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The Influence of the Ōjōyōshū in Late Tenth- and Early Eleventh-Century Japan

Scholars of Heian Buddhism frequently comment that because of the influence of Genshin’s Ōjōyōshū, Pure Land thought and practice spread rapidly to all levels of society in the eleventh century. This assertion has become so common that it is rarely questioned. In this article, I investigate eleventh-century sources, such as novels and diaries of aristocrats, and prove that the Ōjōyōshū is mentioned infrequently. The Eiga monogatari, the only text to emphasize the Ōjōyōshū, seems to be the exception to the rule and raises more questions than it answers, since the author is unknown. While agreeing that the Ōjōyōshū was an important work, I conclude that Genshin was a pivotal figure in Heian Pure Land Buddhism less through his authorship of the Ōjōyōshū than through his participation in and leadership of a number of religious fellowships.

KEYWORDS: Ōjōyōshū – Genshin – Nijūgo zanmaie – Yokawa – Fujiwara Michinaga

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The Ōjōyōshū, composed by Genshin from 984 to 985, is frequently viewed as a text that almost single-handedly caused Pure Land Buddhism to become the dominant belief system in Japan. Numerous scholars, both Japanese and non-Japanese, state that because of the Ōjōyōshū, Pure Land Buddhism rapidly spread to all levels of society and became immensely popular. Among the evidence they present to support this contention are nenbutsu societies which, they say, used the Ōjōyōshū as a handbook; numerous copies, including woodblock print editions, of the Ōjōyōshū; references to the Ōjōyōshū in several texts; and artistic evidence, including illustrations of hells and of the Pure Land based on the first two chapters.¹

These arguments usually fail to note that at least fifty and often over one hundred years passed between the composition of the Ōjōyōshū and most of the evidence for its popularity that they cite. Yet during those years, the influence of Pure Land Buddhism spread enormously. Part of this misunderstanding stems from the critical role that Hōnen (1133–1212) and Shinran (1173–1262) played in the development of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. The influence of the Ōjōyōshū is usually discussed with reference to these two men. They were both, indeed, impressed by Genshin’s work, but Hōnen was not even born until almost one hundred and fifty years after its composition.

This is not to say that the Ōjōyōshū was unimportant. In this article, however, I will argue that its role in early eleventh-century Japan was smaller than is usually assumed. Moreover, focusing on the Ōjōyōshū excessively has led us to overlook other important factors in the spread of Pure Land thought and practice at this time. Several of these factors do involve the monk Genshin, but not necessarily directly through his work the Ōjōyōshū. Although Genshin is frequently referred to as a reclusive monk (*inton no so* 虛遁の僧), in fact he was extremely active in the Yokawa sector of Mt. Hiei in sponsoring and guiding numerous fellowships (*ko* 講), some of which included lay people and many of which became active beyond the boundaries of Mt. Hiei.

**Nenbutsu Groups and the Ōjōyōshū**

It is often said that Genshin composed the Ōjōyōshū as a handbook for a group

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¹ See, for example, Allan Andrews (1989, p. 28); Kuge Noboru (1968, p. 154); Inoue Mitsusada (1956, p. 164); and Michiko Yusa (2002, pp. 46–47). Richard Bowring recently stated that the Ōjōyōshū caused Genshin to become a household name (1998, p. 252).
of nenbutsu practitioners called the Nijügo zanmaie. The Nijügo zanmaie was founded in the Yokawa sector of Mt. Hiei in 986, when twenty-five monks from the hall Shurıyōgon in the Prefecture to one another, gather monthly to practice the nenbutsu, and most importantly, go to the deathbed of any member who became fatally ill. The ultimate goal was birth in the Pure Land for oneself and the other members.

Because of the existence of the Ōjōyōshū, the argument holds, it was not necessary for members of Heian nenbutsu groups to read numerous texts in order to learn the proper method of performing the nenbutsu and achieving Pure Land birth. Allan Andrews takes this view in his seminal work *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth*, which remains the only book-length treatment in English of either Genshin or the Ōjōyōshū, arguing:

*The Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth*, written between the eleventh month of 984 and the fourth month of 985, was probably composed as a manual of nenbutsu cultivation for the Nembutsu-samadhi Society of Twenty-five [Nijügo zanmaie]. It became the guide to Pure Land faith and practice for the next 200 years to the close of the Heian Period. (1973, p. 28)

Similar statements are also found in Japanese works. KUGE Noboru, for example, states that the Ōjōyōshū was written with the Nijügo zanmaie in mind, further arguing that its influence did not stop with that group; it became the text for such gatherings all over Japan (1968, p. 154). HAYAMI Tasuku holds that nenbutsu groups were formed to put the teachings of the Ōjōyōshū into practice (1998, p. 126).

Such assertions require further examination. Most of the Ōjōyōshū consists of highly technical instructions for performing meditative nenbutsu, as well as complex doctrinal discussions. Since the Nijügo zanmaie did not engage in meditation at all, most of the Ōjōyōshū could not have been useful to them. Nevertheless, the sixth chapter, eleventh section of the Ōjōyōshū, “Deathbed Rites” (Rinjū gyogi), does deal with rituals similar to those enacted by the Nijügo zanmaie. Based on this, some argue that this section, at least, was taken directly from the Ōjōyōshū. I will refute this idea in the following discussion.

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2. Nijügo zanmaie, the name of the group, is somewhat mysterious. The term nijügo zanmai, found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, refers to a group of samādhis, performed by bodhisattvas, that puts an end to rebirth in the twenty-five existences (nijügo u zaijī; F 12: 448b11–12, c1–2). These twenty-five existences correspond to the twenty-five abodes of sentient beings in standard Buddhist cosmology. The *Fa-hua hsüan-i* (593), a compilation of lectures given by Chih-i, and the *Fa-hua hsüan-i shih-chêng* (764), by Chan-jan (727–782), both quote this passage concerning the nijügo zanmai (T 33: 731c4–5; T 33: 879a9–18). There is not, however, any evidence that this meditation was actually performed by members of the Nijügo zanmaie. The name may simply have been chosen because the number twenty-five matched the number of founding members, or to convey the intention of members to lead sentient beings in the six paths of saṃsāra to the Pure Land.
Several of the records of the Nijūgo zanmaie are extant, making it possible to investigate this group in considerable detail. In the ninth month, fifteenth day of 986, two months after the Nijūgo zanmaie was founded, a covenant called the Kishō hachi kajo 起請八箇条 was composed. The Kishō hachi kajo consists of eight articles outlining the basic rules by which members agree to abide. For example, they stipulate a regular meeting time for the group and call for the construction of both a special hall to which the critically ill person should be moved and a cemetery for members of the fellowship. The Kishō hachi kajo is usually attributed to Yoshishige Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (931–997), even though he was never a member of the Nijūgo zanmaie. Genshin himself, far from being the founder of the group, as is sometimes asserted, was not even a member at this time.

The Kishō hachi kajo does not speak of any form of meditation, although that is the topic of most of the Ōjōyōshū. The heading for the first article states:

We shall perform the nenbutsu zanmai 念仏三昧 on the fifteenth day of every month.

(KOYAMA 1997, p. 85)

This article goes on to explain that during the monthly gathering, the six fascicles of the Amida Sutra are to be read, in order to guide sentient beings in each of the six paths. After the completion of each fascicle, members recite the nenbutsu one hundred times while circumambulating an image of the Buddha, transfer the merit thus acquired to all sentient beings, and recite verses in praise of the Buddha. Last, in the late afternoon, after making their vows, members intone a verse from the Hōshō ron 宝性論, praying that by means of the merit accumulated through these practices, they will be able at the moment of death to see Amida Buddha. In addition, this article stipulates that if a member is forced to miss a meeting, he must explain his reasons and receive permission to do so.

3. Confusion surrounding these documents has significantly impeded research in the past. The first problem is that the same text is referred to in various typeset editions by different names. For example, the title Yokawa Shurōgon'in nijūgo zanmai kishō in the Dai Nihon Bukkyō zenshū (b2) and the title Yokawa Shurōgon'in nijūgo zanmai shiki in the Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (1) actually refer to the same work. This is only one of numerous examples of such confusion. Another problem is the difficulty in establishing the authenticity of these texts. Because the original for none of them survives, scholars must rely on copies that date to later periods and frequently contain notes added by the compilers. Moreover, the identity of the author is often unknown.

Koyama Masazumi, a graduate student at Ryukoku University, investigated both the oldest surviving manuscript and the various typeset editions. A photographic reproduction of the first two texts in the manuscript, as well as a typeset version, are found in his article (KOYAMA 1997) on pages 72–74.

4. All references to the Kishō hachi kajo are from the text in KOYAMA’s article (1997).

5. For more on this issue, see HAYAMI 1998, p. 134.

6. The Hōshō ron (the full title is the Kukyō ichijō hōshō ron; S. Ratnagotra-vibhāga-mahāyānottarātānta-śāstra) is a four-fascicle work, found in T 31. The text itself does not name an author, but Chinese tradition holds that it is by Śrāmatī. Thought to date to the late fourth or early fifth century, it contains a detailed discussion of the concept that the Buddha-nature is inherent in all sentient beings (tathāgata-garbhā). The verse from the Hōshō ron is also quoted in the Ōjōyōshū. The Ōjōyōshū, however, takes the verse from Chia-ts’ai’s Ching-t’u-lun 浄土論 (early seventh century), which in turn refers to
The term nenbutsu zanmai, used in the article’s heading, does not refer to one specific practice. The text seems to be subsuming all of the activities outlined here, including reading of the Amida Sutra and recitation of the nenbutsu, under the title nenbutsu zanmai. Daniel Stevenson explains that in fourth- to sixth-century China, nian-fo san-mei (buddhanusmrti-samādhi) involved visual recollection of the physical marks of the Buddha (1995, pp. 360-61). There is no indication, however, that this was the case in the Nijūgo zanmaie. Loose usage here of the word zanmai is in keeping with the name of the fellowship itself, which, as footnoted earlier, was not specifically related in any way to the nijūgo zanmaie described in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra. The absence of meditational activity stands in direct contrast to the focus of the Ójōyōshū.

Article Four of the Kishō hachi kajō states:

We shall construct a separate building and call it the Öjōin 往生院. When a member becomes ill, he shall be moved there. (Koyama 1997, p. 88)

The hall was to be modeled on the Jetavana monastery in India. In the northwest corner of this monastery stood a hall called Mujoin 無常院 that enshrined a standing, east-facing statue of the Buddha. The sick person, in front of the statue, would face west and visualize the marks of the Buddha. He then grasped the end of a five-colored pennant that was hung from the hands of the image.7

Sato Tetsuei argues that the author of the Kishō hachi kajō must have had a copy of the “Deathbed Rites” section of the Ójōyōshū at his side when he wrote the fourth and fifth articles (1979, pp. 137-38). Hayami Tasuku and Hori Daiji, among others, echo this idea (Hayami 1978, p. 114; Hori 1964, p. 148). For years this was the standard theory. Recent research, however, has shown that sources besides the Ójōyōshū were also used extensively in the composition of the Kishō hachi kajō. Koyama demonstrates that large portions are taken verbatim from Tao-shih’s Fa-yuan chu-lin 法苑珠林 (1997, p. 63). The Fa-yüan chu-lin itself was used as a source for the “Deathbed Rites” section, but the text of this article in the Kishō hachi kajō matches exactly that in the Fa-yüan chu-lin, not the Ójōyōshū.8

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7. The locus classicus for this passage is found in Tao-hsiian’s (596-667) Ssu-fen-lu shan-fan pu-ch’ueh hsing-shih-ch’alù四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, written around 660. Tao-hsiian outlines a procedure in which the dying person is transferred to a separate hall, where he dies in front of an image of the Buddha, his hands attached to it by threads. This passage is quoted in the Ójōyōshū. The Nijūgo zanmaie charters, however, quote a similar section from Tao-shih’s (?) 668 Fa-yüan chu-lin (668), rather than the Ójōyōshū (and thus the Ssu-fen-lu shan-fan pu-ch’ueh hsing-shih-ch’alù) (40:144a13-20). The Fa-yüan chu-lin is a one-hundred fascicle work that classifies and explains various Buddhist teachings and technical terms. Minamoto Tamenori, a contemporary of Genshin, used it extensively in the Sanbde, indicating that this text was known among educated people in Heian society.

8. In his article, Koyama Masazumi (1997) lines up passages from the Fa-yüan chu-lin and the Kishō hachi kajō, highlighting matching portions. This passage from the Fa-yüan chu-lin may be
Article Five states:

During the period of [the member’s] illness, members should take turns nursing him. (Koyama 1997, p. 89)

The purpose of the group, this article states explicitly, is to help participants attain birth in the Pure Land. This is accomplished by constantly encouraging one another, and at the moment of death assisting the dying person in maintaining the proper state of mind (*rinjū shōnen* 臨終正念). A person’s next birth relies entirely on whether or not he achieves this state in his final moment, this article continues. The fellowship is meaningless, therefore, if the dying man is left alone.

Members are to form pairs and take twenty-four hour shifts watching over the sick man. One person’s role is to assist with recitation of the *nenbutsu*, while the other takes care of the menial tasks that accompany an illness. They may leave only when the next pair comes to relieve them, and they are forbidden to shy away from unclean sights or smells. When the sick man seems about to die, everyone is to gather for recitation of the *nenbutsu*, singing of hymns, and other activities. If the dying person has dreams or visions, they are to be recorded. In this article, unlike the previous one, only one phrase quotes from the *Fa-yüan chu-lin*. None of this article matches the text of the *Ojōyōshū*.

In the sixth month, fifteenth day of 988, two years after the *Kishō hachi kajo* was written, Genshin, having joined the group, composed the *Nijūgo zanmai kishō* 二十五三昧起請. While some of the twelve articles are similar to those in the *Kishō hachi kajō*, others introduce entirely new ideas, such as lectures on the *Lotus Sutra*. Still, meditation is not mentioned. Because Genshin is the author of this text, it can be used to reveal many aspects of his thought not found in the *Ojōyōshū* that were enacted in a popular context. Article One states:

We shall practice the continuous *nenbutsu* (*fudan nenbutsu* 不斷念仏) throughout the night of the fifteenth day of every month. (Koyama 1997, p. 73)

This is the first time the term *fudan nenbutsu* is used to describe one of the Nijūgo zanmai’s activities. Traditionally, the *fudan nenbutsu* was identified as the highly demanding *jōgyō zanmai* 常行三昧, one of the four types of *samādhi* outlined in the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*. As defined in that text, the *jōgyō zanmai* requires constant circumambulation of an image of Amida for ninety days. In Japan, however, the term was used to refer to a number of different *nenbutsu* practices. In the *Nijūgo zanmai kishō*, *fudan nenbutsu* simply identifies a *nenbutsu* practice that continued throughout the night. A demanding exercise, it does stand in contrast to the procedure outlined in the *Kishō hachi kajō*, in which

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*found in* ^K3: 886c29–987a16. All portions of the *Ojōyōshū* which quote the *Fa-yüan chu-lin* are listed in Hanayama Shinshō 1937, p. 42.*
recitation of the nenbutsu occurs for a relatively short length of time. Still, it is not a form of meditation in the usual sense, nor is it mentioned in the Ôjôyôshû.

In fact, in this work by Genshin, the deathbed ritual part of the Nijûgo zanmaıe’s activities is actually deemphasized, as can be seen by comparing the length and detail of Article Eight of the Nijûgo zanmai shiki with Article Five of the Kishô hachi kajo. This indicates that there may have been a movement, led by Genshin himself, to avoid placing too much weight on the deathbed moment, a conspicuous element of the Kishô hachi kajo (Ishida 1986, p. 218). In addition, Genshin does not quote himself; the Kishô hachi kajo never quotes directly from the Ôjôyôshû, nor does it refer to that text.

Three death registers (kakochô過去帳) for the Nijûgo zanmaie are also extant. The most complete, discovered in 1970 at the Kunaichô Shoryôbu宮内庁書陵部, was published under the title Ryo'gon'in nijûgo zanmai kechien kakochô 楞getSingleton二十五三昧結縁過去帳. No commentary was provided at that time, but in 1985, Hirabayashi Moritoku presented both the text and a brief analysis of it. This has come to be the standard version of the Nijûgo zanmaie’s kakochô.

The manuscript, copied by the monk Keisei慶政 (?–1267) in the year 1230, not only includes many names not found in earlier kakochô but also provides the date of death and the age of the deceased. It contains seventeen biographies. In total, fifty-one names are listed, all monks at Yokawa. The names and biographies are in the order in which the members died. The biographies focus on the deathbed moment of the member and on proof after his death of his birth in the Pure Land. The Ôjôyôshû, however, is referred to only in Genshin’s own biography and in the biography of the monk Shokin聖金, who is said to have recited the “Deathbed Rites” section as he died (Hirabayashi 1985, pp. 48–49).9

Copies of the Ôjôyôshû

If the Ôjôyôshû was indeed extremely popular in the early- to mid-ten hundreds, one could reasonably expect that many copies were made at that time. Two basic versions of the Ôjôyôshû exist today. The distinction between them is first made in the postscript to a 1253 printed copy (Kitabatake 1992, p. 45). The first version was sent to China (referred to as the kensô bon 遣宋本); the other remained in Japan (referred to as the ryûwa bon 留和本).10 Some Kamakura printed copies state that the ryûwa bon was the original, while the kensô bon was the revised version (Hayami 1988, p. 146). This is based on the fact that the ryûwa bon contains four sections in the first fascicle that are missing from the kensô bon. But Hanayama Shinshô, who conducted a thorough study of various copies of the

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9. For further detail on this biography of Genshin, see Rhodes 1996.
10. Although the character so refers to the Song dynasty, at this time China was actually in the Tang dynasty. The Kamakura notetakers, however, seem to have been confused on this point, and the name kensô bon stuck.
Ojōyōshū, argues that the kenšō bon is closer to Genshin’s original, explaining that the extra parts found in the ryūwa bon seem to have been added later. The two earliest known copies are both ryūwa bon (cited in Hayami 1988, p. 146). In any case, the differences between the two versions are minor and not significant for the purposes of this article.

Genshin had long cherished the idea of going to China himself, but for various reasons, including obligations to his family, was unable to do so. There was close contact, however, between Japan and China in the mid- to late-tenth century. The Sanron monk Chōnen (?–1016) went to China in 983, returning in 986 with texts and a famous statue of Śākyamuni. His homecoming was marked in Kyoto by a large celebration of which Genshin would have been aware. Hayami even speculates that Genshin included numerous quotes from Chinese commentaries in the Ojōyōshū because from the start he intended to send it to China (1988, p. 148). When Genshin went to Kyushu in 987, his main goal may have been to dispatch his work to China. In Kyushu, he became acquainted with a merchant to whom he entrusted the Ojōyōshū, as well as several other Tendai texts. The Ojōyōshū was well-received in China, as Genshin learned, to his delight, through letters that are sometimes appended to copies of the kenšō bon version. In fact, the Ojōyōshū perhaps had more contemporary influence in parts of China than it did in Japan.

The oldest extant copy of the Ojōyōshū dates to the twenty-sixth day, seventh month of 996, during Genshin’s own lifetime; he would have been fifty-five years old at the time. The date is listed in a postscript, which also gives the name of the copyist as Chōin 長胤. Unfortunately, only fifty-five pages of the second fascicle are extant (Kitabatake 1992, p. 41).

The next copies are one dating to 1152, of which only the last half of the first fascicle is extant, and one from 1181 that contains some Japanese syllabary (hiragana) mixed with the Chinese characters (Nishimura 1990, pp. 40–41). The fact that the latter includes hiragana indicates that there was an effort at the time to direct the text toward a broader readership. Nevertheless, by the time this copy was made, Pure Land thought and practice had already spread widely throughout Japan.

The oldest complete copy for which the date is certain, kept at Shōren’in in Kyoto, is from 1171 (Kitabatake 1992, p. 45). Recently, however, a complete Heian copy was discovered at Saimyōji 最明寺 in Kanagawa Prefecture. It is thought to have been made slightly before the Shōren’in text, but unfortunately the date is not recorded (Kitabatake 1992, p. 42).

The copy upon which the Taishō shinshū daizōkyō text was based is a printed edition at Mt. Kōya’s Shōchī’in. The exact date is not known, nor are further details concerning its origins. The postscript states that there was a woodblock printing in 1168, which was then lost in a fire and reprinted in 1210, but neither survives in its entirety (Kitabatake 1992, p. 42). The compilers of the Nihon
shiso taikei edition of the Ōjōyōshū used a complete copy dating to 1253, owned by Ryūkoku University in Kyoto (nst 6: 5).

Portions of the 1210 ryūwa bon are held at Osaka’s Shitennōji and at Senkōji in Aichi Prefecture. These two parts, when combined, form an almost complete version. Because this text became popular, numerous later printed copies were based on it (Kitabatake 1992, p. 42). The earliest known printing of the Ōjōyōshū, in 1168, was made almost two hundred years after its composition. Not surprisingly, this was the time when Honen was active. Therefore, although it is true that the Ōjōyōshū was one of the earliest and most frequently printed texts, this could not account for the popularization of Pure Land Buddhism in the hundred years immediately after it was written.

In 1631, for the first time markings (kaeriten 返り点 and okurigana 送り仮名) were added to the Chinese characters in a printed version to assist Japanese in reading the text without translation (Kitabatake 1992, p. 43). The oldest copy of parts of the Ōjōyōshū that includes illustrations, called the Eiri Ōjōyōshū jigoku monogatari 絵入往生要集地獄物語, dates to 1671 (Nishimura 1990, p. 45). Obviously, this is quite late.

The Ōjōyōshū did become famous through paintings and illustrated versions, but not until the 1600s and after. Moreover, such illustrations were limited to the first two chapters. There exist only fragments of a few eleventh-century copies. Of course it is possible there were many more that do not survive, but ultimately the evidence is inconclusive.

References to the Ōjōyōshū in Contemporary Texts

Numerous biographies of Genshin exist, but as with most biographies of eminent monks, they tend to be considerably embellished. This makes it difficult to reconstruct the facts of Genshin’s life and the importance the Ōjōyōshū played at that time. Nevertheless, three biographies of Genshin were written within sixty years of his death, which, for a monk of his time period, is unusual. Two of the biographies were probably written by monks who knew Genshin personally, while the third author seems to have had contact with some of Genshin’s disciples.

The first extant biography, contained in the Nijūgo zanmai kacockō and probably written by his close disciple Kakuchō 覚超 (960–1034), does place some emphasis on the Ōjōyōshū, including letters sent from China praising Genshin and his work. After presenting the letters, Kakuchō states:

I have never heard in previous ages of spreading the Buddhist teachings in two countries. Indeed, [Genshin] is a master who transmits the light. How could he not be a messenger of the Tathāgata? (Hirabayashi 1985, p. 49)

Nevertheless, the Ōjōyōshū is far from the only work of Genshin’s that is mentioned. The Kakochō also refers to the Ichijō yōketsu 一乗要訣, the Daijō tai kusha
shō 大乗対倶舎抄, the Inmyō shisō isho chūshaku 因明四相違疏注釈, and the Dansan chūshaku断纂、注釈 (Hirabayashi 1985, p. 49). The Ichijō yōketsu in particular, a text that took up the cause of universal enlightenment, was an influential work, perhaps more so in eleventh-century Japan than the Ōjōyōshū.11

The second biography is in the last fascicle of the Hokke genki法華騐記, composed by the monk Chingen around the year 1043. Chingen is known to have had contact with Genshin through the Shakako 釈迦, a devotional group Genshin organized. The section of the biography concerning Genshin’s life before going to Mt. Hiei’s Yokawa sector clearly borrows from the Nijūgo zanmai kاكochō, but the following portion presents some new information. These additions probably came from other documents, from stories that were circulating, or from Chingen’s own knowledge of Genshin and his activities.

The Hokke genki states:

[Genshin] wrote the Ōjōyōshū, setting forth guidance to the Land of Supreme Bliss (gokuraku), bestowing the means [by which to achieve enlightenment]. At this time, [he had] a dream in which a smiling Kannon extended a golden lotus; Bishamon raised a canopy, standing before the holy man [Genshin] to serve him. It is quite impossible to conceive of the Buddha’s great wisdom and expedient means (hōben). (NST 7: 549)

The Hokke genki adds, after several more lines, that the T’ang emperor commanded that a temple be built to enshrine an image of Genshin and a copy of the Ōjōyōshū, and that he granted Genshin the title Great Master (Daishi 大師) (NST 7: 550).

But again, the Ōjōyōshū is not the only work of Genshin’s discussed. Immediately before the passage quoted above, the Hokke genki addresses the importance of the Ichijō yōketsu in some detail, telling of a dream Genshin had in which Aṣvaghoṣa and Nāgārjuna, two prominent Indian Buddhists, pat him on the head to show their approval of the text (NST 7: 549). The Hokke genki also states that Genshin wrote the Shō Amidakyō sho, the Tai kusha shō, and the Inmyō shisō isho chūshaku (NST 7: 550).

The third biography is known by a number of different names, including the Enryakuji Shuryougon’in Genshin Sōzuden, Genshin Sōzuden, and Eshin Sōzuden. This was written in the middle of the eleventh century by Ōe no Sukekuni 大江佐国, of great literary fame at that time. Sukekuni used the biography in the Kakochō, embellishing it with his famous literary style. In addition, he included information from numerous other documents, and he was able to converse with a disciple of Genshin’s later years, Kyōhan 廣範. Because Kyōhan died in 1061, the biography must have been written before then (Hayami 1988, p. 5). This places it in the years between Genshin’s death in 1017 and Kakuchō’s own

Of the three early biographies, the Eshin Sōzu den stresses the Ojoyōshū the most, referring to it several times, discussing the circumstances through which it was sent to China (esz 5: 662–63). The Ojoyōshū, however, is not the focus of this work.

On the one hand, more time is spent on the Ojoyōshū than on any other text of Genshin’s in all three biographies. This indicates that the Ojoyōshū may have been the most influential of his writings. On the other hand, it still is not the focus of any of these biographies. As Robert Rhodes points out, biographies served specific purposes; that found in the Hokke genki, for example, intended to show Genshin’s devotion to the Lotus Sutra, not to Amida Buddha (1996, pp. 42–43).

Later biographies include those found in the Zoku honchō ōjōden and the Konjaku monogatari. The Zoku honchō ōjōden was written by Ōe no Masafusa (1041–1111), probably within five years of 1103. Masafusa relies heavily on information from the Genshin Sōzuden, and therefore, indirectly, also on that from the Kakochō. Numerous famous stories about Genshin come from the Konjaku monogatari, which is thought to have been compiled around 1106. By this time, elaborate legends about Genshin had taken shape.

Several other biographies date to even later years. In recent times, those writing about Genshin have sometimes freely relied on these biographies, such as that contained in the Sangoku denki (1431) and the Eshin’in Genshin Sōzu gyōjitsu (1718). These texts, however, pose numerous problems, since the source of much of this later information is not known. As time passes, more and more emphasis was apparently placed on the Ojoyōshū. This has contributed to the myth of its all-pervasive influence in the eleven hundreds.

The Ojoyōshū did have considerable influence, almost immediately, in Enryakuji itself. Hayami states that this is because Genshin was the first to clarify the ways in which the nenbutsu differed from a dhāraṇī, explaining that the goal of the nenbutsu is birth in the Pure Land (1988, p. 116). The first work to refer to the Ojoyōshū was Josho’s Shōshō’s 靜照 (d. 1003) Gokuraku yūi 極楽遊意, written before 990, which discusses the sixteen contemplations outlined in the Visualization Sutra (Ishida 1970, p. 466). In addressing the ninth, contemplation of Muryō Butsu 無量寿仏, Jōshō says, “There are, in the world, the works Ojoyōshū and Byakugō kan 百豪観. Practitioners should act in accordance with these texts” (Ishida 1970, pp. 457–58). Both of these writings are by Genshin. Within five years of the completion of the Ojoyōshū, therefore, a monk on Mt. Hiei had mentioned it in another work. Nevertheless, this is only a passing reference that also speaks of one of his other writings. An additional contemporary monastic text that mentions the Ojoyōshū, the Ojō gokuraku mondo 往生極楽問答, is by Kakuchō, who states that the ten items outlined in the Ojoyōshū regarding one’s

12. The Byakugō kan is found in esz 3: 579–83.
dying moments should be followed (bz 24: 360). Kaku-chô, as a close disciple of Genshin, naturally would refer to Genshin’s works.

The Ojô jûnen 住生十念, of unknown authorship, mentions the Ojôyôshû in several places. Initially, the Ojô jûnen was attributed to Genshin, but the current consensus is that it dates to a slightly later period and is probably also by Kakuchô (ISHIDA 1970, p. 468). Another text which refers to the Ojôyôshû is Shingen’s (1064–1136) Junji ôjôkô shiki 順次住生式, which is supposed to have contained chapters called “Ojôyôshû uragaki” and “Ojôyôshû ihyô ki” 住生要集依念記 (ISHIDA 1970, p. 466). Unfortunately, this work does not survive.

The ten-fascicle An’yôshû 安養集 provokes some interesting questions regarding the Ojôyôshû precisely because it does not refer to it. The introduction states that the purpose of the work is to collect passages that explain and interpret the virtues of Amida from the esoteric and exoteric teachings of India, China, and Japan. This passage continues by explaining that several tens of masters (ajari 阿闍梨) from Enryakuji participated in the compilation, but the main compiler was Minamoto no Takakuni (1004–1077). The An’yôshû is strictly an anthology; none of the writings of the compilers themselves are included. The An’yôshû quotes Genshin’s Amidakyô ryakki, but contrary to expectation, never the Ojôyôshû (ISHIDA 1970, p. 468).

Ishida Mizumaro argues that the An’yôshû resembles the Ojôyôshû in structure: the first two chapters are “Despising the Defiled [Land]” (On’e 厌縮) and “Longing for the Pure [Land]” (Gonjô 欣浄); it continues with “Cultivating Causes [for Pure Land Birth]” (Shuin 修因), “Experiencing Results” (Kanka 感果), “Subsidiary Rewards” (Iho 依報), “Proper Rewards” (Shôhô 正報), and “Ideas” (Ryôken 料簡). Because these match very closely the chapter headings of the Ojôyôshû, ISHIDA posits that the An’yôshû was in fact a study of the Ojôyôshû (1970, p. 468). This view seems to be the consensus; the Nihon bukkyo shi jiten states that it was probably modeled on the Ojôyôshû (ÔNO 1979, p. 10). Such an explanation, however, poses further questions. If the compilers of the An’yôshû intended to model their work on the Ojôyôshû, this would indicate that they found the Ojôyôshû inadequate, since they wanted to do basically the same thing. In addition, throughout the Ojôyôshû Genshin occasionally uses his own words, but they never saw fit to quote him.

Certainly the Ojôyôshû was known on Mt. Hiei soon after it was written, but this does not necessarily mean that it had a large impact outside the monastic community. The examples cited above show some familiarity on the part of the authors with the Ojôyôshû, but with the possible exception of Kakuchô in his Ojô jûnen, they did not focus on it in any detail.

13. A translation of these ten items is found in DOBBINS, 1999.
14. The text is held by Saikyo-ji, a Tendai temple located in Sakamoto 架本, near Mt. Hiei; again, there is no typeset edition.
Biographies of several monks in おじょでん (collections of biographies of those who had achieved birth in the Pure Land) provide some further evidence of the influence of the おじょゆしゅ, but not as much as might be expected. The first Japanese おじょでん, Yoshishige Yasutane's にほんおじょこくらくき, was completed in 986, at almost exactly the same time as the おじょゆしゅ. Not unexpectedly, it does not mention this text. The next おじょでん, Ōe no Masafusa's ぞくほんちょうおじょでん, was written around 1101, almost one hundred years later. The only time this work speaks of the おじょゆしゅ is in its biography of Genshin. There, Masafusa lists six works written by Genshin. He briefly discusses the おじょゆしゅ, explaining that it was sent to China and well-received. After listing the six, he says that these writings all should be followed, without singling out the おじょゆしゅ (nst 7: 573).

The third fascicle of the しゅいおじょでん (1132), by Miyoshi no Tameyasu, tells the story of Ajari Shōkin (d. 1025), who is listed in the にじゅうざんまいけっかちゅ as one of the early members of that group. This narrative states that when Shōkin became ill, he faced a painting (へんぞ) of the Pure Land and recited the nen-butsu. As he neared death, the people surrounding him told him not to speak of anything besides birth in the Pure Land, explaining that the おじょゆしゅ commands that a person's good friends (ぜんちじき) do this at the time of his death (nst 7: 624). This is clearly based on the earlier-mentioned story in the かかちゅ. Another mention of the おじょゆしゅ is found in the middle fascicle of the ごしゅいおじょでん, also by Miyoshi no Tameyasu, which relates that the monk Giko 義光 (d. 1127) read the おじょゆしゅ every day (sz 107: 112). Still, most biographies in おじょでん make no reference to the おじょゆしゅ. In addition, these works date to more than one hundred years after the composition of the おじょゆしゅ. Even when they give biographies of earlier figures, much of the information may be inaccurate.

Ishida argues that the おじょゆしゅ's authority extended to monks belonging to other schools. He cites, for example, the Sanron school's Eikan 永観 (1033–1111), suggesting that the influence of the おじょゆしゅ on Eikan's おじょせん おじょゆしゅ is strong, but he adds that this is hard to prove (1970, p. 470). He bases his argument on connections Eikan is known to have had with Genshin's thought. For example, the しゅいおじょでん states that Eikan sponsored mukae-ko 迎講, dramatizations of the いがつ scene (Amida and his retinue coming to greet the dying person and escort him to the Pure Land), which were associated with Genshin (nst 7: 381). The fact that Eikan was influenced by Genshin, however, does not necessarily mean that influence occurred by means of the おじょゆしゅ, as I discuss later in this article. In fact, the おじょゆしゅ never mentions mukae-ko. The influence on Eikan of Genshin likely came largely through activities themselves.

The Eiga monogatari, Okagami, and the おじょゆしゅ

Novels are the form of literature most frequently cited as evidence of the widespread influence of the おじょゆしゅ. In almost all cases, however, the novels that
are mentioned were either composed much later than the Ōjōyōshū, such as the mid-Kamakura Heike monogatari, or the connections between the two are only speculative. This is not, however, the case with the Eiga monogatari栄華物語; the author of this work was indisputably familiar with the Ōjōyōshū. The Eiga, the first portion of which was composed around 1028, is the first novel which gives incontestable proof of the Ōjōyōshū’s influence.

Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1028) is the central figure of the Eiga. Michinaga was the most successful of the Fujiwaras, the family which dominated Japanese politics for much of the tenth and eleventh centuries. For thirty years, Michinaga was de facto ruler of Japan, a feat he accomplished by means of his political savvy, which included the tactic of marrying his numerous daughters to crown princes. As he grew older and his health began to suffer, he turned his interests to Buddhism, commissioning the building of a personal temple, Hōjōji, part of which was an Amida Hall called Muryōjuin. The purpose of the author of the Eiga in writing the entire book seems to have been to praise Michinaga and his accomplishments.

Chapters Fifteen, Sixteen, Seventeen, Eighteen, Twenty-two, and Thirty contain twenty quotations from the Ōjōyōshū (Matsumura 1969, pp. 3–4). Sometimes the author acknowledges this source, sometimes not. The only difference between the two works is that the Eiga writes the passages out in Japanese syllabary rather than Chinese characters. Quotes are not only from the first two chapters of the Ōjōyōshū but also from the chapters “Proper Practice of the Nenbutsu” (Shōshū nenbutsu 修正念仏), “Methods of Assisting [Practice]” (Jonen hōhō 助念方法), “Nenbutsu for Special Occasions” (Betsuji nenbutsu 別時念仏), and “Benefits of the Nenbutsu” (Nenbutsu riyaku 念仏利益). For the most part, though, the Eiga quotes from the second, “Longing for the Pure Land” (Gongu jōdo 欣求浄土).

The Eiga even mentions the title of the Ōjōyōshū at one point: when a group of nuns visits Michinaga’s Amida Hall and worships the Buddha statue there, “recalling the words of the Ōjōyōshū,” they recite a verse from it (McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH 1980, 2: 573–74). In addition, the Ōjōyōshū is quoted in the narration of Michinaga’s death.

His only desire was to concentrate his thoughts on Amitābha Buddha as death approached. He wished to see no forms other than the signs and attributes of the Buddha, to hear no sound other than the words of the Buddhist teachings, and to think of no object other than his future life.

(McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH 1980, 2: 763)

Hayami argues that this shows that Michinaga’s death took place exactly according to the instructions of the Ōjōyōshū (1998, p. 196). In fact, however, as G. Cameron Hurst notes, Michinaga’s death in all likelihood was a messy, unpleasant affair (1979, p. 106).

Some say that the Eiga’s heavy reliance on the Ōjōyōshū shows that this work
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of Genshin’s profoundly influenced the literati shortly after its completion. Complicating this argument, however, is the fact that other contemporary works do not mention the Ōjoyoshū. Why, then, would the Ōjoyoshū be so heavily used only in the Eiga?

In order to answer this question definitively we need to know the identity of the Eiga’s author. Unfortunately, the author has never been conclusively identified. Most people agree that it was written by a woman, because the issues it focuses on are those which would have been the concern, in that time period in Japan, mainly of women. The author discusses in great detail birth, marriage, courting rituals, clothes, and so on, for the most part ignoring economic and political questions. Moreover, in the Heian period, prose writing such as this was almost exclusively confined to women.

The current theory is that the first thirty chapters were written by one woman and the following ten by another, because a clear break exists between the two sections (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 44). Chapter Thirty describes the death of Fujiwara no Michinaga; this is a moment of great transition in the novel. The author herself, at the end of this chapter, states:

There will be other events following the ones I have described. Someone who witnesses or hears about them must be sure to write them down.

(McCullough and McCullough 1980, 2: 774)

This implies that she is ending her own narration while at the same time inviting some future person to pick up where she left off. In addition, linguistic evidence shows that there were likely at least two different authors for the first and second parts (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 41). Because most of the references to the Ōjoyashū occur in the first thirty chapters, I will confine my discussion here to them and their supposed author.

The earliest known attribution of the Eiga to an author occurs in the Nihongi shiso 日本記事私抄, compiled by the monk Ken’ā (1261–1338). Ken’ā states that it was written by Akazome Emon 赤染衛門, a poet who was active in the late tenth and early eleventh century. As McCullough points out, she could not have composed the last ten chapters, because by then she would have been over one hundred and twenty years old. Because Chapter Forty, the last, ends with an event that took place in 1092, it is assumed that the last ten chapters took shape then or soon after (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 42–43).

Akazome is known to have been close to Michinaga’s family and to have had access to much information about them. One work from the early Kamakura period states that she was a lady-in-waiting for Michinaga’s consort, Rinshi. Moreover, Akazome married into the Oe family, of great literary repute for their historical writings. This may have prompted her to become interested in writing herself, and she would have had available, as the Eiga author must have, numerous historical documents (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 45).
Of most importance to this discussion are Akazome’s Buddhist connections. Many of her poems have Buddhist themes. One of them indicates that she became a nun after her husband’s death, which would have given her access to Buddhist works and information. It is thought, for example, that portions of the Ojōyōshū must have been written by a nun or at least the information was obtained from nuns (Matsumura 1983, p. 391). To be interested in Buddhism as a Heian aristocrat was hardly unusual; even becoming a nun was fairly common. The author’s familiarity with Buddhist texts such as the Ojōyōshū, however, was not the norm. Clearly, the author, whether Akazome or another woman, had an unusual life.

The genre to which the Eiga belongs is also important; it is usually classified as the first historical novel (rekishi monogatari) in Japan. It was later followed by works such as the Ōkagami, which is thought to have been composed soon after the first thirty chapters of the Eiga (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 30). Its identity as a rekishi monogatari sets the Eiga apart from, for example, The Tale of Genji, which does not claim to be recounting historical events. The Eiga talks about real people and real occurrences, and does not pretend to fictionalize them. Therefore, it would at first appear that narrations that include words from the Ojōyōshū accurately represent its use.

The Eiga does, however, contain numerous factual errors, many of which concern minor details such as dates (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 33). If it were indeed written by Akazome, she must have composed it when she was quite old; she would have had to rely on her memory to fill in gaps in the narrative. The mistakes are more numerous toward the beginning of the work, indicating that recent events she could recall with greater accuracy (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 48). Moreover, the author fleshes out incidents, the specifics of which either she cannot remember or are not available to her. She does not invent events, but she fills in the details, “perhaps especially when she wished to depict their scenic aspects and emotional states of the people involved” (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1: 34).

The author makes use of numerous historical documents that she seems to have had at hand, although she rarely acknowledges her sources. The Eiga borrows from a number of Buddhist texts (Matsumura 1983, p. 384). It relies on the Ojōyōshū the most when discussing Michinaga and his religious activities, which he engaged in more and more as he neared the end of his life. The relationship between Genshin and Michinaga was complex. Scholars frequently point out that the Gonki, the diary of the famed calligrapher Fujiwara no Yukinari (972–1027), shows that Fujiwara no Michinaga owned a copy of the Ojōyōshū. In the entry for the ninth month, seventeenth day of 1005, Yukinari states that he visited Michinaga to return a copy of the Ojōyōshū, which he had borrowed in order to make a copy which Michinaga requested (zst, 5: 39). That

15. See, for example, Hayami, 1998, p. 9, 98, 147.
Michinaga asked for a new copy does suggest the possibility that he used his first so much that it became dog-eared. Hayami speculates that the previous year, Michinaga became enamored of the Ōjōyōshū, always keeping it at his side (1988, p. 207). It is also possible, however, that Michinaga had other reasons for wanting a new copy; for example, perhaps the calligraphy in his first was not of the quality of Yukinari’s. On the basis of this this one reference in Yukinari’s diary, it is ubiquitously stated that Michinaga loved the Ōjōyōshū.

In any case, there was contact between Michinaga and Genshin for several years. Michinaga first took note of Genshin in his diary, the Mido kanpakuki 御堂関白記, when Genshin was given the title Gon Shōsōzu 権小僧都 (a prestigious imperially appointed monastic position, sometimes translated as Provisional Lesser Vicar) in 1004 (mkz, 4: 100, 104). A month later, Michinaga notes that when he and his consort were fasting at Kyoto’s Gedatsuji, they sent a messenger to Genshin to invite him to visit. Apparently, he did not come. Four days later, they once again asked Genshin to visit, because there were “things that troubled them” (mkz, 4: 124, 127). Neither of these entries mentions the Ōjōyōshū, although Michinaga’s diary frequently contains references to Buddhist works.

From the sixth to the seventh month of that same year, 1004, Michinaga suffered from serious illness. It is likely that he wanted Genshin to pray for his recovery from sickness in this life, rather than birth in the Pure Land in the next. In any case, around this time, Michinaga sought to become close to Genshin, as he had to several other monks, but Genshin does not appear to have been interested. He did not respond to either invitation (Hayami 1988, p. 207). Nevertheless, Michinaga became increasingly intrigued by Genshin; it was in the ninth month of the next year that he asked Yukinari to make a new copy of the Ōjōyōshū. But it would be a mistake to assume that Michinaga was interested in Genshin solely because of the Ōjōyōshū. Genshin was engaged in numerous other activities that made him a prominent figure and brought him to Michinaga’s attention. One such example is the Shakako 駒伽講, a group founded by Genshin in 1006, which centered on Lotus Sutra practices. Members signed up to serve twenty-four hour shifts in a hall in Yokawa, waiting on an image of Sakyamuni as if it were alive, giving it food, fanning it in summer, and so on. Laypeople from the city of Kyoto, including women, participated. A sign-up sheet which is extant has the name of Rinshi 倫子, the consort of Michinaga, here referred to as Sadaijin Denhoku Seijo 左大臣殿北政所.16 Perhaps the author of the Eiga intended to reflect this interest of Michinaga’s in Genshin by frequently quoting the Ōjōyōshū, although she never mentions Genshin’s name. Hayami reasonably argues that the author of the Eiga probably used

16. It is possible that some of the people listed on the sheet did not actually go to Yokawa but rather had proxies go in their stead. In any case, they still would have been aware of the existence of the group. The text of the sign-up sheet is found in Takeuchi (1964, 11: 262–73) under the title Ryōzen’in kakocho.
excerpts from the Ōjōyōshū because she knew of the connections between Genshin and Michinaga (1998, pp. 98, 147).

Hayami also states that because the Eiga quotes the Ōjōyōshū, we can assume that in aristocratic society at that time, the nenbutsu of the Ōjōyōshū was the ideal nenbutsu (1988, p. 262). In addition, he posits that the Ōjōyōshū was deeply loved by the aristocracy at this time (Hayami 1998, p. 197). We must return, however, to the issue of the author and the ideas she is presenting. As stated earlier, the author makes many mistakes, not usually in relating that certain events took place, but in the details of when it was, who was there, and what was said. To make up for these lapses in her memory, she freely borrows from numerous texts that she appears to have had at hand. Therefore, while one can probably accept as accurate, for example, that the Amida Hall enshrined nine images of Amida, it is not necessarily true that as Michinaga died, he recited words from the Ōjōyōshū.

Michinaga is the narrative center of the Ōkagami, the second rekishi monogatari, as well. The author, like the Eiga author, must have had access to numerous historical documents; in fact, he was familiar with the Eiga itself, to which he refers in several places. In addition, he sometimes borrows information, without acknowledgment, from it. Frequently, the author of the Ōkagami “asks a modern historian’s questions,” analyzing and interpreting events in a way that the Eiga did not (McCullough and McCullough 1980, 1:16–17). Nevertheless, the Ōkagami refers to Genshin only once, in a very brief incident in which Genshin turns down an elaborate rice bowl offered by the empress (nkbt 21:15). The Ōjōyōshū is never mentioned at all, even though references to Pure Land thought are scattered throughout the text.

Other Late Heian and Early Kamakura Literary Evidence for the Ōjōyōshū’s Influence

The Genji monogatari, written around 1008, frequently uses phrases and ideas that some scholars say came directly from the Ōjōyōshū. These include words and expressions, such as onri edo 厌離穢土 and raigo 来迎, that seem to refer to important concepts contained in the Ōjōyōshū. For example, the Genji contains the phrase “despise the world and separate from it” (yo o itoi hanareru 世を離れる) (Shirato 1986, p. 681). Although the meaning of this phrase is similar, onri edo itself is not found in the Genji. Similarly, the word raigo does not occur either, although there seem to be indirect references to the idea, such as a prayer to find oneself atop a lotus blossom (Shirato 1986, p. 679). Ishida Mizumaro argues that the Pure Land thought that permeates the Genji proves the influence of the Ōjōyōshū (1970, p. 480). He points, for example, to the chapter “First Flower” (Yūgao 夕顔), in which a nun refers to the holy light the nenbutsu cleansing her heart (nkbt 14:125).

Shirato Waka is a strong proponent of the idea that the Genji relies heavily
on the Ōjōyōshū. Nevertheless, she points out herself that the words onri edo already occur in the fifth fascicle of the Ten Thousand Leaves (Man’yōshū 萬葉集, eighth century), in the following poem (1986, p. 678):

I have always despised this tainted earth,
my constant wish to entrust my life to the Pure Land beyond.

Mukashi yori kono edo o onri su
従来この穢土を厭離す
Hongan o mo chit e sho o sono josetsu ni yosemu.17
本願ももって生を彼の浄刹に託せむ

Ishida Mizumaro also strongly believes that the Ōjōyōshū was immediately influential in Japanese literature. He bases this argument almost entirely on what he posits are amazing examples of Pure Land thought in the Genji (1986, pp. 329–30). He also argues that the Ōjōyōshū caused a revolution in Japanese literature (1986, p. 325).

Another argument for the influence of the Ōjōyōshū on the Genji holds that Murasaki Shikibu knew of and was impressed by Genshin. Proponents of this idea point to the chapter “Writing Practice” (Te narai 手習い), which centers around a prominent but nameless monk from Yokawa, his mother, and his sister. The story in the Genji is that while the sister and mother of the Yokawa no Sōzu were traveling, the mother suddenly became quite ill. The Yokawa no Sōzu was summoned to be at her side, where she was staying in Uji. While there, the Sōzu and other monks noticed a young woman in a state of turmoil under a tree. The other monks wanted nothing to do with her, assuming that she was a fox who had merely taken on human form. But because the Sōzu, out of his compassion, convinced them that the woman needed help, they took her in (NKBT 18: 339–414).

This connection to Genshin is first made quite late, in the Kakai sho 河海抄, a commentary on the Genji that was written by Yotsutsuji Yoshinari 四辻善成 (1326–1402) around 1367 (Shirato 1986, p. 670). Nevertheless, Edward Kamens points out how widespread and accepted this view became; The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature, for example, simply states, “Genshin is the model for Yokawa no Sōzu in the closing parts of the Genji monogatari” (Princeton Companion, p. 157; referred to in Kamens 1993, p. 133).

Proponents of this theory point out that the ages of the mother and sister in this story, eighty and fifty respectively, would roughly match the ages of Genshin’s own mother and sister at that time, as determined by various biographies of the two women (Shirato 1986, pp. 671–73). In addition, some scholars state that the fact that the Yokawa no Sōzu displayed such compassion towards the woman also links the figure to Genshin. Ishida Mizumaro and Ikemi Chōryū are

among the many who argue that the Yokawa no Sōzu is Genshin (Ishida 1986, p. 329; Ikemi 1988, pp. 68–69). Kamens, however, presents a convincing argument against this theory in his essay “Genshin’s Shadow.” He contends that Genji is a work of fiction, not of history, and that assuming the author was modeling characters on real people is a mistake. Unlike the Eiga, the Genji is not a rekishi monogatari. Moreover, even if it could be established that Genshin was the monk mentioned in the Genji, it would not prove that the author was familiar with the Ōjyōshū, although familiarity is often claimed in articles intended to show connections between the Ōjyōshū and Heian literature (Kamens 1993, p. 133, 140). Examples of Pure Land thought in the Genji, therefore, prove only that such ideas were indeed becoming popular. They do not tie the Genji directly to the Ōjyōshū. More likely, in fact, all these works together were drawing on a common vocabulary that was used at the time.

Diaries of contemporary aristocrats, another valuable source of information for this time period, almost never refer to the Ōjyōshū, even though other Buddhist works are frequently named. The example cited earlier from the Gonki is one of the few contemporary instances in which the Ōjyōshū was mentioned. Moreover, women’s diaries and writings of the period such as the Izumi Shikibu niki, the Murasaki Shikibu niki, the Sarashina niki, and the Makura no sōshi, show no evidence of influence by the Ōjyōshū (Ishida 1970, p. 481).

**Artistic Evidence for the Ōjyōshū’s Influence**

Determining the influence of the Ōjyōshū is difficult in part because the Ōjyōshū itself is primarily a compendium of quotations from other sources, including sutras, treatises, and commentaries. If a particular phrase or theme appears in a Japanese text or artwork that postdates the Ōjyōshū, scholars frequently assume that the text or art relied on the Ōjyōshū. It is possible, however, that these later writings and art forms are drawing upon the original sources, or other secondary sources, and not the Ōjyōshū. This is even more likely if the original is a well-known text, such as the Visualization Sutra.

Much late Heian and early Kamakura art is said to be based on the Ōjyōshū. Numerous scholars state that the first chapter of the Ōjyōshū, particularly its descriptions of the eight levels of hells, gave rise to paintings of the hells (jigoku zu) and of the suffering experienced in all of the six undesirable rebirths (rokudē 難道絵), while the second chapter, especially the section describing the pleasures of raigō, caused numerous raigō paintings to be produced.

But illustrations of hells that predate the Ōjyōshū exist. The Son’i zōsōjō den

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18. Shirato, for example, makes this argument in her article (1986, pp. 670–73).
19. I am indebted to Professor Mimi Yiengpruksawan for pointing out that diaries of Heian aristocrats rarely refer to the Ōjyōshū.
20. See, for example, Narita 1987, p. 636; Takemi 1998, p. 147.
尊意僧正伝 (late-ninth to early-tenth century) mentions depictions of the hells on the wall behind a Buddha statue at Yoshidadera (ZGR 8: 213). Such pictures also existed shortly after the composition of the Ōjōyōshū. The Makura no zōshi (late tenth to early eleventh century), for example, mentions folding screens upon which were depicted the hells at a Butsumyō e (仏名会) (NKBV 19: 114).21

Paintings of the hells did not become common until the middle of the Kamakura period and after. In fact, concentration on avoidance of rebirth in the six undesirable paths, and rokudō e based on this, did not spread rapidly until the end of the twelfth century, when the famous figoku zōshi, Gaki zōshi, and Yamai zōshi, all of which survive, were made (Hamada 1988, p. 91). In addition, a famous set of rokudō e were commissioned at the end of the twelfth century by Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127–1192) (Nakano 1985, p. 101). There are no known rokudō e that date to the time of Genshin. Moreover, illustrated copies of the Ōjōyōshū in which the drawings incontestably are related to the text did not appear until the late 1600s, and did not become popular until the Edo period.

Although the idea of hells did not become popular in the eleventh century, the concept of raigō did. Genshin was instrumental in the popularization of the notion of raigō. This was not only through the Ōjōyōshū but also through activities he led. In the Ōjōyōshū, Genshin simply quotes the Visualization Sutra’s narration of how Amida, exuding a great light, accompanied by many bodhisattvas and thousands of monks, appears before the dying person (NST 6: 336). Numerous scholars have attempted to show that existing raigō paintings were based on this description. This is not a convincing argument for three reasons.

First, there is a variety of raigō paintings; not all are based on a single text. In addition, since the Ōjōyōshū is merely quoting the Visualization Sutra, determining whether certain illustrations are based on the Ōjōyōshū or the Visualization Sutra is impossible. Last, most raigō images are not, in fact, based on any text at all. The wall paintings at Byōdōin in Uji, the oldest surviving independent raigō illustrations, are meant to represent the nine levels of birth in the Pure Land. Genshin does not deal with the nine levels in any detail in the Ōjōyōshū. In fact, the nine levels on the walls do not accurately represent the depiction in any writings; they do not match, for example, the nine levels outlined in the Visualization Sutra (Taguchi 1982, p. 107). The artists took the idea of nine levels of Pure Land birth and the corresponding raigō scenes, and apparently freely interpreted them according to their own artistic sensibilities.

Mukae-ko (today commonly known as nerī kuyō 練り供養), which were dramatizations of the raigō scene, probably stemmed from the activities of the Nijūgo zanmaie. The Hokke genki, written within forty years of Genshin’s death

21. Butsumyō e were held in the twelfth month, initially from the fifteenth day, later from the nineteenth day, for three days, either at the Imperial Court or at various temples. Participants read the Butsumyō kyō, recited the names of the Buddhas in the three realms, and confessed their transgressions.
by a monk who had been acquainted with him, states that Genshin began the
mukae-kō, and that participants included monastic and lay, men and women,
noble and lowly. The Eshin Sōzuden, composed at approximately the same time,
describes the ceremony in some detail.

The Kakochō also states that Genshin created statues and paintings (Hirabayashi 1985, p. 49). Although scholars assert that none of the countless objects
now attributed to him are truly his works, the fact that this early account makes
such a statement strongly suggests that Genshin did at least commission a distinc-
tive type of artwork. Some of these images may have been linked to mukae-kō. In
contrast to the later hell and Pure Land scrolls, this genre of art most likely was
based on the theme of raigo.

Other Religious Associations

One last indication of Genshin’s role in the spread of Heian Pure Land Buddhism
is the existence of several other religious associations begun by him at Yokawa. The
one for which there is the most information is the Shakako, in which members
took turns serving a statue of Śākyamuni around the clock, as though it were alive,
and attended a monthly lecture on the Lotus Sutra. Participants included lay peo-
ple, mostly aristocrats. Although the purpose of this society was not performance
of the nenbutsu, for Genshin Pure Land Buddhism was never separate from other
types of Buddhist belief and practice. For example, at the end of all of his works,
most of which do not treat Pure Land ideas, he nevertheless includes a passage
dedicating the merit accumulated in writing the text to the birth of himself and of
all sentient beings in the Pure Land in the west. Through the Shakako, lay people
had regular contact with Genshin and were exposed to his religious influence,
which always included a concern for Amida’s Pure Land.

Genshin is also attributed with the founding of two other groups, called the
Fugen kō 普賢講 and the Jizō kō 地蔵講. Texts outlining the activities of these
groups are found in the Eshin Sōzu zenshū. Most works in this collection,
however, are apocryphal, and whether Genshin did in fact establish such groups
is not known.

Monks of several sects were instrumental in spreading Pure Land Buddhism
beyond the monastic community in tenth- and eleventh-century Japan. Although
a strong case can be made that Genshin was the monk in the mid-Heian period
who contributed the most to this spread, this is not only because he wrote the
Ōfujyōshū but also because of his myriad other activities.

22. The Fugen kō saho 普賢講作法 is found in ESZ 5: 519-42; the Jizō kōshiki 地蔵式 is in ESZ 5: 583-90.
Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that the Ojōyōshū was not as well known in the hundred years or so after its composition as it is frequently portrayed to be. Yet in this same hundred years, Pure Land thought and practice spread rapidly. If the Ojōyōshū was not the primary cause of this, what were the other factors? Religious fellowships were certainly pivotal. The Nijūgo zanmaie was limited to monks during Genshin’s lifetime, but they were a diverse group: ages ranged from twenty to sixty-nine, and included a monk of one of the highest ranks (dento daihōshī) as well as numerous otherwise unknown monks. Moreover, activities they sponsored soon spread to the city of Kyoto and beyond. This type of group, previously unknown on Mt. Hiei, is an often overlooked factor in the rapid spread of Pure Land Buddhism in eleventh-century Japan. The Ojōyōshū was only one part, albeit an important one, of a conversation that would change the face of Japanese Buddhism.

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