8, lines 20–25)

Just like the *Hikekyō*, Jōkei is here saying that it is relics that allow sentient beings to embark on the Buddhist path, that is, to arouse *bodaishin*. Elsewhere Jōkei identifies relics as the vehicle by which sentient beings establish a karmic connection (*en* 縁) with the Buddha. This is similar to the *Hikekyō*'s portrayal of relics as the vehicle by which one can access the Buddha after his death.

This emphasis on relics as agents of salvation appears to be a result of influence from the *Hikekyō*, for no other scripture that might have served as a basis for devotion to Śākyamuni held a similar view of relics. The *Lotus Sūtra*, for example, contains many exhortations to worship Śākyamuni's relics, but never depicts them as actively salvific in the way that the *Hikekyō* does. And esoteric Buddhist theories about relics, which probably constituted the dominant view of relics in medieval Japan, interpreted them either as wish-fulfilling jewels or as a manifestation of the *dharmakāya*, that is, as an earthly manifestation of the Buddha's cosmic, eternal form. None of these sources depict the relics as taking an active role in saving sentient beings.

Poetic License: the 500 Vows and Śākyamuni as *daimyōjin*

Here I want to turn from specific individuals to the first of the two trends I mentioned above. This is the enumeration of Hōkai's "500 vows" from the *Hikekyō*. (I shall address the attribution to the *Hikekyō* of the idea that Śākyamuni will appear in Japan as a *daimyōjin* during the time of *mappō* below.)

The most representative work here is the *Shaka nyorai gohyaku daigan* (*kyō*) 釈迦如来五百大願(經), a work from the early twelfth or late eleventh century (Iwagami 2010). The *Gohyaku daigan* is essentially a list of the 500 vows. Each vow begins with "vow number X" and is followed by a description of the action that Śākyamuni is vowing to undertake in the future, after which he says that if he does not succeed in fulfilling this vow that he will not achieve full awakening. This enumeration

is based on a literal interpretation of the motif of Hōkai’s 500 vows; as previously noted, in the *Hikekyō* itself “500” simply means “a lot.” However, the *Gohyaku daigan* is entirely faithful to the content of the *Hikekyō*, and each vow is based on some line in the *Hikekyō*.¹ It is as if someone went through the *Hikekyō*, elaborating and creating corresponding vows as he went.

If the *Gohyaku daigan* was created by going through the *Hikekyō* and turning its contents into a list with some elaboration, then the reverse process was undertaken in the case of a manuscript of the *Hikekyō* in the Shōgozō 聖語藏 collection at Tōdaiji. In this manuscript, red numbers have been added to the text to indicate which line corresponds to which vow in the *Gohyaku daigan* (Iwagami 2010). The existence of such a text is a further indication of the interest in this text.²

Although the *Gohyaku daigan* (and the 1134 *Shaka nyorai shaku*, which quotes extensively from the *Gohyaku daigan*) employ the 500-vow motif to an extent not found elsewhere, there are many other works that made reference to the *Hikekyō* and refer to the “500 vows” or list specific vows (e.g., Ōe no Chikamichi’s *Issai sharira shū* 一切設利羅集 [by 1151], *Hōbutsushū* [c. 1179], Dōgen’s *Shōbō genzō*).

While some later attributions to the *Hikekyō* of this or that vow sometimes strayed from the content of the *Hikekyō*, works that enumerated Hōkai’s vows maintained a fidelity to the *Hikekyō* that is at odds with what we see in Japanese *chūsei shinwa*, in which stories are fabricated almost entirely anew. The second phenomenon I mentioned, however—the attribution to the *Hikekyō* of the idea that Śākyamuni will appear as a *daimyōjin* in the final age—is a different matter altogether.

The attribution in question usually appears as the following phrase: “In the *Hikekyō*, [Śākyamuni states that], ‘After my final passing, during [the time of] *mappō*, I will appear as a *daimyōjin* and save sentient beings far and wide’.”³ However, the term *daimyōjin* appears neither in the *Hikekyō* nor in any related, contemporaneous work.

The term *daimyōjin* developed from the terms *myōjin* 名神 and *myōjin* 明神, which were originally used to denote a shrine (or deity housed therein) of a high and specific rank. Imahori (1990) argues that the term *daimyōjin* was only used to refer to a manifestation of a buddha or bodhisattva (a “living buddha”; *shōjin no hotoke* 生身の仏) after the advent of *mappō* in 1052. Although prior to this there were appearances of the term, in such cases the character *dai* 大 was simply honorific.

This changed with the new understanding of *daimyōjin*, which entailed the idea that one requests not simply aid to achieve the Buddhist soteriological goal, but rather salvation itself directly from the *myōjin*; this logically follows from the fact that the *myōjin* in question is thought to be none other than a provisional manifestation of this or that buddha or bodhisattva. In short, Imahori is identifying the advent of *mappō* in Japan as the stage of development of the *honji suijaku* theoretical framework when *kami* were no longer simply sentient beings charged with protecting the Buddha-dharma but rather were manifestations of buddha and bodhisattvas. The use of *daimyōjin* as a term to denote

¹ All references to are to Sueki’s transcription (2001–2004).

² While the extant scholarship on the *Gohyaku daigan* usually assumes it to be a Japanese creation, Sueki Fumihiko (2000: 67) found that in China there are many other “*besshōkyō*” 別生經 based on the *Hikekyō*—that is, modified extracts from the *Hikekyō* that function as independent sūtras—and that two of these are very similar to the *Gohyaku daigan*, a fact that leads him to suspect that the *Gohyaku daigan* is in fact a Chinese creation.

³ 悲華經云、我滅度後、於末法中、現大明神、広度衆生

suijaku deities must be understood in this context.

As early as the early nineteenth century the attribution of the phrase to the *Hikekyō* was recognized by Hirata Atsutane as inaccurate.⁴ While the origins of the phrase are not clear, Misaki Ryōshū (1961) has argued that it was either a corruption and transformation of a phrase from the *Dai darani mappōchū ichiji shinju kyō* 大陀羅尼末法中一字心呪經⁵ or from lines found in the *Daijōhi pundari kyō* 大乘悲分陀利經, a text that is so similar to the *Hikekyō* that some scholars simply regard it as an alternative translation of the *Karuṇapūṇḍarīka Sūtra* (i.e., *Hikekyō*). Both these works share in common with the *Hikekyō* the idea that after Śākyamuni's final passing, during the final age of the Dharma, Śākyamuni's relics will transform into a body, perform miracles, and save sentient beings. These ideas, Misaki argues, formed the basis for the phrase. In contrast, Imahori Taitso (1990) suggests that the first two lines of the phrase in question ("After my final passing, in the time of *mappō*") come from the *Lotus Sūtra*.⁶ The origin of the latter two lines ("I shall appear as a *daimyōjin* and save sentient beings far and wide"), on the other hand, is less clear, but they do appear in a number of Heian and Kamakura-period works (e.g., *Ryōjin hishō*).

The first extant source in which the phrase appears and is attributed to the *Hikekyō* is the *Chūkōsen* 注好選, a late eleventh or early twelfth-century *setsuwa* collection.⁷ This is in fact very close to the earliest extant textual appearance of a buddha or bodhisattva as *daimyōjin*, which is the appearance of Kannon as a *daimyōjin* in Ōe no Masafusa's *Honchō shinsen den* 本朝神仙伝 (c. 1098?).⁸ This suggests that Śākyamuni qua *daimyōjin* was one of the first instances of a buddha or bodhisattva appearing as a salvific *daimyōjin*.⁹

The Larger Historical Context

In the Japanese reception of the *Hikekyō* we see that Śākyamuni was portrayed as a salvational

⁴ Hirata Atsutane *zenshū* 1: 44b5–8.

⁵ "After my final passing, when my relics have spread (or been distributed), [I will] hide the [eight] major marks and [thirty-two] minor marks [of my body]. [The relics] will [then] transform into a body and perform this spell." 我滅度之後、分布舍利已當隱諸相好、變身為此呪。 See Misaki 1992: 279.

⁶ Imahori (183) notes that people such as Saichō and Nichiren held the belief, widespread during the Heian period, that the *Lotus Sūtra* was considered to be the most appropriate scripture for the time of *mappō*. A belief in *mappō* would thus lead to increased popularity of the sūtra, while an increase in popularity would in turn reinforce the idea that the final age had arrived.

⁷ *SNKBT* 31: 346.

⁸ *NST* 7: 259 (tale no. 4).

⁹ Nomura Takumi (2005). The *Yōtenki* 耀天記 (c. 1223) and *Enryakuji gokoku engi* 延曆寺護国縁起 are also important works for understanding the use of the *Hikekyō* on Mt. Hiei; I do not go into these examples here for the sake of brevity.

figure. This was relatively new in Japanese Buddhism. Prior to the late Heian period Amida and Kannon were the two Buddhist figures most commonly seen as able to provide salvation. And while this continued during the period that I examine, the new interest in Śākyamuni and the new vision of Śākyamuni as both capable of saving us and as being historical (in the sense of being embedded in time) should be understood in light of contemporaneous trends. Here, then, I want to first sketch early views of Śākyamuni in Japan (so that we can see how the *Hikekyō* and medieval vision of Śākyamuni differed), and then discuss, first, the new sense of history that rendered the *Hikekyō*'s vision of Śākyamuni attractive, and, second, the emergence of *chūsei shinwa*, a trend that in part helps us make sense of the idea of Śākyamuni as a *daimyōjin*.

— *Early depictions of Śākyamuni in Japanese Buddhism* —

Until at least the early Nara period, Śākyamuni was prayed to primarily for this-worldly benefits and for the benefit of one's parents (both while they were alive and after they had passed away.) This emphasis on filial piety makes early Japanese devotion to Śākyamuni similar to that found in Nanbeichao (420–589) and Sui (581–618) China: in either case it was a means of expressing and acting upon one's filial piety (Hiraoka 1972: 266). Early state-centric uses of Śākyamuni include the creation of a Shaka statue for the deceased emperor Jitō 持統 in 722 and the proliferation of Shaka statues as the central icon in the *kokubunji* 国分寺 temples established by Shōmu 聖武 (701–756; r. 724–749).

Besides these uses of Śākyamuni, neither of which appear to be of great importance in early Japanese Buddhism, prior to the late Heian-period there seem to be two distinct Śākyamunis: the Śākyamuni of narrative and the Śākyamuni of doctrine. The Śākyamuni of narrative is found in *jātaka* tales (*honjōtan* 本生譚) and hagiographies. *Jātaka* tales relate isolated incidents from a distant past, isolated in that there is no attempt to fill in the temporal gap separating the previous life being described and the Buddha's final life, as Siddhārtha. An early example would be the images appearing on the two sides of the Tamamushi no zushi at Hōryūji. In contrast, hagiographies of Śākyamuni tell of the prince's final life, his career as the Buddha, and the event surrounding his final passing. Two early examples include the 711 clay diorama of the *parinirvāṇa* scene nestled inside the northern face of the central pillar of the five-tiered pagoda at Hōryūj and similar dioramas depicting the eight scenes of Śākyamuni's life that once existed in the central pillars of the three-tiered east and west pagodas of Yakushiji, built in 730 (Donohashi 1988: 18–20; Watanabe 2012: 42–47). More influential than these early representations, however, was the *Sūtra of Past and Present Cause and Effect* (*Kako genzai inga kyō* 過去現在因果經) and the illustrated scrolls based on it, the *Illustrated Sūtra of Cause and Effect* (*Eingakyō* 絵因果經).

In contrast, what I am call the Śākyamuni of doctrine is the transcendent Śākyamuni of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* and *Lotus Sūtra*, or, alternatively, the omnipresent Śākyamuni of *hongaku* theories. In the sixteenth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* we learn that the Buddha's death was but a trick—an instance of skilful means—undertaken for the benefit of sentient beings. Although the *Lotus Sūtra* never explicitly states that the buddha Śākyamuni exists eternally, this is the implication. This vision of a binary Śākyamuni and the revelation that the buddha of ancient India was but a provisional manifestation—an act of deception motivated by compassion—was reinforced by Tiantai exegeses that identified the Śākyamuni of the former half of the *Lotus Sūtra* as the provisionally manifested Buddha (*shakubutsu* 迹仏), and he of the latter half (i.e., the immortal Śākyamuni) as the main, or original, Buddha (*honbutsu* 本仏).

The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is far more explicit about Śākyamuni's eternal nature (Blum 2013: xvii). While the *Lotus Sūtra* came to be more influential in Japan than the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (possibly because the latter scripture did not serve as the central text for any particular institution or school in Japan), its influence can be seen in both Japanese Buddhist art and in Buddhist thought. The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*'s ideas concerning buddha nature (*busshō* 仏性), *icchantikas* (*issendai* 一闍提), the immortality of the Buddha, and the *parinirvāṇa* were central concerns throughout most of Japanese Buddhist intellectual history. In his *Nihon ryōiki*, Keikai 景戒 quotes extensively from the sūtra, as well as from Chinese commentaries on it (Ishii 1999). To give another early example, in the famous debate between Saichō and Tokuitsu, although Saichō's arguments were ostensibly based on the *Lotus Sūtra*, the fact of the matter is that the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*'s theories about buddhanature partly constituted the foundation for his views (Sueki 2010: 113).

Although the death of the Buddha can be viewed as one event within the life of the Buddha, and thus as one element of the Buddha's biography, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*'s focus on the *parinirvāṇa* serves not as the backdrop for a discussion of Śākyamuni's life and deeds, but rather as point of departure for a discussion of the Buddha's true nature. It is thus during his final moments that we learn that he is in fact eternal. Were the sūtra to situate the death in the context of the Buddha's biography, we might see the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*'s Śākyamuni as another instance of the narrative Śākyamuni. But the point here is precisely the opposite: while the sūtra itself is a narrative, the lesson is that Śākyamuni transcends the narrative of history, for he is eternal. In this way, the Shaka of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, like that of the *Lotus Sūtra*, is ahistorical.

One other factor that appears to have reinforced the idea of an eternal Shaka (what I am calling the Shaka of doctrine) is the conflation of Śākyamuni and Dainichi Nyorai. In his *Kongōchō daikyō kyōsho* 金剛頂大教王經疏, Ennin (794–864) writes, "The ācārya [Yuanzheng 元政] of the Great Tang Daxingshansi temple said, 'That Buddha of the Lotus [Sūtra] who awakened so long ago is simply Vairocana Buddha of this sūtra.'"¹⁰ In a similar vein, Enchin (814–891) states in his *Daihizō yuga ki* 大悲藏喻伽記 that Dainichi and Shaka are but one: "Originally [there is but] one Buddha; it is not the case that there are two bodies. However, according to [one's] karmic capacity [one mistakenly perceives] that there is a difference."¹¹

The point here is that neither the Śākyamuni of hagiography nor the Śākyamuni of doctrine was historical or a source of salvation. While the narrative Śākyamuni of hagiography and *jātaka* tales is thought of as existing in the past, and thus a temporal relationship to s/he who hears, reads, or sees the narrative is implied, there is no "line"—a link or series of links that can be known—connecting Śākyamuni-in-the-past to the present. In other words, there is no continuity between the past of Shaka's hagiography and the present, even if there is a temporal relationship. Histories such as Gyōnen's *Sangoku buppō denzū engi* (1311) and *Kokan Shiren's Genkō shakusho* (1322) are organized around genealogies that link people alive in the present to Śākyamuni of India through a series of individuals and transmissions. In these works Śākyamuni is within historical time if by historical time we mean a period during which some number of links can connect all actors and events contained within that period. Śākyamuni of hagiography, and especially Śākyamuni of the *jātaka* tales, is much farther back in the past. There is thus something akin to what Jan M. Vansina (1985: 24) has called a floating gap here between the Japan of the present and the bodhisattva or Śākyamuni, in so far as there is no account of what specifically happens between the Buddha's time and the arrival

¹⁰ T 2223, 61.39b14–16

¹¹ DBZ 27: 955c.

of Buddhism in Japan. Japanese would have to wait for the rise of Buddhist historiography in the form of the *Gukanshō* and the aforementioned works by Gyōnen and Shiren for that floating gap to be filled (in the form of genealogies). This distance effectively puts *jātaka* tales and Śākyamuni's life as the earthly buddha in the realm of what I will call mythical time: a past that is relevant to the present but separated by a temporal gap of immeasurable length. It is in this way that the Śākyamuni of narrative is ahistorical: there is no traceable continuity.

As for Śākyamuni in his capacity as a striving bodhisattva in the past, he was not a figure who would sweep down to save humans in distress. Instead, he was a figure either to be worshipped or to be emulated. Alternatively, he also served as a reminder of how long and difficult the Buddhist path is, and he also reminds us why we should be grateful to the buddha: because Śākyamuni went through so many trials and tribulations for us. This is in distinct contrast to the Śākyamuni of the *Hikekyō* and theories about Śākyamuni-cum-*daimyōjin*, which portray the Buddha as a salvational figure who chose this world in order to save us, and who will come back when we are most in need of his beneficence.

The Śākyamuni of doctrine is also ahistorical, but here simply because he transcends time and thus history. The *Lotus Sūtra* and *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*'s Śākyamuni is transcendent and eternal, while when Śākyamuni is merged with Dainichi Nyorai in the context of *hongaku* thought he is omnipresent but in no way historical or bound by time and place.

— Sangoku and a New Sense of History —

In this way, neither the Śākyamuni of the classical sutras so important to Japanese Buddhism's formative centuries nor the Śākyamuni appearing in *jātaka* tales and hagiography was portrayed as belonging to ancient India and therefore as being historical.

However, an early shift in views of Śākyamuni can be seen in the famous Śākyamuni statue at Seiryōji in Kyoto, brought back from China by Chōnen in 985. Indeed, the statue itself is referred to as the *sangoku denrai no Shaka* 三国伝来釈迦. The view that the statue was a living statue—a *shōjin butsu*—also gives this Śākyamuni an historical quality that is in marked contrast to the eternal Buddha found in the *Lotus Sūtra* and *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*. Although in the twelfth century *Seiryōji* became an important center for *yūzū nenbutsu* practice, the importance of the Seiryōji Śākyamuni as the (or a) Buddha who had come from distant India and who provided a tangible link to the original land of the Buddha's dispensation remained strong throughout the late Heian period, a clear case of this being the description of the Seiryōji Shakazō found in the *Hōbutsushū* 宝物集 (c. 1179).

The idea of *sangoku* is mentioned as early as 819, in Saichō's *Naishō buppō sōshō keshimyaku fū*. It was in the late Heian period, however, that *sangoku* became the dominant worldview, thus replacing the previous Japan-China dichotomy with the India-China-Japan schema (Abe 2012; Maeda 2008). This situation would remain largely unchanged until the arrival of Portuguese Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century.

The *sangoku* worldview has both a temporal facet—history as the transmission of Buddhism over time—and a spatial one—India as the center, with Japan at the world's periphery. The spatial facet is given full expression in the *gotenjūzū* 五天竺圖 map at Hōryūji (1364), in which a gigantic India sits at the center while Japan is depicted as a tiny archipelago in the upper right hand corner of the map. Certainly it is true that not all Japanese monks were concerned with the historical and geographical distance that the *sangoku* model implied. But there were enough worried monks that the

idea of Japan as a *zokusanhenji* 粟散辺地, or, to put it colloquially, a backwater, became a common trope (Sueki 1993: 110f). It was precisely this anxiety about the distance from India and from Śākyamuni that led some to turn to the historical Buddha.

— *The Japanese Reception of the Hikekyō in light of Chūsei Shinwa* —

While this new sense of history in part explains the focus on Śākyamuni, the idea of Śākyamuni as a *daimyōjin* should also be seen in light of *chūsei shinwa* (medieval mythology).

Chūsei shinwa are those myths that were based on *kodai shinwa* (primarily those appearing in the *Nihon shoki*) but were in fact entirely new creations (Saitō 2012: 45). Besides referring to the myths themselves, though, *chūsei shinwa* refers to the process whereby, during the medieval period, the *honji suijaku* relationships that developed during the Heian period were used as a basis for fabricating new myths. One important characteristic of this trend was that, like medieval commentaries, these new myths were collectively authored/compiled works (Komine 2002).

Of course unlike many of these new myths, the idea that Śākyamuni will appear as a *daimyōjin* is in some sense in accord with the message of the *Hikekyō*, seeing that this sūtra spells out how Śākyamuni will save us in the future. However, where a clear analogy can be seen is the use of a scripture as a point of authority for a particular idea or set of ideas. In the case of *Chūsei Nihongi*, the *Nihongi* became a symbol of sorts—an authority to which one could refer to make a number of related assertions. And the misattribution to the *Hikekyō* follows a similar logic. The *Hikekyō* became representative of the idea that Śākyamuni (and *not* Amida) was our man and would come to our aid. Thus people could attribute such ideas to the *Hikekyō* without in any way feeling that they were being unfaithful to the *Hikekyō* itself.

Final Thoughts: So why the Hikekyō?

As a closing thought I want to point out that if we think about what types of narratives humans find satisfying, then the reasons why some Japanese found the *Hikekyō* and its message attractive are more easily discerned. The individuals and texts that I examine turned to Śākyamuni in an attempt to reconnect with what they perceived to be the origin of their tradition, which in this case was the Indian Buddha. While a number of scriptural sources existed in which Śākyamuni played a central role, the people and texts that I have mentioned here looked to the *Hikekyō* as a basis for their promotion of Śākyamuni because the *Hikekyō* connected them to Śākyamuni in the past, present, *and* future: not only did this scripture affirm the strength of the relationship between human beings in this world and Śākyamuni in his former life as the minister Hōkai, thereby connecting them to the Buddhist past, but it also explained how Śākyamuni, in the form of relics, was here in the present (thus connecting them with Śākyamuni in the present) *and* it promised that Śākyamuni would return to save them at some point in the future.

In any attempt to (re)connect with ones perceived origins, this simultaneous connection to both past and future is of central importance, for what one is doing in such an instance is creating a narrative, and research on narrative tells us that narrative necessarily has an end, or some sense of finitude (e.g., Gottschall 2012; Bruner 2003).¹²

¹² Steve Collins (1998: 124–133) shows how even in the world of the Pali texts *nirvāṇa* functions as a symbol of

The type of narrative thinking that I am addressing in this case is essentially a type of historical consciousness, that is, a thought process whereby one establishes relations between temporally-distinguished periods or entities. And the people and texts mentioned here chose the *Hikekyō* precisely because it presented them with a set of relationships between past (Śākyamuni), present (human beings living in the world after the passing of the Buddha and during a time of decline), and future (a salvific Śākyamuni returning to the world in the form of relics) that meaningfully tied them to Śākyamuni in a way that previous worship of the *Lotus Sūtra* and Śākyamuni-centered state rites had not. In this way, in a period characterized by a new sense of history and a distant Buddha, it was the *Hikekyō* that provided a satisfying narrative.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Chūkōsen. SNKBT 31.

Daihizō yuga ki. DBZ 27.

finitude despite the fact the doctrinally speaking there is nothing finite about *nirvāṇa*.

Hikekyō. T 157 (vol. 3).

Honchō shinsen den. Nihon shisō taiki 7.

Kongōchō daikyōō kyōsho. T 2223.

Seigan shari kōshiki. Jōkei kōshiki shū, pp. 7–16.

Shaka nyorai gohyaku daigan (kyō). Transcribed in Sueki 2001–2004.

Tōshōdaiji Shaka nenbutsu ganmon. DBZ 49.

Secondary Sources

Abe Yasurō. “Chūsei Nihon no sekaizō.” In *Nihon shisōshi kōza 2: chūsei*, Karube Tadashi et al., eds., 27–74. Tokyo: Perikansha, 2012.

Blum, Mark. *The Nirvana Sūtra: Volume 1*. Honolulu: U of Hawai'i Press, 2013.

Bruner, Jerome. “The Narrative Construction of Reality.” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 1–21.

Collins, Steven. *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1988.

Donohashi Akio and Koezuka Takashi. “Shaka shinkō no isan.” *Nihon no Bijutsu* 267 (1988): 86–96.

Gottschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories make us Human*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

Hiraoka Jōkai. “Nara jidai ni okeru Shaka shinkō ni tsuite: Tōdaiji daibutsu no zōken to Shaka shinkō no kankei.” In *Akamatsu Toshihide Kyōju taikan kinen kokushi ronshū*, ed. Akamatsu Toshihide Kyōju Taikan Kinen Jigyōkai, 261–280. Kyoto: Akamatsu Toshihide Kyōju Taikan Kinen Jigyōkai, 1972.

Ikegami Jun'ichi. “Tōdaiji toshokanzō *Shakanyorai shaku*: kaisetsu to honkoku.” *Bunkagaku nenpō* 16 (1997): 111–160.

Imahori Taitsu. *Jingi shinkō no tenkai to Bukkyō*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1990.

Ishii Kōsei. “Nihon ryōiki ni okeru Nehankyō no igi.” *Komazawa tanki daigaku Bukkyō ronshū* 5 (1999): 19–37.

Iwagami Kazunori. “*Hikekyō* kara *Shaka nyorai gohyakudaigan kyō* e.” In *Kitabatake Tensei hakushi koki ki'nen ronbun shū: Nihon Bukkyō bunka ronsō*, ed. Kitabatake Tensei hakushi koki ki'nen ronbunshū kankō kai, 723–738. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1998.

———. “*Hikekyō no senkō kenkyū gaikan.*” *Masashino daigaku Bukkyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 26 (2010): 1–42.

———. “Shōsōin Shōgozō bon Don Musen yaku *Hikekyō ni mirareru shuhitsu no kaki ire ni tsuite.*” *Indo tetsugaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 17 (2010): 73–96.

Komine Kazuaki. *Setsuwa no gensetsu: chūsei no hyōgen to rekishi jojutsu*. Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2002.

Maeda Masayuki. “Sangokukan”. In *Konjaku monogatari shū o yomu*, ed. Komine Kazuaki, 118–140. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2008.

Misaki Ryōshū. “Shinbutsu shūgō shisō to *Hikekyō*”. *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 9, no. 1 (1961): 16–21.

Nomura Takumi. *Chūsei Bukkyō setsuwa ronkō*. Osaka: Izumi Shoin, 2005.

Saitō Hideki. *Araburu Susanoo, shichi henka chūsei shinwa no sekai*. Tokyo: Kodakawa Bunkan, 2012.

Sueki Fumihiko. “Kōzanji shōzō *Shaka Nyorai gohyaku daigan* no honkoku kenkyū: ichi” (1, 2, 3, 4). In *Heisei jūni nendo Kōzanji tenshi monjo sōgō chōsadan kenkyū hōkoku ronshū*, ed. Kōzanji Tenseki Monjo Sōgō Chōsadan, 23–40, 85–98, 15–26, 29–47, respectively. Tokyo: Kōzanji Tenseki Monjo Sōgō Chōsadan, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 respectively.

———. “Nihon Bukkyō no *Nehankyō*”. *Daihōrin* 77, no. 2 (2010): 110–114.

———. “*Shakamuni nyorai gohyaku hongan kōtoku hōmonkyō kaidai.*” In *Nanatsudera koitsukyōten kenkyū sōsho* 5: Chūgoku Nihon senjutsu kyōten (sono go), senjutsusho, eds. Makita Tairyō (chief ed.) and Ochiai Toshinori (volume ed.), 25–56. Tokyo: Daitō Shuppan, 2000.

Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Watanabe Satoshi. *Butsudenzu ronkō*. Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 2012