

The Development of Mappō Thought in Japan (I)

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Introduction: Mappō in India and China

The idea that the Buddhist Doctrine is subject to continuous decline and that human beings cannot escape such a law is a concept known in Japan as the Last Dharma Age (*mappō shisō* 末法思想). The cardinal points on which this idea was based developed into the following theories:

1. The theory of the Three Ages, according to which history is divided into three periods, reflecting the progressive deterioration of the Buddhist Doctrine. These three periods are the True Dharma Age (*saddharma*, Jpn. *shōbō* 正法), the Imitation Dharma Age (*saddharma-prativāpava*, Jpn. *zōbō* 像法), and the Last Dharma Age (*saddharma-vipralopa*, Jpn. *mappō* 末法). With the exception of the Last Dharma Age, which was thought to last ten thousand years, the first two ages were supposed to last the space of either five hundred or one thousand years after the date of Śākyamuni's demise. These periods were combined in different ways according to four theories, as schematized below.¹

	1	2	3	4
<i>Shōbō</i>	500 years after Buddha's death	500	1,000	1,000
<i>Zōbō</i>	500 years after <i>shōbō</i>	1,000	500	1,000
<i>Mappō</i>	10,000 years after <i>zōbō</i>	10,000	10,000	10,000

¹ The first theory is based on the *Daijōsanjūsangekyō* 大乘三聚識悔經 (Sūtra of the three categories of Mahāyāna repentance, T. 24, 1091-1095) and the *Kengōkyō* 賢劫經 (Sūtra of the sages' kalpa, T. 14, 1-65). The second is based on the *Daijūkyō* 大集經 (Great collection sūtra, T. 13, 1-408) and the *Makamayakyō* 摩訶摩耶經 (Sūtra of great Māya, T. 12, 1005-1015). The third is based on the *Hikekyō* 悲華經 (Sūtra of the compassion flower, T. 3, 167-232). The fourth is based on the *Daihikyō* 大悲經 (Sūtra of great compassion, T. 12, 945-972) as quoted in Hui-kuan's *Shakujōdogūngiron* 釈淨土群疑論 (Treatise explicating the multitude of doubts concerning the Pure Land, T. 47, 30-76).

2. The theory of the Five Periods, a further division showing the deterioration of human abilities, each period lasting 500 years.

a. Period of Strong Enlightenment (*gedatsu* 解脱), the first 500 years following Buddha's death, when the True Dharma was still in effect and enlightenment was secure for everybody.

b. Period of Strong Meditation (*zenjō* 禅定), corresponding to the beginning of the Imitation Dharma Age, when all monks were practicing deep meditation.

c. Period of Strong Listening (*tamon* 多聞), which corresponds to the end of the Imitation Dharma Age, when many people were still listening to the sūtras and following the commandments.

d. Period of Temple and Pagoda Building (*zōji* 造寺), at the beginning of the Last Dharma Age, when teachings and practices were already being neglected but temples and pagodas were still built.

e. Period of Strong Conflicts (*tōsō* 鬪争), the end of the Last Dharma Age, when the Buddhist teachings had been completely forgotten, and the monks neglected the precepts, being too busy in doctrinal fights which gave rise to pagan views (*Daihōdōdaijūgachizōkyō* 大方等大集月藏經, T. 13, 298–381).

3. The theory of the Five Defilements (*kaśāya*), according to which the world is defiled by the impurities of kalpa (*kōjoku* 劫濁), views (*kenjoku* 見濁), evil passions (*bonnōjoku* 煩惱濁), the mind and body of sentient beings (*shujōjoku* 衆生濁), and the human lifespan (*myōjoku* 命濁). These five marks indicate the prevalence of wars and disasters, the dominance of false teachings, the strengthening of desires, the increase of mental and physical frailty, and the shortening of man's life span (see the *Amida Sūtra* 阿弥陀經, T. 12, 346–348). This last idea developed into the theory of the life span of people, according to which life expectancy varies according to the period in which people were living. The length of human life was supposed to fluctuate between 80,000 and ten years, diminishing with the increasing evil of the age.

The concept of the impurities of kalpa was a development of the Buddhist cosmological view known as the "theory of the rotation of the four kalpas," in which history was seen as developing through the passing of four huge spans of time (medium kalpas, *chūgō* 中劫): the kalpa of becoming (*jōgō* 成劫), the kalpa of existing (*jūgō* 住劫), the kalpa of destruction (*egō* 壞劫), and the kalpa of emptiness (*kūgō* 空劫). Each of these periods was subsequently divided into twenty small kalpas (*shōgō* 小劫), each of which was characterized by increase in the first half, and decrease in the second half. At the beginning of the kalpa of becoming, mountains and rivers appear, and during its nineteenth small kalpas, celestial beings, hell, men and all sentient beings are born. The process of human activity unfolds during the kalpa of existing. During the kalpa of destruction everything is destined to chaos and ruin

under the destructive power of fire and wind. At the end, only the void is left in the kalpa of emptiness, waiting for the time of regeneration to begin over again in an eternal process.²

These theories, well known to the Japanese of the medieval age, were the result of development and mixture of ideas brought by Buddhist scriptures from India and China. Although the *Āgamas* presented the belief in the inevitable decline of the Buddhist Doctrine, stating that the True Dharma Age will disappear giving place to the Imitation Dharma Age (*saddharma-patirūpaka*), a coherent formulation of the theory of the Three Ages never developed in India.³ Nevertheless, the word “final age” (*sue no yo* 末の世), which does not appear in early texts (*sutta* and *vinaya*), made its appearance in Mahāyāna scriptures like the *Vajracchedikā Sūtra* (*The Diamond Sūtra*, T. 8, Nos. 235–237, pp. 748–762). Here we find Subhuti’s question: “Will there be any beings in the future periods, in the last time, in the last epoch, in the last five hundred years, at the time of the collapse of the good doctrine, who, when these words of the Sūtra are being taught, will understand their truth?”⁴ The number five hundred came from the anecdote telling that the True Dharma Age, which was expected to last one thousand years, was reduced to the limited span of five hundred years after the acceptance of women into the Buddhist order, a story which developed into the theory of the Five Periods, each of them lasting five hundred years (*Daihōdōdaijikyō* 大方等大集經, *Great Collection Sūtra*, T. 13, 1–408).

The twelfth chapter of the *gachizōbun* 月藏分 roll of the *Daijikyō* presents the Buddha’s words that, after his demise, the True Dharma Age will follow for five hundred years, and then the Buddhist Doctrine will start to decline. The Buddha talks about monks who, looking for fame and profit, do not hesitate to abandon good practices and throw away the Buddhist teachings, adorn their robes, and live by trade or agriculture like laymen. These monks like to quarrel, feel jealous towards those monks who follow the precepts, and indulge in negligence, thus accumulating vast evil karma which finally brings several calamities to a world already destined to dry up like a desert. Floods, typhoons, and famines bring people to exhaustion and to war in countries destroyed by earthquakes, pestilences, and fire, where

² This follows Vasubandhu’s theory as found in the *Abhidharmakośa* (T. 29, 1–126).

³ See, for example, the following passage from the *Samyutta-nikāya*: “When the True Dharma of the Tathāgata is about to become extinct, an Imitation Dharma will appear. When the Imitation Dharma appears in the world, the True Dharma will be eradicated. For example, a ship in the ocean, when loaded with too many treasures, sinks at once. The True Dharma of the Tathāgata is not like this, but it disappears gradually. . . . Evil sentient beings appear in the world and do evils at pleasure. Plotting all kinds of evil deeds, they actually do evil. They talk non-Dharma into Dharma, and Dharma into non-Dharma” (T. 2, 226c). Quoted in Ryukoku University Translation Center 1980, p. xiii.

⁴ The original Sanskrit reads: *anāgate’dhvani paścime kāle paścime samaye paścimāyām pañcaśatyām saddharma-vipralopakāle vartamāne*. Quoted in Kumoi 1976, p. 330, and Conze 1958, p. 30.

wells, springs, and ponds dry up, and crops suffer the consequences of a total lack of rain.

The description given by the *Great Collection Sūtra*, whose goal was the protection of the true Doctrine, is very detailed. In fact, this description is followed by the formulation of magic formulas (*dhāraṇī*) made in order to eternally preserve the true Buddhist Doctrine. To deny the existence of the true Doctrine was a necessary premise in order to sustain this Doctrine since, as the basic Buddhist teaching says, everything is destined to change. This sūtra didn't have, as its main goal, the purpose to present an apocalyptic view of the world, as we can see from the fact that no mention of the Last Dharma Age (*mappō*) was made in the roll mentioned above. The author's goal was to show that the decline of the Buddhist Doctrine was only due to the increase in the breaking of the precepts and to the absence of virtue in people's behavior. The same sūtra presents the theory of the Five Periods which, combined with the concepts of True and Imitation Dharma Ages, makes us certain that the main features of *mappō* thought were already present in this scripture. Nevertheless, the *Great Collection Sūtra* did not introduce the theory of the Five Periods in order to stress the view of an uninterrupted historical decline, as we can see from Buddha's statement that, if we reach enlightenment through one of the practices still alive in the five periods, we are equal to those people who lived during the True Dharma Age. As in the case of the description of the world's catastrophes, the theory of the Five Periods was presented with the purpose of illustrating the necessity to preserve the Buddhist Doctrine. The sūtra's main idea was turned to the sad possibility that the Doctrine had to decline, without implying any inevitable historical destruction (see Kazue 1961, pp. 11–23).

The same critical attitude against the secularization of the Buddhist community during the Final Age, meant as the time immediately following Buddha's entering into *nirvāna*, was taken by the compiler of the *Daihōdō-musōkyō* 大方等無想經 (T. 12, 1077–1106).

In India, moreover, the theories of the Five Defilements, with particular regard to the idea of the life span of people and of the rotation of the four kalpas, were all fused together in the third chapter of the *Abhidharmakośa* (T. 29, 1–160) by Vasubandhu (ca. 420–500). Here we read that at the end of the kalpa of becoming (*vivarta-kalpa*), the lifespan of people is nearly eternal, but with the arrival of the kalpa of existing (*antaḥkalpa*) such life expectancy decreases until it reaches the short span of ten years. This process takes place during the first small kalpa of the medium kalpa of existing. In the following eighteen small kalpas life expectancy keeps increasing and decreasing from ten to 80,000 years, and the twentieth small kalpa witnesses only the process of increase in life. The Buddha appears only at the time when human life drops from 80,000 to one hundred years and not after that time, since,

because of the worsening of the five defilements, it becomes difficult to teach the Doctrine to human beings (Poussin 1971, II, pp. 181–194). Many later Mahāyāna scriptures would argue that the Buddha appeared exactly because of the sinful nature of this world.

Although there is no doubt that the germs of *mappō* thought were already there in the Pali and Sanskrit scriptures, they still lacked a coherent systematization. Nobody went so far as to formulate a theory of the Three Ages, the main pillar of *mappō* thought, which was the result of the strong opposition met by Buddhism from the Chinese Emperors Wu 大武帝 (424–451) of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386–534) and Wu (561–577) of the Northern Chou 北周 (557–581) Dynasties. External factors allowed Chinese monks to express clearly what, until then, had been kept inside the heart of believers who inwardly felt the declining of the Buddhist Doctrine, but who still needed historical proof to confirm their beliefs. The Emperors Wu provided that proof, thus causing the diffusion through China of *mappō* thought at the time of the Sui 隋 (581–618) and T'ang 唐 (618–907) dynasties. In a sūtra carved on a stone north of Peking by monk Jing-wan 靜琬 of the Sui dynasty we read: “The True and Imitation Dharma Ages lasted 1,500 years. Being now in 628, already seventy-five years have passed from the time we entered the Last Dharma Age. I carved this sūtra at the time of the persecution of Buddhism, during the Last Dharma Age, in order to spread Buddhist teachings (Michihata 1976, p. 339).

The same consciousness of being already in the Final Age was presented in the *An lo chi* 安樂集 (Collection of essays on the western paradise, T. 47, 4–22) by Tao-ch'ō 道綽 (562–645), a witness of the Northern Chou persecution who saw in the Pure Land the only escape available to ignorant people during the degenerate age of the Buddhist Doctrine. The theory of the Three Ages appeared clearly formulated in the *Li shih yüan wen* 立誓願文 (T. 46, 786–792) by the T'ien-t'ai monk Hui-ssu 慧思 (515–577) of Northern Chou, and in the works of monk Chi-tsang 吉藏 (459–623) of the San-lun school. In China the theory of the Three Ages and the theory of the Five Defilements were mixed together in the attempt to show the degeneration of the times in which people were living, as it is stated in the *Fa yüan chu lin* 法苑珠林 (Forest of gems in the garden of the Law, T. 53, 269–1030) compiled by Tao-shi 道世 of the early T'ang. These were years of Buddhist persecutions, a time when, as a consequence of the Buddhist suppression of 574, Buddhist temples, statues and sūtras were all objects of confiscation and destruction. This was fertile ground for the spreading of *mappō* thought and the search for salvation, through the activities of the sect of the Three Stages (San-chieh-chiao 三階教) established by Hsin-hsing 信行 (540–594), and of the Pure Land school led by Tao-ch'ō and Shan-tao 善導 (613–681). Both sects, although differing in their conclusions, shared the belief that a particular type

of Buddhism was required by people of the Last Dharma Age, who were too ignorant to be able to find salvation by themselves. In his main work, the *San chieh fo fa* 三階仏法 (The doctrine of the Three Stages), Hsin-hsing stressed the fact that the old Buddhist sects (T'ien-t'ai, Hua-yen, San-lun, Ch'eng-shih) satisfied the needs of the people living in the first two ages, whereas in the Last Dharma Age people could be saved only by his own teaching, a universal Buddhism which overcame all the prejudices and particular views of the other sects and which, at the same time, incorporated the belief in all Buddhas and all doctrines. The same concern for the ignorant people living in an age devoid of doctrines led the Amidists to preach the cult of Amida and of the invocation of his name (*nenbutsu* 念佛) as the easiest way to reach salvation. In both sects we detect the search for a Buddhist doctrine suitable to a particular time, namely the Last Dharma Age. Tao-ch'o's *An lo chi* clearly states that the Buddhist Doctrine has no meaning if it is not fit to the time of the listeners to which it is addressed. Quoting the theories of the Three Ages and Five Periods, it says that one simple recitation of Amida's name washes the sins of 800,000 kalpas. The recitation of Amida's name was the way offered by the Jōdo school in order to escape *mappō*. The sect of the Three Stages disappeared soon (845), leaving the Pure Land school the true hero of *mappō* thought.⁵

Mappō in Japan — Kyōkai

In Japan the theory of the Three Ages was dealt in the *Sangyōgisho* 三經義疏, a commentary written by Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (573–621) on three sūtras, the *Shōmangyō* (Sūtra of Queen Śrīmālā 勝鬘經), the *Yuimakyō* (Vimalakīrti Sūtra 維摩經), and the *Lotus Sūtra*. Shōtoku Taishi accepted the theory of the True Dharma lasting five hundred years and of the Imitation Dharma lasting one thousand years. Following the tradition of the *Chou shu i chi* 周書異記 (Record of the extraordinary events of the Chou Dynasty), according to which Buddha would have died in 949 B.C., he calculated that the Last Dharma Age had begun in 552, during the 13th year of Emperor Kinmei's reign (539–571). But he also presented the theory according to which the historical Buddha would have died in 609 B.C., in which case *mappō* was believed to begin in 891. According to the first theory, Shōtoku Taishi was already living in the Last Dharma Age, a fact which must have amazed the same Shōtoku, who was witnessing the peak of prosperity enjoyed by Buddhism in Japan. This was a time when Buddhist Law and Imperial Law were one and the same, mutually supporting one another, with Buddhism a supporter of the *ritsuryō* system and Buddhist prayers a means to protect the country from disasters and to strengthen it. Should we accept the year 552 as the beginning of the Last Age in Japan, we might add that *mappō*

⁵ For details on the sect of the Three Stages see Yabuki 1927.

coincided in that country with the introduction of Buddhism. According to the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan, 720), an image of Śākyamuni in gold and copper was sent in 552 by the Korean King Syōng-myōng 聖明王 of Paekche as a gift to emperor Kinmei, together with several flags and canopies, a number of volumes of sūtras, and an exhortation to embrace the new religion (Sakamoto 1965, 68, pp. 100–101; Aston 1980, 2, pp. 65–66). The year 552 was not a casual choice for the introduction of Buddhism to Japan, being the fifteen-hundredth year after Buddha's supposed demise in 949 B.C.

When, at New Year's day of 743, the *Konkōmyōsaishōōkyō* 金光明最勝王經 (Skt. *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, Sūtra of the golden light, T. 16, 403–456) was read in the Konkōmyō-ji, the monk intoning the word *zōbō* (Imitation Doctrine) was filled with hope, since *zōbō* meant a period when the Buddhist Doctrine was going to be restored, thus reaching the glory enjoyed in the past age of the True Dharma. Such optimism can be explained only when we recall the fact that this sūtra was, along with the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Ninnō-kyō* 仁王經 (Sūtra of the benevolent kings, T. 8, 825–833), one of the three scriptures officially adopted for the protection of the country, thus excluding the possibility of giving *zōbō* the connotation of decline and degeneration.

The consciousness of a spiritual crisis which started the process of diffusion of *mappō* ideas was brought about a few years later by unofficial monks who operated outside the monastic institutions codified by the *yōrō* 養老 code (701), and who addressed themselves to common people. A good example is provided by Gyōgi 行基 (668–749), whose activity as itinerant preacher helped to change Japanese Buddhism, the audience of which until then had been limited to political leaders. A new sense of self-criticism was brought into the Japanese monastic order by the arrival of Chinese monks like Tao-hsüan 道宣 (Jpn. Dōsen, 596–667) and Chien-chen 鑑真 (Jpn. Ganjin, 687–763), who were instrumental in breaking the identification of Buddhist Law and Imperial Law, transforming Buddhism into a way of thinking and believing which every single human being must face personally (see Ishida 1976, pp. 359–360).

Such sensibility can be detected in the figure of the self-ordained monk Kyōkai 景戒 (757?–after 822), who must have been very well acquainted with the *Daijikyō*, quoted several times in the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 (Wondrous stories of karmic retribution of good and evil in Japan), a collection of Buddhist tales. As we have already seen, the *Daijikyō*, while teaching the scheme of the Five Periods, stressed the neglect in which monks were keeping Buddhist teachings and precepts, being prey to envy, jealousy, and other mundane concerns. Kyōkai himself witnessed a similar reality in light of the edicts proclaimed by Emperors Kōnin 光仁 (r.770–781) in 780 and Kanmu 桓武 (r.781–806) at the end of the eighth century. These edicts had

the purpose of removing the monks' interest in politics and plots, and restoring a community devoted to religious practices. The relationship between Empress Shōtoku 称徳 (r.764–770) and monk Dōkyō 道鏡, with all its political implications, was only one, albeit the clearest example of the totally worldly nature of religion in that time. Moreover, Kyōkai must have been very much struck by the antagonism between different sects of the same Buddhist faith, and among jealous monks, as seen in the story of Chikō, an eminent monk of Gangō-ji belonging to the Sanron school. Chikō was summoned to hell by King Yāma because of the jealousy he felt when Gyōgi, a mere novice in Chikō's opinion and a man who had experienced the condemnation of the court because of activities outlawed by the codes of the time (*sōni-ryō*), was appointed to the high position of Great Chief Executive (*Daisōjō* 大僧正) (Koizumi 1984, pp. 123–129; Nakamura 1973, pp. 167–171). This story stands as a proof of Kyōkai's realization that he was already living in the fifth and last of the Five Periods, the Period of Strong Conflicts (*tōsō*), at the end of the Last Dharma Age.

Another reason which confirms Kyōkai's knowledge of the *Daijikkō* can be found in the many passages throughout the *Nihon ryōiki* defending the figure of the monk and of all those who have undertaken the Buddhist way, even the self-ordained monks, the true beggars of the time who were so persecuted by Emperor Kanmu. The crimes perpetrated against monks and lay-brothers are those most severely punished in the *Nihon ryōiki*.⁶ This may seem to be in contradiction to the criticism moved in the *Daijikkō* against the corruption of the Buddhist community. The *gachizōbun* roll of the same *Daijikkō*, however, states that in the Last Dharma Age, when no one of high capability is left alive in this human world, the common person who takes the tonsure or simply undertakes Buddhist practices, whether one keeps the precepts or breaks them, must be considered a Buddha Treasure. This was because, by simply thinking of the Buddha, this person was doing something more meritorious than anybody else in that age. This idea, developed in *Mappō tōmyōki* 末法燈明記 (The candle of the Latter Dharma) and, later, in Shinran's works,⁷ led Kyōkai to quote a passage from the *Jizō jūringyō* 地藏十輪經 (T. 13, 721–776): "As an orchid, even if it has withered, excels other flowers, so monks, even if they violate precepts, excel non-Buddhists. To talk about a monk's faults such as whether he violates or keeps the precepts, whether he recognizes or does not recognize the precepts, or whether he has or has not faults is a graver sin than that of letting the bodies of innumerable Buddhas bleed" (NR 3: 33; Koizumi, p. 286; Nakamura, pp. 268–269).

This quotation, included in a chapter devoted entirely to the defense of self-ordained monks, sounds like a matter of self-defense written by a Kyōkai

⁶ *Nihon ryōiki* (hereafter "NR") 2:1, 2:11, 2:18, 2:35, 3:14, 3:15, 3:24, 3:33.

⁷ See the second part of this article in Vol. 15/4.

who was trying to free from Kanmu's persecution all those peasants who had to abandon their work because of the enormous amount of taxes levied for building the great temples of Nara, and because of the compulsory conscription started in order to build an army against the northern Emishi, and who were thus forced to find their sustenance wandering as unofficial or self-ordained monks (*shidozō* 私度僧). However, beside very personal motivations, we cannot ignore the fact that such a defense could only be built on the premises that these monks were living in an age as corrupt as the one described in the *Daijikyō*, thus showing that Kyōkai was quite aware of what had been written on *mappō* before his time.⁸

In the first part of the preface to the third volume which is known as *Maeda-bon itsubun* 前田本逸文 (Lacuna of the Maeda manuscript), a controversial passage believed spurious by some scholars, Kyōkai writes about the True Dharma Age lasting five hundred years, the Imitation Dharma Age one thousand years, and the Last Dharma Age destined to last 10,000 years. Moreover, he took 949 B.C., the date of Śākyamuni's death, to be in total accord with the theories presented in the *Daijikyō*, and A.D. 552 to be the year for the official introduction of Buddhism to Japan. The passage says: "The Inner Scriptures show how good and evil deeds are repaid, while the Outer Writings show how good and bad fortunes bring merit and demerit. If we study all the discourses Śākyamuni made during his lifetime, we learn that there are three periods: first, the period of the True Dharma (*shōbō*), which lasts five hundred years; second, the period of the Imitation Dharma (*zōbō*), lasting one thousand years; and third, the period of the Degenerate Dharma (*mappō*), which continues for 10,000 years. By the fourth year of the hare, the sixth year of the Enryaku era (787), seventeen hundred and twenty-two years have elapsed since Buddha entered *nirvāṇa*. Accordingly, we live in the age of the Degenerate Dharma following the first two periods. Now, in Japan, by the sixth year of the Enryaku era, two hundred and thirty-six years have elapsed since the arrival of the Buddha, Dharma and Samgha" (Koizumi, pp. 207–208; Nakamura, p. 221).

Knowledge of the theory of the Three Ages doesn't necessarily lead to belief in the continuous and uninterrupted deterioration of the quality of human beings. When we examine the purpose or reason why Kyōkai compiled the stories of *Nihon ryōiki*, we realize that the author was aiming at a practical goal, to "lead people to good, and show them how to cleanse their feet of evil," as Kyōkai himself put it in the same preface (Koizumi, p. 210; Nakamura, p. 222). The same thing was said in the preface to the first volume where Kyōkai stressed the didactic nature of his work, in the attempt to make the reader to "put aside evil, live in righteousness and, without causing evil,

⁸ On the position of Kyōkai as a "pioneer of Japanese *mappō* thought" see Masuko 1969, pp. 35–58.

practice good” (Koizumi, p. 25; Nakamura, p. 102). If Kyōkai believed in the possibility of teaching human beings, he couldn’t accept the consequences hinted at in the theory of the Three Ages. He believed that a correct knowledge of the inexorable laws of karma could drive people along the right path in this life, and therefore he strove to show the sad consequences that ignorance of the Buddhist teachings could have in the present world. The basic idea underlying *Nihon ryōiki* was Kyōkai’s belief in the possibility of earthly improvement. Even if many references to Amida’s paradise, the western land of bliss, do appear in the book, they remain outside the author’s main concern.⁹

Kyōkai’s interest in the present world is well documented by the kind of description he gave of hell and of the other world, and by the role played by hell in more than fourteen stories.¹⁰ The story of the assistant governor Hirokuni 広国 who, after his sudden death, was brought back to life so that he could tell of his experiences in the other world, gives the same details that we find in all the other descriptions of hell included in the *Nihon ryōiki*. Hirokuni was accompanied on his journey by two messengers who brought him to a river with a golden bridge. Crossing the bridge he found himself in a strange land known as “the land in the southern direction” (*tonan no kuni* 南の国). After reaching the capital, he was escorted by eight armed officials to a golden palace, residence of King Yāma, who was sitting on a golden throne. There Hirokuni met his wife, whose body was pierced with iron nails and with an iron chain around her limbs, on account of the sin of envy and hate committed when the woman was driven out of the house by her husband. Yāma let Hirokuni go, warning him not to talk thoughtlessly about the land of the dead (*yomotsukuni* 黄泉). Hirokuni continued his journey following a southern direction where he met with his father, who was standing and holding a hot copper pillar. He had thirty-seven nails in his body and was beaten nine hundred times a day for having killed living beings, and for having collected high interests on loans in order to support his family. Moreover, Hirokuni’s father confessed to having robbed others of their possessions, committing adultery with the wives of others, neglecting filial piety and reverence to his elders, and to having used abusive language to his debtors. He urged his son, therefore, to make a Buddha-image and to copy holy scriptures in order to atone for his sins. Hirokuni, back at the bridge, was about to cross it when he was stopped by the guards watching the gate, who reminded him of the prohibition of letting out anybody who had already stepped into hell. Thanks to the wondrous intervention of a human incarnation of the *Lotus Sūtra* that he had copied in his childhood, Hirokuni was finally able to return to this world (NR 1:30; Koizumi, pp. 86–93; Nakamura, pp. 143–146).

⁹ References to the Pure Land are made in NR 1:22, 2:22, 3:30 and postscript.

¹⁰ NR 1:30, 2:5, 2:7, 2:16, 1:19, 2:24, 2:25, 3:9, 3:22, 3:23, 3:26, 3:35, 3:36, 3:37.

We can detect many heterogeneous elements in Hirokuni's description of hell, from a shamanistic concept of a bridge over which it is possible to pass from one cosmic region to another, thus establishing communication with the world above and the world below (Eliade 1972, p. 173), to a Buddhist interpretation of a vedic deity, Yāma, seen as a judge dispensing penalties and rewards, not to mention the Confucian behavior of Hirokuni, whose filial piety makes him repay his father's love by atoning for his sins. Beside all these influences which confirm the complex manner in which the pattern of Japanese civilization had already been woven by the time of the recording of the first written documents, we are presented in the ninth century with a kind of other world conceived as an open realm in constant communication with the living world, in the very tradition of Japanese indigenous thought. Hirokuni's hell is on this point very similar to *tokoyo* 常世, the land at the bottom of the ocean conceived by ancient Japanese as a spot in constant communication with this world, as the land of the spirits of the ancestors, where all the dead are going and from where all new lives are coming. We may think of the pages of the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Record of ancient things, 712) presenting the myth of Ōkuninushi, the land-creator and culture hero of Izumo mythology. He overcame his eighty evil brothers after having obtained the sword, bow, and divine *koto* which Susanoo, son of Izanagi, jealously kept in the underworld. Ōkuninushi succeeded in his attempt only after having surmounted Susanoo's tricks, and thanks to Susanoo's daughter, Suseribime. He managed to escape safely from the underworld, together with Suseribime who had become his wife.¹¹

At the same time, Hirokuni's hell, known as *yomotsukuni* (another reading for *yomi no kuni* 黄泉国, Land of the Yellow Springs), is the same underworld as the one visited by Izanagi, ancestor of the Sun-Goddess Amaterasu, in his failed attempt to rescue his wife Izanami, who was burnt to death while giving birth to the fire-deity (Nishimiya 1979, pp. 36–40; Philippi 1968, pp. 61–67). Hell, as described by Kyōkai, appears on the same level of the high plain of the gods (*takaamanohara* 高天原) and the world of human beings (*nakatsu no kuni* 中津国). With this scheme in mind, Kyōkai started to tell the story of monk Chikō's experiences in the underworld, replacing the high plain of the gods with Amida's Pure Land. In fact Chikō, before reaching hell in his journey, was taken by Yāma's messengers to the west (= the Western Paradise), where he saw a golden pavilion waiting for the birth of the bodhisattva Gyōgi. Only then, turning north, was he finally able to reach Yāma's kingdom, and later, after further travel to the north, he eventually reached the *Abi* hell (*abi jigoku* 阿鼻地獄), the worst of the eight hells in Buddhist cosmology. At last Chikō was able to come back to life (NR 2: 7;

¹¹ See Nishimiya 1979, pp. 62–65 and Philippi 1968, pp. 98–112. On the concept of *tokoyo* see Tanigawa 1983.

Koizumi, p. 123–129; Nakamura, p. 167–171). In spite of this confused description of the other world presented along the same lines as the Pure Land and dressed in very Buddhist clothes, it confirms the opinion that the underworld is in perpetual communication with this world and is located on the same level as this world. Perhaps it would be better to say that hell in the *Nihon ryōiki* is not something transcending this world, but only another dimension of this world. We do not get the impression that the inhabitants of such an underworld are definitely cut away from our existence. Dead people look as if they are hiding themselves, while their spirits still wander in this world and influence the present reality. They are like spiritual existences wearing a magic coat which makes them invisible (*kakuremino* 隠れ蓑). Here again we see reflected in the *Nihon ryōiki* the ancient belief in spirits (*mono no ke* 物怪) which had the power to take revenge or to bring all sorts of disaster to living people, and must therefore be pacified. As long as the spirit was believed to remain in the body and not yet gone back to its home land, a mortuary hut (*moya*) was built in order to keep the corpse unburied for a limited period. This practice, known as “temporary enshrinement” (*mogari*), is attested to in several poems of the *Man'yōshū* (756), and is reported by Kyōkai who used the device of this custom in order to stress the possibility that a spirit had to come back to life and, therefore, that it may need its body again. In fact, it would be a tragedy for a spirit to come back to life and find that one’s body had already been cremated. This reportedly happened to Kinume of Utari, who was advised by King Yāma to take the body of another lady of Yamada summoned to hell at the same time, since Kinume’s body had already been transformed into ashes (NR 2:25; Koizumi, pp. 168–170; Nakamura, pp. 194–195).

That Kyōkai’s hell is a copy of this world is also proved by the nature of Yāma and his messengers, whose behavior was modeled on weak human dispositions. We know that Kinume of Yamada, in the story mentioned above, had been summoned to hell by King Yāma, and that she saw her life temporarily spared because of the generous hospitality she gave to Yāma’s messenger who had come to take her to hell. Thanks to the delicious food received, the messenger suggested that she take to hell in her place the unlucky lady Kinume of Utari, whose only fault was that she shared the same name as the messenger’s host (Nakamura, pp. 194–195). The same plot is proposed in the story of the three fiend messengers sent by King Yāma to take the life of Nara no Iwashima, who finally canceled his death on the account of a rich banquet given in their honor by their victim (NR 2:24; Koizumi, p. 164–168; Nakamura, p. 192–194). Yāma’s compromising nature can be seen in his way of dealing with the matter of Kinume of Utari, who had been sent back to life by the king, being the wrong person, only to find her body already cremated. Not knowing what to do, Yāma suggested that

the woman take the body of Kinume of Yamada who, eventually, was unable to escape her destiny (NR 2:25). The aesthetic side of King Yāma is well described in the story of Tokari no Ubai, who had been summoned to hell by the king only because he wanted to listen to the beautiful voice of a woman reciting holy scriptures (NR 2:19; Koizumi, pp. 154–156; Nakamura, pp. 186–187). He sides with the majority when asked to pronounce a difficult sentence toward a wealthy householder haunted by seven subhuman beings, the seven oxen he had killed in his religious services, and protected by ten million men, the living beings he had freed during his life (NR 2:5; Koizumi, pp. 117–121; Nakamura, 164–166). He looks like a magician when stroking Fujiwara no Hiroinari's, marking him with a charm, so that he will never meet with disaster (NR 3:9; Koizumi, pp. 229–232; Nakamura, pp. 233–235).

Hell, with all its earthly elements, stands as a justification of everybody's destiny, as a simple warning of the law of karma which nobody can escape. For Kyōkai hell had no value in itself; it couldn't be separated from its function as the carrier of immediate rewards in this world. Hell was not the ultimate, sad abode to which sinners were destined, but the place where one's destiny in this world was decided. Therefore, for all those who were ignorant of the laws of karmic causation, the real hell with all its pains and tortures could only be this human life. This is clearly stated by Kyōkai at the end of the story of the wicked boy whose feet were burnt in a field aflame because he used to hunt, boil, and eat birds' eggs. The flames of hell had reached him on the hills of Izumi province, so that Kyōkai could conclude, "Now we are sure of the existence of hell in this world" (NR 2:10; Koizumi, pp. 133–135; Nakamura pp. 174–175). Kyōkai's concern was turned to the present world, as we can see from the abused expression "immediate reward" (*genpō* 現報) occurring throughout his work. A man had his body covered with scabs as the consequence for skinning a live rabbit without mercy (NR 1:16; Koizumi, pp. 63–64; Nakamura, p. 127). Miyasu died of hunger and cold for having pressed his aged mother to repay him for borrowed rice, since a penalty is imposed "not in the distant future, but in this life" (NR 1:23; Koizumi, pp. 74–76; Nakamura, pp. 135–136). Miroku appeared to a wealthy man who was thus able to fulfill his vow to copy one hundred scrolls of the *Yugaron*, so that the man "could attain deep faith and happiness here below in this land bound by suffering" (NR 3:8; Koizumi, pp. 227–228; Nakamura, pp. 232–233). The greedy Hiromushime was promised by King Yāma in a dream to become an ox, as an immediate penalty in this life (NR 3:26, Koizumi, pp. 268–271; Nakamura, pp. 257–259). Even the role played by Buddhist scriptures like the *Lotus Sūtra* and by bodhisattvas like Kannon are this-worldly oriented, inasmuch as they are sources of magical power able to bring to the change of one's destiny and to happiness in this life. The *Lotus Sūtra*, as a book containing mystical syllables (*dhāraṇī*), works as the magical revenger of its reciter

against the criticism of laymen who got their mouths twisted for having ridiculed monks reciting this scripture.¹² Kannon brings wealth to believers in need¹³ and restores the eyesight of a devoted blind man.¹⁴ Their role is quite different from the one they play in a later collection, the *Hokkegenki* 法華驗記 of the Heian era, where holy scriptures and bodhisattvas were prayed to in order to obtain a positive salvation in the other world, to be born in the Pure Land.

Kyōkai's concern with this world meant also faith in this world and on the capability that the Buddhist Doctrine still maintained in regulating the course of history. On this point, again, Kyōkai was indebted to the *Daijikyō* which, beside describing the degeneration of the age and the corruption of monks and laymen, stressed the eternal presence of the true Dharma that could be kept with the help of *dhāraṇī*. Kyōkai believed that, even in the Last Dharma Age, the eternal presence of the dharma-body (*hosshin* 法身, Skt. *dharmakāya*)—absolute reality—could guarantee the prosperity of the Buddhist Doctrine and the salvation of human beings. We can see this in the story of the six bronze statues of Kannon stolen from a nunnery and found again in a pond thanks to a heron—symbol of the incarnated Kannon—standing on them. This story ends with a quotation from the *Nehangyō* (*Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*) saying, “The dharma-body always exists even after the death of Buddha” (NR 2:17; Koizumi, pp. 150–152; Nakamura, pp. 184–185). The same belief in the eternity and unchangeableness of the dharma-body even after the death of the historical Buddha was shown by Kyōkai in the story of the groaning voice coming from the head of a sixteen-foot image of Miroku, fallen to the ground and eaten by a thousand ants (NR 3:28; Koizumi, pp. 275–277; Nakamura, pp. 261–262). This indestructible, timeless Absolute which cannot deteriorate in any historical period and which is, at the same time, the bearer and the object of enlightenment or Buddhahood, as embodiment of truth and wisdom (*ricchi hosshin* 理智法身), justifies the returning to its place of its own accord the head of a Kannon statue which had fallen off for no apparent reason.¹⁵

This faith in the strength of the Buddhist teachings may also explain the reason why Kyōkai chose the year A.D. 552, the first year of *mappō* according to one theory, as the year of the introduction of Buddhism in Japan, thus following the tradition transmitted by the *Nihon shoki*. It seems that, by accepting the first year of *mappō* as the first year of Buddhism in Japan, Kyōkai was

¹² NR 1:19; Koizumi pp. 69–70; Nakamura, pp. 130–131. Also 2:18; Koizumi, pp. 152–153; Nakamura, p. 185. For other examples of the magic nature of the *Lotus Sūtra* see 1:8, 2:6, 2:15, 3:1, 3:9, 3:10, 3:13, 3:20.

¹³ NR 1:13, 2:34, 2:42, and 3:3.

¹⁴ NR 3:12; Koizumi, pp. 236–237; Nakamura, pp. 237–238. For other episodes concerning Kannon see NR 1:16, 1:17, 2:17, 2:36, 2:37, 3:7, 3:13, 3:14, 3:30.

¹⁵ “Indeed we know that the dharma-body of wisdom exists.” NR 2:26; Koizumi, pp. 193–194; Nakamura, p. 120.

trying to demonstrate that Japanese Buddhism was going to be the strongest weapon in the fight against the age of degenerate dharma that in China was showing signs of victory because of the weakening of Buddhism there. Therefore, Kyōkai focused his harshest criticism against the slanderers of the Buddhist Doctrine and all those who were not contributing to the protection of Buddhism and of its community. According to him, the slanderers of the Three Treasures—Buddha, his doctrine, and his community—were devoid of Buddha-nature, and their murder was not going to bring damnation to the killer. He agreed on the fact that among the five separate and distinct species in which men were divided by the Hossō sect, the last one known as *ichisendai*—闍提 (Skt. *icchantika*) was the true danger to the world and the carrier of corruption and degeneration. All human beings with a little wisdom were responsible for avoiding becoming one of them. Kyōkai presented on this point two quotations from the *Nehangyō*. The first runs: “I have a high regard for the Mahāyāna teachings. I killed a Brahman who spoke ill of a Mahāyāna scripture. Consequently I will not fall into hell hereafter.” And again: “Those of the *ichisendai* shall perish forever. If you kill even an ant, you will be accused of the sin of killing; you will not, however, be accused of the sin of killing if you kill the *ichisendai*” (NR 2:22; Koizumi, pp. 162–163; Nakamura, p. 191).

This only confirms our belief that Kyōkai, who knew quite well the debates on *mappō*, was still very confident in the power of the faith he had embraced. His acceptance of the theories of the Hossō school makes us feel the Kyōkai’s age was still far from feeling the necessity of opening the way of salvation to all human beings. It was too early to give up in front of a mere theoretical knowledge which still needed time before changing into a psychological reality.

Other Concepts of Mappō in the Early Heian Period

Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the founder of Japanese Tendai, never stated that his age was already in *mappō*. In his *Kenkairon* 顯戒論 (A manifestation of the discipline, 820) he said that he was living at the end of the Imitation Dharma Age, while in his *Shugo kokkaishō* 守護国界章 (Defense of the country, 818) he stressed the fact that they were already very close to the Last Age, although both works were written after the year when *mappō* was thought to have begun. Anchō 安澄 (763–814) of Daian-ji believed that the True Dharma Age lasted five hundred years and the Imitation Dharma Age one thousand years, and accepted 949 B.C. as the year of Buddha’s death, thus reflecting the common belief that *mappō* had already started in 552. However, he stated in the *Chūkanronsōgi* 中觀論疏記, written as late as 806, that he was living during the Imitation Dharma Age. The Japanese of the ninth century seemed unable to accept for Japan a reality conceived in China. They

hid theoretical teachings beneath the vague term of “the final age” (*masse* 末世) and made great efforts to reject such a reality. This was true also for the monk Gen’ei 玄叡 (ca. 840) of the Sanron sect who, in his work *Daijōsanron-daigishō* 大乘三論大義鈔 (T. 70, 119–172), maintained that the True Doctrine lasted one thousand years, not five hundred, in order to postpone the first year of *mappō* from 552 to 1052. He claimed that there was no reason to be frightened by a reality which was still so far away.

The same belief was shared by the Hossō school. The *Hossōtōmyōki* 法相燈明記 (T. 71, 48–49) by Zan’an 慚安 (ca. 776–815), adopted the theory presented by Fei Tchang-fang 費長房 in the *Li tai san pao ki* 歷代三寶記 (T. 49, 22–128, ca. 597), according to which the historical Buddha would have died in 609 B.C. He stated that from the time of the death of Buddha until 815, 1,430 years had passed, thus implying that seventy years of the Imitation Dharma Age were still left. This confirms the fact that *mappō* was seen by people of the ninth century as something to come in the future. Up to this time there was no doubt that the Buddhist Law could be restored to its old glory through cooperation with Imperial Law, and this belief was justified by the relative stability of the *ritsuryō* system. Moreover, the existence of different theories about the date of Śākyamuni’s death and the length of the Three Ages led to confusion concerning when the Last Age should have started. An attempt was made by Annen 安然 (841–884) of the Tendai sect in his *Kyōjijō* 教時證 (T. 75, 355–362) to find out which of these theories was the most reliable, and he was influential in establishing the year 949 B.C. as the date of Buddha’s demise. This date was accepted with little variation by successive writers like the compiler of the collection of Buddhist legendary tales *Sambō ekotoba* 三寶繪詞 (984) and by Jakuren 静胤 in his *Tōnomine ryakki* 多武峰略記.

Genshin

In the tenth century *mappō* was felt to be the product of a deep inner crisis, not as a simple matter of dates, such as in Genshin’s 源信 (942–1017) *Ōjyōshū* 往生要集 (The essentials of salvation). Here no mention of any date was made with regard to the beginning of the Last Age, although the author clearly showed an awareness that he was already living in such a dreadful period. Annoyed by the doctrinal fights between rival monks on Mt. Hiei and by the secularization of the community of Enryaku-ji, Genshin resigned the high title and position of Provisional Lesser Vicar General (*Gonshō sōzu* 權小僧都) in 1005, one year after his appointment, and secluded himself in a mountain retreat of the Yokawa area (Kazue 1961, pp. 75–80). This must have had something to do with Genshin’s perception of his age as the Final Age of corruption and impurities, as he stated in the preface to his *Ōjyōshū*. Exactly because of the limited human capabilities at the end period of the

Buddhist Doctrine, Genshin says he started to compile quotations from important Buddhist scriptures in order to show common beings (*bonbu* 凡夫) a way out of the net of history. The solution given by Genshin was a Tendai interpretation of Jōdo beliefs, stressing teachings and practices necessary to be born in Amida's Pure Land, with a particular concern for the efficacy of both contemplative and invocational *nenbutsu*. *Ōjōyōshū*'s preface clearly shows that Genshin wrote his book with the idea of *mappō* in mind: "Teachings and practices in order to be born in the Pure Land are the most important things in this Final Age of defilements (*jokuse matsudai* 濁世末代). Who, either among monks or laymen, noblemen or commoners, is not going to follow this way? But many are the Buddhist teachings, esoteric and exoteric, which aren't necessarily the same. Many are the practical and the theoretical ways of meditation on Buddha and on his Pure Land. Wise people, excellent people, earnest in their devotion, won't find any difficulty to undertake these practices, but for a foolish being like myself, how is it possible to bear them? Therefore I assembled important passages from holy scriptures and Buddhist treatises elucidating the practice of *nenbutsu*. I think that, looking at these quotations, it will be easier to understand these teachings and less difficult to undertake such practices."¹⁶

Genshin's concern for ordinary beings of the Last Dharma Age points to his knowledge of the theory of the Three Ages which was not directly mentioned in *Ōjōyōshū*, but to which Genshin referred when quoting from the Jōdo scripture *Muryōjūkyō* 無量壽經 (Large Sūtra of immeasurable life, T. 12, 265–278) saying that "although this world of the Last Dharma Age is going to end and the Buddhist Doctrine is going to perish, this scripture will survive one hundred years [after the ten thousand years of *mappō*] in order to lead people to the Pure Land" (Hanayama, p. 219).

In Genshin's work we do not find the optimism shared by the writers of the ninth century and confirmed in Senkan's 千觀 (918–983) *Jūgan hosshinki* 十願発心記 (Ten vows testimonial), according to which the Last Age was considered an attempt to restore the Imitation Dharma Age, in much the same way as the Imitation Dharma Age was trying to recapture the spiritual purity of the period of the True Doctrine. Genshin gave a detailed description of the ruin faced by both the Buddhist Law and the Imperial Law, stressing the continuous fights between the monks of Tōdai-ji and Kōfuku-ji, and describing the war, famine, and other natural calamities which were exhausting the country. All these events were put by Genshin in the dimension of *mappō*, which was considered for the first time in a conscious way as a fact of the present time. Genshin personally suffered the ruin of the *ritsuryō* system and the consequent conflict between Buddhist and Imperial Laws, which

¹⁶ See Hanayama 1972, pp. 36–37. I am indebted for the English terminology to Andrews 1973.

brought about the decline of his own school, the Tendai sect, now that it could not play its original role of protector of the country. Therefore, Genshin turned his attention to the power of the savior Amida.

Starting with basic Buddhist teachings, he gave in the first roll of his *Ōjōyōshū* an extremely vivid, pictorial image of the consequences of human ignorance and misunderstanding of the Buddhist truth that life is impermanent (*mujō* 無常) and full of suffering (*ku* 苦). To consider such impermanence as authentic truth and reality binds men to this world of defilements (*edo* 穢土), preventing them from finding a way out of the cycle of birth and death (*rinne* 輪廻), and forcing them to be born again in one of the six paths (*rokudō* 六道) of Buddhist cosmology. Therefore Genshin wrote his first roll to teach ordinary beings of the Last Age the need to “despise this defiled realm” (*onri edo* 厭離穢土). Each of the six realms, from the lowest (hell) to the highest (gods’ realm), present such cruel and inexorable features that the reader cannot avoid believing that all human faults, even the smallest and most trivial, are destined to be punished, and that all human beings are shackled to one of these courses for the simple reason that they are a product of this illusory world. The worst destiny of human beings who do not believe in the law of karmic causation is birth in one of the eight terrible hells described by Genshin in very different terms from those used by Kyōkai. Genshin put all his strength in the attempt to cause fear and incredulity in the reader’s mind. We can visualize the atrocious pains inflicted upon sinners when reading the beginning of the *Ōjōyōshū*, and while looking at the pictures of *Jigoku zōshi* 地獄草子 (Hell scroll), presumably compiled at the beginning of the Kamakura era on the basis of Genshin’s description (Ienaga 1960, plates 1, 2, 3, 4).

Hate is the main characteristic of the Hell of Revival (*tōkatsu jigoku* 等活地獄), where sinners wound each other with iron claws until nothing remains of their bodies except bones. Fiends strike them with iron sticks from head to feet, until their bodies are reduced to a heap of sand. Unfortunately for the sinners, their pain is not over, since a fresh breeze brings them back to life again and their bodies are ready to suffer the same punishment. Time in the present world is infinitely shorter than in this hell, to which are destined those who commit the sin of killing living beings.

Murderers and robbers are destined to the Hell of the Black Whips (*kokujiō jigoku* 黒縄地獄) where they must lie down on a flaming iron ground, and suffer the lashes of the fiends’ iron whips. Their flesh is cut by axes, swords, and saws along the marks left by the whips, until the sinners’ bodies are reduced to a thousand small pieces of flesh. On both sides of this hell there stands a huge iron mountain crowned on the top by many iron poles. On each connecting set of two poles is a chain under which is located a big boiling pot. Sinners must walk on all fours on the chains with heavy

weights on their backs, until they inevitably fall into the pot, thus being immediately boiled. Four doors lead from the main hell to sixteen minor hells where those who committed suicide without paying attention to their duties find their punishment.

Immoral behavior causes people to be born in the Hell of Striking and Crushing (*shugō jigoku* 衆合地獄), where they are put between the moving walls of two iron mountains which, pushed by ox-headed and horse-headed fiends, crush the bodies of the unfortunate sinners while their blood flows all over the ground. Moreover, those destined to be born in this hell are put in big mortars and pounded with iron pestles. Tigers, wolves, crows, and other birds spread flesh and bones in every corner, while eagles with iron beaks pick up sinners from the ground and hang them on tall trees, making prey of their victims. This hell is characterized by the presence of a forest whose leaves are as sharp as swords, while on the top of each tree there is a beautiful girl inviting a sinner to climb the tree. When he reaches the top of the tree, thus being wounded by the leaves, the woman suddenly disappears, showing herself at the bottom of the tree from where she again invites her victim to descend. The same process repeats until the indefatigable suitor has his entire body cut to pieces by the leaves.

Murderers, robbers, immoral people, heavy drinkers, those who sold *saké* mixed with water, and liars are destined to the Hell of Wailing (*kyōkan jigoku* 叫喚地獄) and to that of Great Wailing (*daikyōkan jigoku*), where they are terrified by the shouts of monstrous fiends mixed with the laments of sinners. The liars cannot even scream since their mouths and tongues are stuck together with iron needles, as a consequence of their past sins.

The flames of the hells mentioned above are said to be like snow when compared to the flames of the Hell of Scorching Heat (*shōnetsu jigoku* 焦熱地獄) to which are destined those who didn't believe in the laws of karmic causation. Here sinners are stuck on iron skewers and roasted on the back and on the trunk. People who let themselves starve to death in order to reach paradise the quickest way are invited by a voice to look for a pond where many white lotuses are in bloom, so that they can appease their thirst and rest in the shadow of the trees. The credulous sinners start their search unaware of the fact that the road is full of holes spurting flames into which they finally fall. Brought back to life again, they keep on looking for the pond, driven by their terrible thirst, only to meet repeated failure. Those who doubted the truth that everything is impermanence are blown by a strong wind which makes their bodies rotate with such speed that they finally become a heap of sand.

The Hell of Great Scorching Heat (*daishōnetsu jigoku*) is waiting for all those who committed violence against nuns and pious women of sincere faith. Here the fiends are made of fire and with their enormously long arms seize

the sinners by their throats, making them float in the sky. Moreover, they scare their prey by reminding them that they are burnt not by the flames of hell but by the flames of their sinful behavior. In this hell the fire is said to reach a height of four thousand kilometers, and to stretch out on an area of sixteen hundred square kilometers. The inhabitants of this hell fall from the top to the bottom of such a fire.

The lowest and the most cruel of all hells is called the Unremitting Hell (*abi jigoku* 阿鼻地獄), the abode of those guilty of the five crimes, of those who denied the principle of cause and effect, who cursed the Mahāyāna teachings, broke the precepts, improperly took alms from believers, and burnt Buddhist images and lodgings belonging to monks. This hell is dominated by a castle surrounded by seven walls, protected all around by a forest of swords and by four huge dogs made of copper, put in the four corners of the castle. The dogs' eyes are as bright as lightning, their teeth as sharp as swords, and their tongues are similar to iron thorns, while their pores emit flames producing a stinking smoke. Each of the fiends guarding the castle have sixty-four eyes which cast iron bullets against the prisoners kept inside. On the four doors of the castle lay eighty pots full of melted copper which flows all over the castle and its inhabitants. Pythons and other poisonous snakes cover the walls, and insects emit flames from their countless mouths, making the Unremitting Hell the hottest of all, where sinners' pains do not know a moment of rest. People here are made to climb extremely hot iron mountains and to swallow hot bullets which burn the victims' bowels. Those who have stolen food from monks are moved by such a violent hunger and thirst that they end up eating each other (Hanayama, pp. 38–91).

Such dramatic description is not limited to the sphere of hell. The realms of starving ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼), beasts (*chikushō* 畜生), raging spirits (*asura* 阿修羅) are painted in very similar colors which sometime get even darker than those of hell, considered the increasing realism used by Genshin in the description of realms drawing nearer and nearer to that of human beings (*jin* 人). On this point we can describe the sad destiny of those who didn't provide food to their husbands, wives, and children and that, therefore, as starving ghosts, must feed on remains vomited by others. Additional examples are those destined to appease their thirst by drinking the drops of water trickling from the feet of people crossing a river, or by using the water offered by sons holding memorial services for their dead parents, because of having sold diluted *saké*; or those jailers who committed the crime of stealing food from prisoners, so that now they have to be content with corpses' ashes (Hanayama, pp. 91–97).

Although all these examples present a world outside human experience, and still could be doubted by the most skeptical readers — they weren't by medieval Japanese — Genshin's description of the world of human beings is

presented as the last, convincing proof that people must flee from their evil nature and abandon their wrong views. If the condition of the human being is the necessary starting point for final deliverance and enlightenment, a position even more favorable than the superior realm of the gods (*ten* 天), nevertheless, birth in human form cannot be desirable when the characteristics of a human being are considered. Quoting the *Nehangyō* 涅槃經 and the *Daihōshakkyō* 大宝積經 (T. 11, 1–686), Genshin analyzed human beings with their characteristics of impurity, pain, and impermanence. The human body is conceived as a rolling chain made of three hundred sixty bones which are assisted in their functions by nine hundred muscles, thirty-six thousand veins, nine hundred and ninety thousand pores, ninety-nine layers of skin, five liters of blood, the five viscera (lungs, heart, spleen, liver, kidneys), and the six bowels (stomach, bowels, etc.). All these details aim at showing the perishable nature of the human body destined soon to be rotten, and, according to the idea of spontaneous generation, to be eaten by millions of insects. Moreover, the body is the main source of pain since, behind its imperfect functioning which causes physical illness, it cannot easily stand the winter cold, the summer heat, and the torture of thirst and hunger. Finally, however long life continues, physical weakness leads to inevitable death which, Genshin says, cannot be avoided even by those sages thought to possess super-human powers (*sennin* 仙人) (Hanayama, pp. 101–120).

Considering the fact that even the gods tire of the bliss of their realm so that their struggle to abandon it becomes a source of great grief, the reasonable solution suggested by Genshin was the Buddhist teaching to cut the chains of the law of causation, to reject the idea of an impure self, and to realize human existence as the expression of an absolute, selfless void (*kū muga* 空無我). With these teachings in mind men can hope to free themselves from the net of cravings, to obtain a pure, unmovable enlightenment, and to long for a world outside the six realms, the Pure Land of Amida, which is described in detail in the second roll, “Longing for the Pure Land” (*gongu jōdo* 欣求淨土). Genshin suggested that the way to the Pure Land requires the fivefold practice of *nenbutsu*, including worship (*raihai* 禮拜) of Amida and of his land, praise (*sandan* 讚歎) meant as the practice of meditation on Amida’s virtues and oral praise of them, vow (*sagan* 作願) to cut off all sorts of cravings, to master the Buddhist teachings, to obtain enlightenment, and to bring others to the same goal, thus showing perfect faith in Amida, meditation (*kanzatsu* 觀察) on Buddha’s marks and features, and merit dedication (*ekō* 廻向) conceived as the believer’s effort to turn all karmic merits to bring himself and others to the Pure Land (Hanayama, pp. 239–247). The superior practice acknowledged by Genshin in order to reach Amida’s land was contemplative *nenbutsu* based on meditation of Buddha’s marks and features, and invocational *nenbutsu*, that is, calling upon Amida’s

name. The performance of *nenbutsu* practice can be helped by the right attitude of the believer, who must be deeply devout, keep the precepts, avoid pagan views, extinguish feelings of arrogance, anger, and jealousy, repent of past crimes, and resist evil spirits (pp. 363–468). The results achieved by *nenbutsu* can be more easily obtained when, together with this main practice, the believer respects common moral norms like filial piety, recitation of scriptures, defense of the Buddhist faith, and religious obedience (pp. 586–601).

As a reward of these constant practices, the believer can hope to be granted several benefits, such as the annulment of evil and the production of good karma, the protection of Buddhas and other spiritual beings, the possibility of being saved by Amida and to be born in his land, and the power to bring other people to faith, thus saving many evil beings (pp. 518–577).

Genshin realized that to follow all these practices was not an easy matter for ordinary beings (*bonbu*) of the Last Age, and raised several times in his book the question of how ordinary human beings could make the vows required to reach enlightenment (pp. 252–253), how could they practice the difficult kind of contemplation known as Buddha-mark contemplation (*bessō kan* 別相觀), in which all the forty-two Buddha-marks had to be mentally seen in their most particular details (p. 346), how could they keep their weak minds constantly concentrated on *nenbutsu* practice (p. 395), and, finally, how could dull and evil beings reach the Pure Land? (pp. 621–622)

The Jōdo belief in Amida's eighteenth vow which proclaims his refusal to attain Supreme Enlightenment as long as all human beings are not saved, provided Genshin with the answer he sought. Amida assures salvation to all those willing to reach it. Mind (*kokoro* 心), attitude, and purpose are important, more than the performance of any single practice. For an ordinary being it is enough to long for the Pure Land while enjoying the pleasures or suffering the pains of this world, always keeping alive one's aspiration for birth there. From such desire faith, the necessary element on the way to enlightenment, will arise. With faith one must turn one's mind to Amida, since faith is at the bottom of the "three devotional hearts" (*sanshin* 三心) which one must possess in order to be born in the Pure Land, sincerity (*shijōshin* 至誠心), deep faith (*jinshin* 深心) which excludes any kind of doubt, and dedicating merit in aspiration for rebirth (*ekō hotsugan shin* 廻向発願心, pp. 365–366). Genshin stressed the fact that faith in Buddha's virtues is much more meritorious than either offerings or the building of temples and pagodas (p. 395). An ordinary being can be saved as far as his faith is deep, exclusive, and continuous, and as long as he practices *nenbutsu* (p. 625).

As far as *nenbutsu* was concerned, Genshin, in the Tendai tradition, recognized throughout the *Ōjōyōshū* the superiority of contemplative *nenbutsu*. But he had to address an audience living in the Final Age, as he wrote in his preface, and on this point he borrowed the Jōdo idea of different prac-

tices suitable to the different capacities of the practitioners. Those without any capability, unable to figure out and meditate on the Dharma-body (*hosshin* 法身) of the Buddha should follow easier practices, thus replacing the complicated Buddha-mark contemplation and other types of contemplative *nenbutsu*¹⁷ with the simple invocation of Amida's name. To concentrate one's mind on the recitation of the syllables of Amida's name is worth the extinction of a large amount of bad karma, and will enable the believer to see all the Buddhas of past, present, and future, as stated in the *Monjuhannyakyō* 文殊般若經 (T. 8, 726–731). Genshin stressed the importance of invocational *nenbutsu* for ordinary beings by quoting the interpretation of Shan-tao 善導 (613–681) of a passage of the scripture mentioned above: "The obstacle of evil in ordinary beings makes difficult the accomplishment of meditational *nenbutsu*. Therefore the Buddha, moved to pity, advised them to simply intone the syllables of his name" (Hanayama, p. 530). Although Genshin kept his belief in the superiority of contemplative *nenbutsu*, thus stating that "if even those converted to Buddha's faith who only practice invocational *nenbutsu* are freed of the cravings and sins of the past ten-thousand kalpas, so much more rewarding must be the practice of contemplative *nenbutsu* made with a pure mind" (p. 519), he nevertheless recognized the importance of invocational *nenbutsu* as a skillful means (*hōben* 方便) ideated in order to keep awake the faith of those people too weak to be earnest in their belief in Amida (p. 580).

In particular, he stressed the importance for ordinary beings of extreme *nenbutsu*, the recitation of Amida's name at the time of death. Ten repetitions of the holy name could bring the bearer of evil karma at least to the Land of Transformation (*ke no jōdo* 化の浄土), the imitation land of the true land, a temporary transformation of truth, if not to the Land of Recompense (*hō no jōdo* 報の浄土), the essentially formless and empty land (pp. 626–627). In addition, this extreme *nenbutsu* was the only resource in the hands of those sinners belonging to the lowest grade of the lowest rank (*gebon no geshō* 下品下生) of the nine grades of beings, who had committed the five capital offenses (*gogyaku* 五逆) and the ten evil deeds (*jūaku* 十惡),¹⁸ in order to see reduced the heavy weight of karmic retribution (pp. 589–590). The only problem concerning extreme *nenbutsu* was that the ten invocations of Amida's name could only be done by those used to such practice, those who had persevered in invocational *nenbutsu* during their lives so as to possess the correct attitude necessary to intone Amida's name at the very end of

¹⁷ A general Buddha-contemplation (*sōsō kan* 総相観), or the phenomenal and noumenal aspects of Amida, and a simplified Buddha-contemplation (*zōryaku kan* 雑略観). On this point see Andrews, pp. 58–67.

¹⁸ The five capital offenses are patricide, matricide, slaying an *arhat*, bringing disharmony in the Buddhist community, shedding the blood of Buddha's body. The ten evil deeds are destroying life, theft, adultery, lying, talking nonsense, speaking evil of others, being double tongued, greed, anger, and irrationality.

their existence.

Genshin, beside the theoretical explanation of the approach to extreme *nenbutsu* and of its benefits, gave a practical example of how it should be treated and what a dying person should perform. At the hour of death, the sick person should be transferred into an “impermanence hall” (*Mujō-in* 無常院), a building compared by Genshin to a hospital, with a statue of Amida Buddha enshrined inside, where the dying patient could recited the holy name. Genshin was the first to import into Japan the idea of the “impermanence hall.” Quoting the *Ssu fên lü shan fan pu ch’üeh hsing shih ch’ao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 (Commentary on the *Vinaya in Four Parts*, T. 40, 1–156) by Tao-hsüan 道宣 (596–667), Genshin stated that the origin of such a building went back to the Jetavana monastery (*Gion shōja* 祇園精舍) of Śrāvastī in India. The *Mujō-in* contained a statue of Amida facing the western direction, behind which was put the dying man. The statue had its right hand raised, while its left hand was grasping five strings of five different colors hanging on the back of the statue. The patient was required to catch the strings with his left hand, so to be led to the Pure Land by Amida. Moreover, he was assisted by a kind of guardian appointed with the duty of burning incense, scattering lotuses, keeping the place clean, and, at the same time, continuously asking questions to the dying person in order to check whether one was already in the presence of Amida or of hell. The guardian had, in fact, the role of helping the dying person reach the Pure Land by continuously reciting the *nenbutsu*, and by writing down the last visions of the sick person. If one was seeing images of hell, one was urged by the guardian to continue the practice of *nenbutsu*, until he was finally able to visualize the coming of Amida.¹⁹

What Genshin couldn’t say was what happens if the dying person is unable to see Amida. This marks Genshin’s limitation, due to his unsolved attempt to compromise the Tendai idea of self-effort in merit accumulation and annulment of evil karma through the diligent observation of precepts, with the Jōdo belief in Amida’s benevolence and vow to bring all beings to his land. The result was the formulation of a self-power (*jiriki* 自力) *nenbutsu* which could not guarantee final salvation to those suffering of a too heavy evil karma, and to those unable to long for birth in the Pure Land and to arouse the necessary faith in Amida. Also, since this was a *nenbutsu* based on personal effort and not on the exclusive benevolence of Amida, as we will see with Shinran, Genshin could not even guarantee salvation to those who, like himself, spent all their life in search of enlightenment. This explains Genshin’s recourse to magic upon the death of a member of the “Nenbutsu-samādhi Society of Twenty Five” (*Nijūgo sanmaie* 二十五三昧会). This

¹⁹ Hanayama, pp. 490–492. The role of the *Mujō-in* is discussed in Yamaori 1982, pp. 109–115.

society, founded by Yoshishige no Yasutane (d. 997) and Genshin himself, was composed of twenty-five people coming from a dissatisfied low and middle nobility, and from monks unfavorable to the secularization of Mt. Hiei, who gathered together for the purpose of practicing constant *nenbutsu* in order to reach Amida's land. *Ōjōyōshū* seems to have been composed as a *nenbutsu* manual for these people, who lived in very rudimentary huts, ate simple food, and gathered on the fifteenth of each month at Shuryōgon temple in Yokawa, in order to practice the uninterrupted *nenbutsu* all day and all the following night. This kind of practice, which included the reading of the *Lotus Sūtra* and other scriptures, was done for the purpose of imploring Amida so that no doubt would hinder their birth in the Pure Land at the time of their death. Genshin's *Yokawa Shuryōgon-in nijūgosanmai kishō* 横川首楞嚴院二十五三昧起請 (The pledge of the *nenbutsu*-samādhi society of twenty-five gathering at the Shuryōgon Temple in Yokawa) informs us that, when one of the members of the society died, he was buried in a cemetery called "the paradise of tranquillity" (*anyōbyō* 安養廟). The bones were covered with earth and sand which had been previously treated with an incantation made according to a magic formula (*kōmyō shingon* 光明真言), so that, thanks to this earth endowed with magic powers, the evil karma of the dead was destroyed (Kawasaki 1983, pp. 349–350).

Genshin's *nenbutsu* was unable to overcome the resort to magic, since self-power *nenbutsu* could not offer any certain guarantee of birth in Amida's paradise. This can also explain the reason why Genshin, at the time of his death, longed for birth in the highest grade of the lowest rank (*gebon no jōshō* 下品上生) of Amida's land.²⁰ He knew, in fact, that as a being of the lowest grade of the lowest rank (*gebon no geshō* 下品下生), his chances to see Amida were close to nothing. Only Shinran could be so bold as to say that he was destined to the lowest rank, sure as he was that salvation was guaranteed to everybody.

Genshin's teachings were welcomed by both the common people and the nobility. The first found in Amida's paradise an easy way to escape the daily sufferings of this world, while the nobility saw in it an extension in the other world of their present blissful life, and a glorious model on which to base their worldly behavior. Genshin lived in a period which witnessed the transformation of a Buddhism conceived as the protector of the country into a religion of private salvation. This transformation coincided with and was brought about by the increasing power of the Fujiwara family, which chose the Kōfuku-ji as its clan temple, while Hōjō-ji 法成寺, Seson-ji 世尊寺, and Byōdō-in 平等院 were the private temples respectively of Michinaga 道長 (966–1027), Koremasa 伊尹 (924–972), and Yorimichi 頼通 (992–1074).

²⁰ We know this from the *Nijūgosanmai kechien kakochō* 二十五三昧縁過去帳 (Death registry of the *nenbutsu*-samādhi society of twenty-five), a record of the last words of the members of the society. See Kawasaki 1983, p. 382.

When Genshin was preaching as a way of salvation a type of *nenbutsu* based on the contemplation in the believer's mind of the splendid Amida Buddha and of his gorgeous paradise, he was providing the nobility with a religion of aesthetic appeal which could guarantee the eternity of the nobility's fortunes and glory. This aspect of Genshin's thought was absorbed into the literature of the Heian period more than the detailed analysis of hell and of the sad consequences brought by the arrival of the Last Dharma Age. We can see it in the description of Michinaga's death presented by the *Eiga monogatari* 栄花物語, where no reference to fear or desperation could make the reader feel like a victim of *mappō*. Michinaga dies in a most seraphic way, exhorted by the Mii Novice Narinobu to invoke the holy name. He keeps his eyes fixed on nine Amida images, concentrating his thoughts on Amida's features and attributes, listening to the harmonious recitation of holy scriptures, and thinking only of his future life. He finally dies while grasping the braids held by the Amida statues, with a Buddha-invocation on his lips. His birth in Amida's land is confirmed by Michinaga's daughter, the empress Ishi, who was informed in a dream of her father's salvation (Matsumura 1965, pp. 326–333; McCullough 1980, pp. 762–771).

Genshin's message was not immediately accepted by the Heian nobility. Their literature reveals more a sense of impermanence dictated by a belief in the law of karmic causation, and a sense of stiffness caused by the limits of a too closed society, like the one depicted in *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, rather than a deep analysis of the problem of personal and universal destiny to which Genshin had already turned his attention.

While Genshin was ascribing the ruin of the times to the inevitable arrival of the Final Age, the nobleman Fujiwara no Sanesuke 実資 (957–1064) was identifying in his diary, the *Shōyūki* 小右記 the cause of the same ruin in the lost of political power from the hands of his own family. Fujiwara no Yukinari 行成 (971–1027) arrived at the point of denying Genshin's explanation of natural calamities in terms of *mappō*, showing in his diary, the *Gonki* 権記, the belief that evil could be destroyed if only bad actions were punished and virtuous ones were praised. Only with the approaching of the fatal year 1052, the year beyond which even from the theoretical point of view it was impossible to go on denying the beginning of the Last Age, *mappō* was taken by the nobility to be the scapegoat for all disasters. When Fujiwara no Sukefusa 資房 (1007–1057) was indicating in his *Shunki* 春記 that the ruin of the country was called upon by the authoritarian government of Michinaga's son, Yorimichi, he didn't stop his analysis on the political level, but went on searching the first cause of all evils in the metaphysical sphere, ascribing it to the arrival of the Final Reigns (*matsudai no yue* 末代の故). He saw what he took to be irrefutable proof in the fire which burnt the Hasedera temple in 1052 that the period of the Last Doctrine had finally come (Mezaki 1984, p.

43). Nevertheless, as we know from his diary, Sukefusa was not a religious man. His attention was still very much directed to the political and social meanings of the word “final reigns” (*matsudai*), which he used on several occasions in order to show his dissatisfaction towards the present social conditions, and his criticism against the government.

From the second half of the eleventh century the expression “final age” (*masse* 末世) occurs in many diaries, novels, and works of history, often bringing with it a connotation of fear and inevitability. The idea that disasters happen because of the ruin of the Buddhist Doctrine was a concept stressed in Fujiwara no Munetada’s 宗忠 (1062–1141) diary, the *Chūyūki* 中右記. The item under the 30th day of the 3rd month of 1104 gives a detailed description of the violent nature of the monks at Enryaku-ji. But Munetada believed that even in such a dark age a revival of the Buddhist Doctrine was still possible. As a sign of the “strangeness of this Final Age,” he recorded in the 28th day of the 10th month of 1096 the episode of a temple located in southern Kyoto, which was assaulted by robbers after a fire had occurred. The thieves, moved to repentance by warning dreams, brought back to the temple all the stolen objects. This act was explained by Munetada in terms of the power of the Buddhist spirit, active even in the most degenerate periods (Sasagawa 1934, 1, pp. 390–391). Such an explanation would have been impossible without Munetada’s confidence and faith in an external power (*tariki* 他力) able to help human beings, whose self-efforts (*jiriki* 自力) were insufficient to stand the inexorability of the times. This faith was provided by the cult of Amida which owed its prosperity to the easy solution it offered to the problem of *mappō*. Neither was Amida the only Buddha to whom Munetada and his contemporaries turned. In fact, Amida guaranteed salvation only during the 10,000 years of the Final Age, after which no scripture was going to survive. Therefore, in such circumstances, faith in a new Buddha was felt necessary, and the cult of the bodhisattva Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku), the Buddha of the future, became popular. In this way the Japanese of the eleventh century guaranteed themselves an eternal salvation away from the net of *mappō*. But still they lacked the ability to follow the path undertaken by Genshin, to question their innermost feelings and to meditate on their guilty human nature. This tendency was to develop very soon, after the Gempei war (1186), the first great war in Japanese history.²¹

²¹ This article will be concluded in the December issue of this journal, Vol. 15/4.

ABBREVIATION

- T. TAKAKUSU Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and WATANABE Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭, eds.
 1922–33 *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [Newly revised Tripiṭaka of the Taishō era]. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō.

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