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Biography as Scripture
Ōjōden in India, China, and Japan

Records of individuals who achieved rebirth in the pure land of Amitābha Buddha began as a genre of hagiography in eighth-century China and began appearing in Japan in the late tenth century. Thereafter these *ōjōden* were produced repeatedly throughout Japanese history in greater numbers than in China, and came to function as a form of prooftext for the establishment of the Pure Land school. Focusing on an apocryphal Indian *ōjōden* created in the late Heian period, this paper evaluates the form and content of *ōjōden* as a unique genre of Japanese religious literature exhibiting influences from monastic bibliography, miracle texts, and the category of *adbhutadharma* in Indian Buddhist literature.

keywords: *ōjōden* — hagiography — biography — miracles — *setsuwa* — Hōnen — China — India — Heian

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It goes without saying that the literature of biography and its elaborate cousin hagiography play an important role in all religious traditions. A well-functioning religious system has many needs to provide for its community. One of those needs is to produce and maintain personal narratives that support that religion's messages. In this paper I will consider the role of a unique form of biographical narratives known in Japanese Buddhism by the rubric *ōjōden* 往生伝, or biographies of people known to have attained a special rebirth outside *saṃsāra* known as *ōjō*, rendered here as "Birth," in which one has reached the paradisic Pure Land of the Buddha Amida (Amitābha/Amitāyus). Within this genre, special attention will be given to a little-known text from the late Heian period called *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* 天竺往生験記 [Miraculous accounts of Birth in the Pure Land in India, ZJZ vol. 16, 337], which forms a rather unusual example of Birth stories located in India. After a brief overview of the history of *ōjōden* and discussion of how they might be studied, I will show how this particular Indian *ōjōden* is both typical and atypical of the genre, and what it suggests about the nature of the genre itself.

The term *ōjōden* should perhaps be called properly *ōjō-nin-den* 往生人伝 because for all their depictions of the specific events of an individual's experience of *ōjō*, the format is generally predicated on the frame of a biographical statement about individuals whose piety/diligence/praxis resulted in this specific religious attainment. While some refer to this form of soteriology as *grace,* the stories one encounters in the *ōjōden* genre suggest another religious paradigm, for they always link *ōjō* to praxis of one sort or another. The stories in *ōjōden* may seem utterly imaginary or extremely mundane, and in combining these two aspects many resemble the magico-realism of contemporary South American literature. But in general they typically blend both the didactic and the doctrinal, mixing historiographic and hagiographic information in a way that skillfully brings the ideals of religion into the lives of what appears to be historical persons, and indeed many of the individuals are well-known historical personages. There are exceptions, however, because even though we know that the compilers of these texts often knew many of the people of whom they wrote and chose as exemplars of shared religious ideals, we also have examples of complete fiction purporting to do the same thing, as I will show below.

I cannot do justice to the rich heritage of this literature in China and Japan in the space available and bemoan the fact that no complete translation of any of these works has as yet been published. The following, somewhat limited discussion, is an attempt to come to terms with the the nature of the genre itself, asking

why it arose, what motivating factors can we discern in its authors or compilers, why it persisted into the modern period, and where should this genre fit in to our general understanding of Buddhist literature in a Japanese cultural context.

Historical Overview of Ōjōden

The idea of broad, inclusive biographical compendiums is essentially a Chinese rather than an Indian conception, the most famous being the *Kōsōden,* or *Gaosengzhuan* [Biographies of eminent monks, T 50.322], the first of which was completed by Huijiao in 519 during the Liang dynasty. Even earlier, according to tradition, the *Fufazang yinyuan chuan (*Record of the transmission of the Dharma collection*,* T 50.297), with its twenty-three biographies of prominent Indian Buddhist leaders was cited as an Indian precedent of this genre, and the *Kaiyuanlu* lists three translations of this text into Chinese around 475. In presenting its biographies in the form of a succession of Sangha leaders, this work supplied an authoritative statement of the presence of a patriarchal lineage in Indian Buddhism for the Tiantai and Chan traditions, providing Indian precedence for the creation of their own lineages during the Song. Mochizuki Shinkō has argued that the *Fufazang yinyuan chuan* was probably written in China during the Northern Wei period,[1] but what is often overlooked is that one of the earliest exegetes to cite it is Tanluan 曇鸞 (J. Donran, 476–542, see his *Jingtulun chu,* at T 1819, 40.826c12), born and raised under the Northern Wei, an early patriarch in the Pure Land tradition, and active long before Zhiyi 智顗 (J. Chigi, 538–597), for example. In other words, the value of patriarchal biography as lineage was also appreciated by Pure Land thinkers, and lineage charts of Pure Land patriarchs were created in the Song dynasty that mimic those of the Tiantai, Chan, and Huayan schools.[2] In Japan, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries we find similar notions of patriarchal lineage for the Pure Land tradition stretching from India to Japan attributed to Hōnen and Shinran, and the great Kamakura-period historian Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321) discusses several possible configurations in his 1311 *Jōdo hōmon genrushō* [Origins and development of the Pure Land Dharma Gate*,* T 84.192; see BLUM 2002, 181–95].

But while diachronic presentations of biographies of eminent masters serve to create the sectarian persona of a patriarchal lineage, in the *gaosengzhuan* model biographies of Sangha heroes are organized not by their historical sequence but by their achievements, such as translation work, interpretation of scripture, diligence in practice or monasticism, preaching, and so forth. Although the *ōjōden*

1. See MOCHIZUKI 1909–1916, 5.4494–4495. Mochizuki guesses that it was created under the supervision of Tanyao 曇曜 (n.d.), a central figure in the rebuilding of Buddhism under the Northern Wei after the persecution of 446–452 who served as something like "minister of the Sangha" 沙門統 from 460 and until nearly the end of the century.

2. See Dan Getz, "T'ien-t'ai Pure Land Societies and the Creation of the Pure Land Patriarchate," in GREGORY and GETZ 1999, 477–523.

genre, initially created in China where it is called *wangshengzhuan,* typically organizes the biographies diachronically, it does not imply any notion of patriarchal lineage that requires, in its own mythical conception, direct transmission from generation to generation. Beginning with the seventh-century *Jingtulun* [Pure Land treatise] by Jiacai 迦才 (n.d.), the *ōjōden* model instead follows that of the *gaosengzhuan* in that the individuals depicted need not have any relationship with each other. What warrants their inclusion is the single factor of having achieving Birth in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha, one way or another. But what differentiates *ōjōden*/*wangshengzhuan* from the *gaosengzhuan* format is that these biographies are not intended to showcase "eminent monks" but rather how *anyone* can achieve Birth in the Pure Land. Alongside the highly educated, both monastic and lay, are found poor, illiterate peasants, even children.

As the prototype of the genre, chapter six of Jiacai's work contains biographies of twenty individuals whose Birth in the Pure Land were confirmed by supernatural signs. This tradition was continued in a latter Tang work dated approximately 774, the *Wangsheng xifa jingtu ruiying zhuan* (Miraculous biographies of Birth in the Western Pure Land) by Wenshen 文諗 (J. Monshin) and Shaokang 少康 (J. Shōkō), from which the apellation *wangshengzhuan* was coined. In the Song dynasty, this genre becomes ever more popular with at least seven such works written. We know of one written under the Liao, and many of them containing the word *wangshengzhuan* in their titles. It is in the mid-Song period that we see the first appearance of a Japanese example of the genre, and like the first examples in China, the name *ōjōden* does not appear. I am referring to the best known and most carefully studied example written in Japan, *Nihon ōjo gokurakuki* [An account of Japanese Births in the Pure Land] by Yoshishige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (931–1002), dated 983. By the end of the Heian period, at least eight known *ōjōden* are written in Japan, most of which are called either *ōjōden* or *ōjōki* 往生記, showing the genre in full swing in both countries by the twelfth century. But it is also important to remember that there are other examples Buddhist literature containing one or more biographies of individuals perceived to have attained *ōjō* that are not called *ōjōden*/*wangshengzhuan* because that is not their sole content. The *Fotsu tongji* [Comprehensive history of buddhas and patriarchs] by Zhipan 志磐 (J. Shihan, twelfth c.), *Hosshinshū* [A collection of religious awakenings] by Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1155–1216) dated 1216, and *Kankyo [Kongo] no tomo* [Friends of a quiet locale] by Keisei 慶政 (1189–1268) dated 1222 are only the most notable examples.

Beginning with Yasutane's composition, all Japanese *ōjōden* written in the Heian period are distinguished by the fact that all their authors are literati at the time of composition rather than monks, something not seen in China. But the Kamakura-period *ōjōden* are written by monks, a shift that is continued among most Edo-period compositions as well. This signals a significant change in the motivation for their creation: to wit, from literary composition to religious text.

As we know, belief in Pure Land Buddhism only increases in the Kamakura period, as witnessed by the two *setsuwa* works mentioned above. Although canonical sources of *ōjōden* such as *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (NKBT) usually jump from Heian to Edo, there is evidence of as many as six *ōjōden* written in the Kamakura period, though only three are extant and all three only partially.[3] One is the remarkable *Myōgi shingyōshū* [Stories of progress in the clear meaning], dated 1275, a collection of quite personal testimonials about well-respected monks in the early Kamakura period who had their lives turned around by Hōnen. It is written by Shinzui 信瑞 (d. 1279), a scholar-monk who straddled the Buddhist worlds of the so-called old and new schools, and who is famous for a composing a biography of Hōnen presented to the powerful hegemon Hōjō Tokiyori 北条時頼 (1227–1263). Though written in *wabun,* with its generous quotations from Buddhist scriptures in Chinese and language rich in doctrinal jargon, this work represents a much more serious turn for the *ōjōden* genre, where the actors and presumed audience are professional monastics or at least highly educated elites conversant with this language.

There is nothing extant from the Muromachi or Sengoku eras, but *ōjōden* return in significant numbers in the Edo period. Despite the oft-mentioned decline in the dynamic of Buddhism at this time, there are at least ten examples of Edo-period *ōjōden*. As the genre also continued to be produced during the Ming and Qing, it is likely that Edo authors were inspired by Chinese precedent once again. Here authorship remains largely monastic, but these works have a new encylopedic aspect to them, as many are quite long and appear to be valuing comprehensiveness over inspiration. We also see specialization for the first time among these Edo-period *ōjōden,* with examples limited to specific regions and even one that focuses exclusively on women. From its roots as didactic literature by and for faithful literati, the genre thus evolved into serious testimonials by the professional religious, and then changed again into something like biographical gazetteers.

But the history of *ōjōden* does not end with the disappearance of feudal society. Even less well-known is the fact that *ōjōden* are still being written in the modern period in both China and Japan. In China, a *Jindai wangshengzhuan* [Modern collection of Birth stories] was published in 1925, and in Japan new *ōjōden* were published in 1882, 1885, and 1898.[4] The *Jindai wangshengzhuan*

3. The known six texts are *Konsen ōjōden* by Shōshin 證眞 (no known date; not extant), *Mii ōjōden* by Shōren 昇蓮 dated 1217 (partially extant), *Nenbutsu ōjōden* by Gyōsen 行仙 dated 1262 (partially extant), *Myōgi shingyōshū* by Shinzui 信瑞 dated 1275 (partially extant), *Sangoku ōjōden* by Ryōshū 良秀 dated 1297 (not extant), and *Nihon ōjōden* by Ryōyo 了譽 dated 1341 (not extant). See INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 712; TANIYAMA 1996, 458–73; and SHIMURA 1976, 32–35.

4. In China the *Jindai wangshengzhuan* was compiled by Yang Huijing (1925). In Japan a Meiji *ōjōden* was compiled by Tarumi Ryōun (1882–1884); the *Mikawa ōjō kenki* was written by Tokuen (1885), and a *Shin Meiji ōjōden* was compiled by Kaji Hōjun (1897).

contains one hundred and three biographies of Chinese inviduals, divided into monk, nun, laymen, and laywomen, with specific dating of when each attained Birth, many in the first years of the twentieth century. The 1898 Japanese text includes an auspicious forty-eight biographies of Japanese individuals who lived in the Edo or Meiji periods, monastic and lay, male and female, adult and child, though not so clearly divided as in the Chinese book. In both Chinese and Japanese cases, these are narrations of faith, practice, attainments, and death; in other words, both are clearly representations of the same genre reproduced with new material re-affirming the truth of the teaching in the modern setting.

Returning to the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki,* the reason why this work stands out among others is that it is devoted to documenting individuals who attained Birth in India. From our modern or postmodern perspective in which scholars assume the conception of the Pure Land tradition or school to be a Chinese invention, the idea of a Japanese scholar in the Heian period gathering biographical material on individuals in India whose attainment of Birth was confirmed by others present at their funerals or soon thereafter seems somewhat fantastic. Below I will introduce what previous scholarship has uncovered about this work and then consider its implications for understanding the genre as a whole, but it is worth noting here that despite the acceptance of the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* as genuine in other Heian *ōjōden* materials, in the critical bibliography of Pure Land texts compiled by Hōnen's disciple Chōsai, *Jōdo ehyō kyōron shōsho mokuroku* (commonly referred to simply as *Chōsai-roku*) it is labelled as illegitimate. It is my assertion, therefore, that this work, in existence within the first century of when the genre was initiated in Japan, stood at the margins of plausibility among a great many works of literature that based their own credibility on the dubious assertion that it can be known by the living if or when the deceased has arrived in Amida's Pure Land. The *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* thus forced the community to consider the inevitable tension between their Pure Land faith as manifesting universal religious ideals and local cultural understandings.

Consideration of a Genre: Motives for Compiling Ōjōden

The first and most obvious goal of *ōjōden* is hagiographic: that is, to record the remarkable lives of saints or saint-like individuals. In addition to the fact that these biographical accounts are replete with stories of devotion to religious belief and practice that are meant to serve as examples to inspire future generations, the creation of public documents that record and thereby certify the achievements of *ōjō* attainers is itself a merit-making and thereby pious act.

Stylistically, the *wangshengzhuan*/*ōjōden* of China and Japan are generally regarded differently. The Chinese precedent of monastic biography called *gaosengzhuan* mentioned above is not coincidental. The *gaosengzhuan* literature begins a century before Jiacai's first *wangshengzhuan* and later editions are

compiled in the Tang, Song, and even under the Liao, running parallel to the composition of *wangshengzhuan* that also marches apace simultaneously. This context is instructive in that it reminds us that the hagiographic elements in this literature are essentially of a piece with the hagiographic dimension of monastic biography in China as a whole. Therefore one way to approach to *ōjōden* is to study it as a subgenre of hagiography.

Here it is worth considering the fact that, with a few sporadic exceptions, Japan did not develop a tradition of inclusive biographical compilations of eminent monks until well into the Edo period. The genre was attempted in the Kamakura period by the Tōdaiji monk Sōshō 宗性 (1202–1278) who wrote two short biographical works based on Chinese models that transcended sectarian affiliation, actually using the word *kōsōden* 高僧伝 (biographies of eminent monks) in the titles (*Nihon kōsōden yōmonshō* and *Nihon kōsōden shijishō*), but these first efforts did not engender a felt need to create compilations on the scale of those already completed in China. Of course there is biographical information on a number of monks of particular importance to sectarian traditions in the Kamakura period, most notably in paens to sectarian founders like Hōnen and Shinran, but Sōshō's pan-sectarian approach can only be seen, and in a limited way, in the next two generations of historical scholars, namely his student Gyōnen and the Rinzai scholar Shiren 師錬 (1278–1346). Although both these writers spent considerable time gathering and documenting information about individual monks in their writings, neither attempts to duplicate the "eminent monks" form employed by Sōchō. While biography makes up the majority of the material in the *Sangoku denki*, written during in the early fifteenth century, the content and approach is *setsuwa*, that is didactic, rather than historical-biographical.

It is worth noting that independent works of religious literature in the more serious "eminent monks" mode, that is, devoted solely to collecting numerous biographies of inspirational monastics with historical detail, did not appear again until a new wave of Chinese influence arrived with the Ōbaku school's emigration to Japan in the 1650s. In 1661, more than four centuries after Sōshō's efforts, a Chinese-born disciple of Yinyuan named Xingkuo 性漷 (J. Shōton) compiled the *Tōkoku kōsōden*. Xingkuo took his material entirely from pre-existing sources, most commonly Shiren's *Genkō shakusho,* and thus his work is typically ignored today as containing nothing new, but it is nevertheless significant in that it consciously adopted the eminent monks form in seeking legitimacy for its presentation. Presumably Xingkuo's work inspires the Rinzai monk Shiban 師蛮 (1626–1710) who, in 1703, completes his massive *Honchō kōsōden*, a seventy-five fascicle effort that forms the first truly comprehensive compilation of monastic biography put together in Japan in the mode of Chinese *gaosengzhuan*.

I mention all this to contrast it with the dynamic nature of *ōjōden* production. Consider the fact that we know of no less than fourteen confirmed independent *ōjōden* works written in Japan *prior* to the Edo period, and at least another

ten written during the Edo period. In that both the *kōsōden/gaosengzhuan* and *ōjōden/wangshengzhuan* genres of Buddhist biography originate in China and are introduced to Japan at the same time, the active appropriation of the *ōjōden/wangshengzhuan* form in Japan stands in sharp contrast to Japanese ambivalence if not disinterest in the *kōsōden/gaosengzhuan* form of biography, at least prior to the Genroku period.

If we regard *ōjōden* primarily as biography, then we may conclude that in Japan *ōjōden* was simply a more appealing form of religious biography. But is this the only way to read them? In fact the traditional approach to studying *ōjōden* in Japan—especially those written in the Heian period—are as *setsuwa* (narrative or tale literature), as in the *Sangoku denki*. *Setsuwa* tends to be filled with anecdotes and legends, and while there is a fair amount of biography, its overall goal is to present interesting stories that affirm the faith. By contrast, the more formal biography/hagiography of the *gaosengzhuan* form, though of course also meant to inspire, assumes a self-conscious air of historical documentation, serving as a repository of the significant events in a monk's life for later generations. One of the ironies of considering *ōjōden* as *setsuwa* is that while it is a common assumption that *setsuwa* literature is written in *wabun* (Japanese), Heian period *ōjōden* are all written in *kanbun* (Chinese), though in the Kamakura period there is a shift to *wabun*. An interesting area of further study would be to examine the Muromachi-period *Sangoku denki,* primarily written in *kanji* with *katakana* and is in *wabun* form, yet containing sections in *kanbun*, to see how much of its *ōjōden* material derives from earlier Heian and Kamakura periods, and how much from non-*ōjōden setsuwa* sources containing *ōjōden* material, such as *Hosshinshū* and *Shijuhyaku innenshū*.

Yet a third approach to this material would be to to study these works as miracle texts. There is no clear-cut name for this genre, but let us use the rubric *yingyanji/ōgenki* 應驗記. This form begins in China with works like *Zhongjing yaoji jinzanglun* dated 577, and *Mingbaoji* dated 651–655. The *ōgenki* form begins in Japan with the *Nihon ryōiki* dated approximately 823.[5] The miracles present in these works are, of course, always supernatural events regarded as auspicious and therefore beneficial. The *ōjōden* as a rule also include something miraculous to certify that Birth in the Pure Land has occurred, and thus the fit is natural. Following *Nihon ryōiki,* some well-known examples of the genre in Japan are *Konjaku monogatarishū* [Collection of tales of times now past], *Hokkegenki* [Miraculous accounts of the *Lotus Sutra*], *Kasuga gongen genki* [Miraculous accounts of the emanation at Kasuga], *Miroku nyorai kannōshō* [Responses of the Tathāgata Maitreya], and *Hasedera (kannon) genki* [Miraculous accounts

5. The *Zhongjing yaoji jinzanglun* is a text discovered at Dunhuang and in the Beijing Collection as text No. 8407.

of the Kannon at Hasedera].[6] While hagiographic and miraculous elements are not uncommon in *setsuwa* and thus all these works may also be found under the *setsuwa* rubric, from a religious perspective these texts are distinct in that they endeavor to offer proof of a teaching or belief by way of demonstrated miracles rather than merely communicate religious principles through storytelling. Their very name *ōjōden* suggests a similar gestalt, as these works are also expected to report events that overtly demonstrate the legitimacy of the belief-structure they represent. In other words, both *ōgenki* and *ōjōden* have clearly defined roles as prooftexts.

Here one is reminded of a Daoist analog in *ōjōden* and Chinese works known as *xianzhuan* 仙傳 (J. *senden*), or "biographies of immortals." Beginning with the *Liexian zhuan* [Biographies of a line of immortals] from the first–second century CE attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (J. Ryūkyō, 77–76 BCE), followed by the *Shanxian zhuan* [Biographies of divine immortals] from the early fourth century by Ge Hong 葛洪 (J. Katsukō 283–343),[7] the genre continues into the Tang, Five Dynasties, and Song periods.[8] Even though *xianzhuan* were not replicated in Japan as such because belief in immortals never achieved the mythic impact it enjoyed in China,[9] in their form Japanese literati would have seen a similar combination of historiographic biography, hagiography, and prooftext. Note, too, that a late Tang-period example, *Yongcheng jixian lu* [Record of the assembled (female) immortals of the Walled City] compiled by Du Guangting 杜光庭 (J. Tōkōtei, 850–933), is devoted entirely to women,[10] echoing the strong presence of women in Japanese *ōjōden* generally, culminating in the *Nyonin ōjōden* written in Japan in 1685. It is particularly interesting that two of the nine examples of individuals who attained Birth in the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* did so by *rising into the sky without dying,* something normally identified as a Daoist trope. This is described as *genshin ōjō* 現身往生 in this text, and there is clearly some overlap with the terms *sokushin ōjō* 即身往生 and *sokutoku ōjō* 即得往生, which occur in Kamakura-period Pure Land doctrinal exegesis. Delineating the nuances of

6. *Konjaku monogatarishū* is dated to the first half of the twelfth century. *Hokkegenki* (also *Hokekyōkenki* or *Honchō hokkegenki*) was written by Chingen is dated 1140–1144. *Miroku nyorai kannōshō* was compiled by Sōshō in the thirteenth century. *Hasedera kannon genki*, also called *Hasedera reigenki* 長谷寺霊験記, was written in the fifteenth century. The text for the *Kasuga gongen genki* is attributed to Takatsukasa Mototada around 1309 or earlier with accompanying pictures painted by Ryūken 隆兼 in the fifteenth century. Akin to the *Kasuga gongen genki*, another work focused on miracles associated with a shrine complex is the *Sannō reigenki*.

7. Ge Hong is better known as the author of the Daoist classic *Baopuzi* 抱朴子. On *Shanxian zhuan*, see SHIMOMI 1974.

8. The website http://www.taoism.org.hk/ lists fourteen such works (accessed 2007/6/28).

9. The only thing similar in Japan to biographies of immortals are the mythic stories of heavenly women who get trapped on earth and bring wealth to whatever family they become attached to, as in the *kaguya hime* story in *Taketori monogatari*. But these are more myth than hagiography.

10. Originally one hundred and nine biographies were included in this work, but only thrity-seven are extant. See REN 1981, 1102.

these three terms is beyond the confines of this paper, but it should be pointed out that while all designate attainment of the Pure Land in *this* life (prior to death), the usual understanding is that of a life-transforming enlightenment experience. Note also that it is not uncommon to use the verb *satoru* to indicate just such a spiritual event in Kamakura-period Pure Land writings, for example. But in these "ascensions" described in the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* we are undoubtedly seeing a fusion of Buddhist and Daoist notions of attainment. This fact alone confirms the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* to be a Heian-period work, for the doctrinal precision of Pure Land discourse in the age of Hōnen would preclude any such mixing of religious elements from Daoist sources.

On the other hand, in the context of Buddhist literature, miracle texts like the *ōgenki* have an Indian analog as well. Indian sutras describe initally nine and later twelve categories of canonical material, such as *sūtra, gāthā, jātaka, vyākaraṇa,* and so on, and another category is *adbhutadharma* (Pāli *abbhutadharma*) which designates the wondrous nature of the Buddhist teachings. Represented variously in Chinese, in general the translated form is a version of *weicengyou fa/mizo'u hō* 未曾有法 ("teaching on things that never occured before") or *xifa* 希法 ("especially rare teachings"). In usage, *adbhutadharma* has been glossed in Buddhist treatises as denoting that either the Dharma or the Buddha himself are incomparable and thus of unique historical significance, (particularly in Pāli materials), or as representing those times when buddhas teach by means of displaying supernatural phenomena (more common in the Mahāyāna) (Maeda 1964, 428–37). *Adbhutadharma* may also refer to the miraculous occurences that follow upon the appearance of the buddha or revelations of truth stemming from the Buddhist teachings, but it is the meaning of using miracles or unexpected phenomena to teach—precisely how *adbhutadharma* is defined in the *Yogācārabhūmi* and *Tattvasiddhiśāstra* (Maeda 1964, 430–31)—that closely mirrors the stucture and content of *ōjōden*.[11]

Depictions of miraculous or unnnatural occurences appear in *ōjōden* upon the death of an individual who is noticed for their deep faith in Amida Buddha or unusual commitment to nenbutsu practice. This can take many forms and is not limited to postmortem events. As the death occurs or soon afterward, there may be sweet smells that mysteriously fill the room, purple clouds appearing overhead, the sound of music coming from the sky, flower petals falling out of the sky onto the deceased or his/her grave. As maintaining proper concentration in the death moment was highly valued at the time for effecting a better rebirth, including *ōjō*, long periods (hours or even days) of unwavering concentration on Amida just before death unaffected by physical pain or weakness are common, often coupled with visions prior to dying or a happy countenance remaining after death. The visions occur in two ways: before death to the dying

11. For the use of miracles to convert people, see *Yogācārabhūmi* at T 30.753b7.

individual either of Amida coming to greet him/her, or of the Pure Land as a paradise, and after death to others, usually in dreams, of the deceased individual happily residing in the Pure Land. It is not uncommon for two or more of these signs to be in evidence.

Another important factor in the history of the genre as alluded to above is the expansion in Kamakura, Muromachi, and Edo periods toward greater specialization: specifically sectarian, regional, and gender-specific works. In this we may infer a deeper grounding of the literary genre—that is, it has passed the point of needing to establish its legitimacy—as well as a broader pervasiveness of faith in this form of Buddhism. The earliest sectarian example is the partially extent *Mii ōjōden* by Shōren 昇蓮, dated 1217. This text only includes biographies of monks considered successful at Pure Land practice who lived at or were associated with Onjōji, or Miidera. While the creation of this work was probably motivated in large part by the perception that previous *ōjōden* were too closely aligned with the religious culture at its rival Tendai monastery Enryakuji, the fact that Onjōji monks felt the need to show commensurate fervor in Pure Land faith and practice within their own community also manifests the expansion of Pure Land Buddhism to a more central role in the capital region in the age of Hōnen. Hōnen dies in 1212, meaning that the *Mii ōjōden* was compiled during the height of the influence of Hōnen and his many disciples in the capital region. In the expansion of the genre during the Edo period, specialization is expressed thematically and geographically. For the first time we have *ōjōden* whose entrants are limited to women, as mentioned above, and many others that are limited to individuals living a particular geographical region. Examples of the latter include the *Tōiki nenbutsu riyakuden* by Teiden 貞伝 (1690–1731) from the early eighteenth century, which is focused on the Tōhoku region, the *Kinsei (kenmon) nanki nenbutsu ōjōden* of Ryūen (1759–1835) dated 1802 and limited to the Kishū region (Wakayama and southern Mie prefectures), the *Oyō ōjōden* by Gyōa 行阿 concerning the Owari domain (western Aichi prefecture), and the *Mikawa ōjō kenki* of Tokuen (dates unknown), which is a collection of tales about individuals in the Shinshū stronghold of eastern Aichi Prefecture.

Finally it is also worth noting that there are many biographies or hagiographies of individuals who attained *ōjō* embedded within other medieval *setsuwa* texts and in "preaching" literature, usually called either *shōdō bungaku* 唱導文学 or *dangibon* 談義本. Salient examples of *ōjō* biographies in *setsuwa* are found in the *Hosshinshū* by Kamo no Chōmei (1155?–1216) dated 1216, *Kankyo [Kongo] no tomo* 閑居友 by Keisei 慶政 (1189–1268) dated 1222, and *Shijuhyaku innenshū* by Jūshin 住信 dated 1257. These preaching texts have not been well-studied, and the fact that I have also found *ōjō* biographies in the *Futsū shōdōshū* by the Tendai monk Ryōki 良季 dated 1297–1302, and the *Daikyō jikidan yōchūki* by Shōsō 聖聰 (1366–1440), a monk of the Jōdoshū in all likelihood does not exhaust the source material. Much of this material is borrowed from earlier *ōjōden* collec-

tions, but not necessarily all of it. At the very least the scattering of *ōjō* biographies in these eclectic works, many of which are focused on Tendai religious culture, is further evidence of the widespread nature of both the genre and the belief system it represents.

Originating the Nenbutsu in India: The Tenjiku ōjō kenki

Having summarized the nature of the *ōjōden* genre in terms of Buddhist, Chinese, and Japanese literature and considered its pervasivenes in Japan, we are now ready to fully consider the historical implications of *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* as an *ōjōden* based in India. As mentioned above, the text is referenced and quoted in other sources from the late Heian and early Kamakura periods, where it is also referred to by the name *Tenjiku ōjō honki* 天竺往生本記. It is a short work, composed of nine short biographies of people who attained Birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha, all of whom are described as living in a quadrant (north, south, west, east, or central) of India, and all named either through translation or transliteration.

Although there is no reference to author or translator in the beginning of the text, it contains a colophon that explains its provenance as being authored by Vasubandhu, translated by Kumārajīva, and brought to Japan by Saichō. Two detailed studies of this work have been recently published in Japan that have traced where some of its content appears in other medieval works and compared its printed and manuscript recensions.[12] The text is not found in any Chinese catalog, and there is no evidence of any *ōjōden* or *ōgenki* being brought from China in the list of texts transmitted by Saichō or anyone else from the Nara or Heian periods. No one has, as yet, succeeded in tracing the contents of all the biographies to known sources, but three of the nine names can be found elsewhere the Chinese canon.[13]

If this work is read as merely a record of individuals who followed the beliefs and practices advocated in the many sutras focused on the Buddha Amitābha/Amitāyus that can be traced to India, then this document could indeed originate in India. But there are too many other factors present that suggest either Chinese, and more likely Japanese, authorship. For example, there are frequent references to practices at the core of the Tiantai/Tendai school such as *nianfo/nenbutsu*, *nianfo sanmei/nenbutsu zanmai* 念佛三昧 (nenbutsu samādhi), the

12. Takahashi Nobuyuki (1996) has published two detailed articles on *Tenjiku ōjō kenki*, citing quotations focusing on textcritical issues, comparing quotes from it in other *setsuwa* literature, manuscripts, and xylographs. Building on Takahashi's work, Nakamae Masashi (2004) has looked at how it was read in the Edo period by comparing commentaries written at that time.

13. The names that do appear in the canon are 阿私陀 (Asita), 韋提 (as the name of a brahman woman in T 1912 and T 2122), and 王彌 (as the name of a nun in T 2063). The names that are not found are 乾利, 瑠那呵, 悉多奢, 達龍蘇, and 提婆山.

practice of "twenty-five samādhi,"[14] and in one recension *changxing sanmei/jōgyō zanmai* 常行三昧 (constant-movement samādhi). Particularly noteworthy is the fact that it promotes the unique value of recitation nenbutsu practice, which is most famously associated with Hōnen and therefore Japanese Tendai. The references to India are limited to locales associated with Śākyamuni in the sutras or the "quadrants" mentioned above—nonspecific geographical allusions such as "northern India," or "western India." In addition, the format of the presentation followed the *ōjōden* formula exactly, meaning that were this written in India the genre itself would originate there. But there are no other Indian examples. We have quotations from the text in Kamakura-period documents that correspond to the xylograph editions extant from the Edo period, and the name is mentioned in a late-Heian-period *ōjōden* called *Shūi ōjōden*, with a confirmed date of composition of 1111 written by Miyoshi Tameyasu 三善為康 (1049–1139) (see NST 7.281 & 587). The lack of not only Indian *ōjōden* but even individual *ōjō* stories from India in the literature as a whole, the fact that this work is not attested in any Chinese catalog but is listed in an early twelfth-century Japanese catalog as apocryphal, and the references to Tendai practices all lead to the conclusion that the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* was written in Japan in the eleventh or early twelfth century (between the *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* by Yoshishige Yasutane [d. 1002] and Tameyasu's *Shūi ōjōden*).

Let us first look at what kind of material is in the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* before considering what this text contributes to and says about the *ōjōden* genre as a whole. Tameyasu's reference concerns the doctrine of *genshin ōjō*, or attaining the Pure Land without dying, and upon further examination, this becomes an important clue to understanding the religious perspective of the text as a whole and why it remains canonical despite its dubious provenance. In the first, second, and fourth biographies, the individual attains Birth without dying, although only in the second biography is this specifically referred to as *genshin ōjō.* This rather fantastic notion is seen in two examples of individuals who, while in preparation for death, are lifted into the sky and disappear, which I have drawn attention to for its similarity to the ascension of Daoist immortals. The colophon attached to the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* also mentions *genshin ōjō,* along with other suggestive information. It is worth translating in full:

14. The practice of "twenty-five samādhi" is associated with Genshin (942–1017) and Yoshishige Yasutane, who formed a circle devoted with this moniker to Pure Land practice and study. Despite what is often assumed, the concept of practicing twenty-five scripted forms samādhi is not based on any textual referents to Amida Buddha, but stems from a discussion in the *Nirvana Sutra*. But the link between Amida worship and the *Nirvana Sutra* comes from the core curriculum of Tendai study and practice, and goes back to the founder Zhiyi. The twenty-five-samādhi practice is not actually performed, but is referred to as the register in which a child writes his name before embarking on a pilgrimage every fifteen days to a monastery called Mujō'in 無常院 (Abbey of Impermanence), a name also associated with Genshin, to offer flowers to the monks there, and to promise to return from the Pure Land to save his parents. These good deeds are sufficient to assure his *ōjō*.

> In Central India, the [number of] people focused on [the practice of] concentrating/invoking [*nen* 念] the sacred name [*myōgō* 名號] of Amida Buddha who have attained Birth total 7059. Those among them who achieved Birth in this very body [*genshin ōjō*] numbered thirteen. In Western India, the people who have attained Birth who were solely devoted to reciting [*shōnen* 稱念] the sacred name of Amida Buddha total 35,900. Within this number 180 people achieved Birth in this very body. If someone inquires about practice or if you are teaching [the Dharma] to someone, you should inform them of these things. This many people in the five regions of India who have thus attained Birth are [all] new buddhas, and each will protect and assist those who seek to accomplish Birth [in their own lives].
>
> *The Original Record of Birth in the Pure Land in India* (*Tenjiku ōjō honki*)
> Fourteenth year of Enryaku (795), Śrāmana Saichō,
> returning home after entering China

While the attribution in the colophon to Vasubandhu, Kumarajīva, and Saichō as author, translator, and transmitter may not be factual, there is a mimetic quality to this concern with provenance vis-à-vis indigenously produced Buddhist texts that suggests a conscious understanding in Japan of how this process of ascribing authority in order to legitimate had worked in China and Korea.[15] Although Vasubandhu and Kumarajīva do have links to the Pure Land tradition, the authority of all three "saints" have clearly been exploited in order to legitimate the document; this was done precisely because it narrates stories of individuals in India, a place of which Japan had no direct knowledge in the Heian or Kamakura periods. From the colophon, we get an insight into the author's purpose behind his/her composition. What we are given is basically four themes: (1) devotion to nenbutsu directed toward the Buddha Amida among huge numbers of Indian Buddhists; (2) nenbutsu practice brings a high rate of success (defined as *ōjō*), even in India; (3) affirmation that nenbutsu practice is powerful enough to enable a small yet significant number of people to attain *ōjō* while they are still alive; and (4) equating the goal of attaining Birth in Amida's Pure Land with attaining buddhahood.

If we compare these four items from the colophon with the material in the

15. There numerous examples of this, but perhaps the most obvious one is the way in which the *Dacheng qixin lun* [Awakening of faith in the Mahāyāna] legitimated the doctrine of original enlightenment in the sixth century by attributing it to Aśvaghosa, who otherwise wrote poetic biographies of Śākyamuni and musical texts. Today, because we have a better sense of Aśvaghosa's oeuvre we can point to the absurdity of this claim, but the very pervasiveness of the doctrine in medieval Buddhist thinking in East Asia shows that whatever doubts contemporary scholars may have had about its author-attribution, it was not sufficient to undermine the authority of its doctrines. Probably the best known Korean example is the *Vajrasamādhi sūtra*; see Buswell 1989. There are, of course, other examples of apocryphal attributions in Japan, even sutras.

biographies themselves, a few points emerge. First, nenbutsu has the status of unassailable orthopraxis. It is worth pointing out that while Genshin and later Heian-period Tendai works also asserted the primacy of nenbutsu, the general assumption is that it was not until Hōnen that recitation nenbutsu achieved this kind of status. There is ambiguity in the term nenbutsu itself, which originally meant merely "recall the Buddha." In the eleventh century when this work was written, meditative concentration within Tendai and Shingon circles on a buddha or his attributes without vocal recitation remained a common form of nenbutsu practice alongside recitation. So this raises the question as to whether nenbutsu in this text specifically designates vocal practice. This colophon itself reflects that ambiguity in its use of both *nen* 念 and *shōnen* 稱念, and nenbutsu praxis is mentioned in six biographies, but it is referred to both forms as simply *nenbutsu* 念佛 and specifically as "reciting Amida Buddha" (*shō namu amida butsu* 稱南無阿彌陀佛). It is thus impossible to form any definite conclusion on this question. But it should be mentioned that this ambiguity continues in most Kamakura-period Pure Land writing and therefore the presentation here may be read as a prototype of the Hōnen approach, which comes in the next, or twelfth, century.

The text does not present a consistent or clearly delineated method for attaining *ōjō*. In addition to nenbutsu, other forms of what we may call Pure Land piety are also confirmed as legitimate ways of reaching the goal of Birth. Two of the biographies, for example, record how individuals attained Birth as direct result of wearing small images of Amida as ornaments in their hair, another similarly rewards the donation of (tatami) mats to a temple. There are only two monks among the nine people discussed, yet everyone easily attains their goal, displaying perhaps the most common theme in all *ōjōden* literature: anyone can reach the Pure Land if they are sincere in their faith and practice. Intensity of commitment is not limited to monks: a monastic novice may be so focused on reciting the nenbutsu that he stops speaking to people, but a prince practices nenbutsu samādhi three times a day as a layman yet both attain *ōjō*. As mentioned above, achieving *ōjō* before death does occur in the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki*, but aside from the child returning to save his parents after he attains enlightenment, there is almost no mention of what occurs after reaching the Pure Land. This reflects the common understanding that attaining nirvana in the Pure Land is a foregone conclusion, hence the colophon's reference to the forty thousand or so practicioners in India who reached Amida's Pure Land and are now buddhas.

On the other hand, what the text does focus on is how people died. This is emblematic of the Heian-period belief that properly performed rituals and a properly focused state of mind (*shōnen* 正念) was essential to attaining the Pure Land. The text also mentions the so-called "Amida mudra of meditation" (*mida no jōin* 彌陀定印), a special mudra associated with Amida that is seen more

often Japanese rather than Chinese iconography of the period.[16] This fact also supports the theory of Japanese authorship.

Although we know the Pure Land "tradition" or "school" (*zong/shū* 宗) is a theoretical constuct of Song- and Kamakura-period historical writing, this is not the only example of backdating Pure Land Buddhism to Indian precedents (see discussion of Gyōnen above), but it does appear to be the earliest Japanese example. Contrast this with Chan intellectual efforts to produce an unbroken lineage of transmission backward from Huineng to Bodhidharma to Śākyamuni, and some interesting facts emerge. First, while both efforts sought to originate their interpretive traditions of Buddhism in Indian precedent, we see no attempt to arrange the *ōjō* biographies into a transmisison lineage. In contrast with Gyōnen's efforts in the *Jōdo hōmon genrushō* and other historical writing, which reflect strong lineage consciousness, the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* never alludes to lineage or transmission. In this we may infer lay authorship, which is of course consistent with the other *ōjōden* produced in the Heian period. Second is the parallel with the temporal gap between the creation of Chan and its literature. That is, the first Chan transmission lineages and the apocryphal text that linked them to India were constructed in the mid-Tang, a century or more after the Chan movement began and a time when it was expanding significantly. The *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* plays essentially the same role as the *Fufazang yinyuan chuan* in rhetorically linking a quickly expanding movement to Indian precedent prior to that movement's sectarian establishment. In this case, we are talking about the period between Genshin and Hōnen. And again, just as the Chan histories were written during the Song, when it enjoyed government support, the first histories of the Pure Land school are seen in the works of Gyōnen, the first of which are written more than fifty years after Hōnen in the late Kamakura period.

Conclusion

I have focused on the production of the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* not because it is a typical example of the *ōjōden* genre, but because it shows how *ōjōden* functioned as prooftext within Japanese Buddhism. While the individual biographies within the text itself are formulaic, the frequent reference to Tendai practices, and the information provided on the text's provenance all amount to a not particularly convincing Japanese invention, the attempt itself, the very idea of *ōjōden* having also been written in India, says a great deal. It reminds us, first of all, of the important role that India as point of origin played in the premodern Japanese imagination. The need to extend the Pure Land school to India is well-known from Gyōnen's Buddhist histories from the Kamakura period, the initial threads

16. I am indebted to Karen Mack for this observation, who also notes that the lack of Chinese examples of the Amida mudra may simply reflect the lack of extant Chinese Pure Land art from this period.

of which he gleaned from Song Buddhist historiography, but as a Buddhist hermeneutic this same methodology in its incipient form can be seen in the ninth century in Annen 安然 (841–884) and the *Nihon ryōiki*. In the Kamakura period we see this in the *ōjō* biographies in *Kankyo [Kongo] no tomo,* for example, in the story of Shinnyo 眞如親王, the son of Emperor Saga who journeyed to China in 862 and then continued on to India, the effort for which brought him Birth in the Pure Land. In the Edo period, the *Shihaku ōjōden* also contains Birth stories set in India.

The *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* is thus emblematic of a broader movement from the time of Genshin that continually sought affirmation of what began as "the Pure Land path" within the Tendai order and evolved into enormous religious institutions after Hōnen initiated what became the first Pure Land sect. Akin to the efforts of the Chan movement in China to legitimate its rather unusual approach to Buddhism by linking its founder to a lineage stretching back to Śākyamuni, the Pure Land movement in Japan brought its gestalt to India for legitimation. Notice the fact that we do not see this move in Chinese Pure Land or Japanese Zen. The parallel with Daoist miracle texts only reinforces this same view. That is, as an inherently Chinese religious phenomenon, the Chan tradition used its lineage myth to anchor the religion in both Indian and Chinese precedent, thereby affirming its local identity but backing that up with a myth of Indian origins. When this cultural complex was established in Japan, this historical paradigm was only extended with Japanese lineage conceptions, confirming the model to be fully persuasive as is. In the case of Pure Land Buddhism in China, however, the sectarian consciousness evident in the Chan tradition never reached the same level of institutional consciousness, and therefore the felt need to ground the Pure Land form of Buddhism in India is not evident. But in Japan, we see a sectarian consciousness among followers of Pure Land emerging in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that mimics the evolution of Chan in ninth- and tenth-century China, finally bursting forth in the rather mythic notion that Hōnen founded the Pure Land school in 1275. The *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* is not the only evidence of this development, for here the situation is further complicated by the fact that Japanese Pure Land advocates had to first establish a lineage of sorts in China before they could extend their concept of a tradition of study and practice back to India, and the fact that there are various schema of Chinese Pure Land transmission lineages proffered in the writings of Hōnen and his disciples shows the hermeneutic struggle to fulfill this need well into the thirteenth century.

Considered in the context of the rather difficult task of constructing a historical identity for a Pure Land sect in the early Kamakura period that is based on orthodox Buddhist precedents in China and India—a task that Hōnen himself seems to not have had much interest in—the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* thus represents a new conception of using the *ōjōden* genre to extend beliefs and practices central to the self-conception of a Pure Land "school" to India. The very nature of

the genre itself—hagiography, miracles, religious attainment—lends itself very well to this purpose. Although somewhat clumsy in how it was put together, the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* tells us a great deal about precisely what religious themes its author(s) wanted to promote in defining what the Pure Land "school" should be: the primacy of nenbutsu practice both as oral recitation and as the means to samādhi, the dissolution of the monastic/lay distinction, the recognition of women as fully equal candidates for Birth, the similar recognition that poor, uneducated people can also attain Birth, the power of images to effect religious transformation, and the religious efficacy of charity toward the Sangha. All of these will be in evidence in Hōnen's writings in the next century, and thus the *Tenjiku ōjō kenki* may be seen as an eleventh-century prototype of the type of religion offered by the Jōdoshū, Jōdoshinshū, and Jishū that take shape in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DNBZ *Dai Nippon Bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書. Tokyo: Dai Nippon Bukkyō Zensho Kankōkai, 1912–1922.

GR *Gunsho ruiju* 群書類従. Tokyo: Nihon Bunka Shiryo Sentā, 1996.

JZ *Jōdoshū zensho* 浄土宗全書, Kyoto and Tokyo: Jōdoshū Shūten Kankōkai, 1907–1914; rep. Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1975.

KOS *Kinsei ōjōden shūsei* 近世往生伝集成. Kasahara Kazuo 笠原一男, general ed. Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1978.

NKBT *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957–1969.

NST *Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970.

SNKBT *Shintei Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 新訂日本古典文学大系. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 1993–999.

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 eds. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.

ZJZ *Zoku Jōdoshū zensho* 続浄土宗全書. Tokyo: Shūsho Hozonkai, 1915–1928; rep. Kyoto: Jōdoshū Kaishū Happyakunen Kinen Kyōsan Junbikyoku, 1972–1974.

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Fufazang yinyuan chuan (*Fuhōzō innenden*) 付法藏因緣傳, T 2058, 50.297.

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Jōdo hōmon genrushō 浄土法門源流 by Gyōnen 凝然. T 2687, 84.192.

Kaiyuanlu 開元録 = *Kaiyuan shijiaolu* (*Kaigen shakkyōroku*) 開元釋教録. T 2154, 55.477.

Kankyo [Kongo] no tomo 閑居友 by Keisei 慶政. SNKBT 40.

Kasuga gongen genki 春日権現験記 attributed to Takatsukasa Mototada 鷹司基忠. GR, vol. 16.

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