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Ōjōyōshū, Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki,
and the Construction of Pure Land Discourse in Heian Japan

The place of narrative in organizing our experience in the world has been the topic of much discussion in recent years. This paper starts from the position developed by the psychologist Jerome Bruner, who argues that there are two distinct modes of thought, the paradigmatic (or logico-scientific) and the narrative, and that they are equally important in ordering experience and constructing meaning. Texts written in both of these modes were crucial in the establishment of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan during the Heian Period. The *Ōjōyōshū*, written by Genshin in 985, is perhaps the single most important text in the development of this form of Buddhism in Japan, but insofar as it presents a systematic and comprehensive outline of Pure Land cosmology, doctrine, and practice, it is an example of a text written in the paradigmatic mode. But another text from this period written in the narrative mode, the *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* by Yoshishige no Yasutane, played an equally important role in the spread of Pure Land Buddhism. This text is a collection of forty-two brief biographies of people believed to have been born in the Pure Land. These biographies serve both to “prove” that the Pure Land really exists and provide us with models with which to fashion our lives so we can gain birth in the Pure Land.

KEYWORDS: *Ōjōyōshū* — *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* — Genshin — sacred biography — Yoshishige no Yasutane — Pure Land Buddhism — narrative

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IN *ACTUAL MINDS, Possible Worlds*, the psychologist Jerome Bruner distinguishes two distinct modes of thought, the paradigmatic (or logico-scientific) and the narrative, both of which he argues are equally important in ordering experience and constructing reality. The paradigmatic mode is descriptive and explanatory, and “employs categorization or conceptualization and the operations by which categories are established, instantiated, idealized, and related to one another to form a system” (BRUNER 1986, 12). Bruner gives logic, mathematics, and the modern scientific method as representative examples of this mode of thought. On the other hand, the narrative mode employs storytelling as a way of organizing our experience in the world. Bruner concludes that the two modes are complementary and that “efforts to reduce one mode to the other or ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought” (BRUNER 1986, 11).

The distinction that Bruner makes above highlights the increasing attention given to the narrative construction of meaning in a wide range of disciplines, including literary studies, history, philosophy, theology, ethics, and psychology.¹ If, as Stephen CRITES (1971, 291) has argued, “the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative,” then attempts to describe such experience through time must also be undertaken in the narrative mode. Following this line of thought, philosophers like Alasdair MACINTYRE (1984) and Paul RICOEUR (1992) have stressed the importance of storytelling in constructing personal identity and in shaping how we relate to the world around us (that is, ethics). A similar point is also made by the theologian Michael Goldberg.

By allowing a particular story to direct our attention to the world in some specific way, we let it direct our activity in the world in a certain manner. As the story shapes our understanding of reality, it simultaneously qualifies the way we relate to reality.... By articulating a certain vision of the world, narratives provide us with a way of articulating what we are doing in the world.

(GOLDBERG 1991, 176–77)

In other words, narratives both shape our perception of reality and provide guidelines or normative patterns to explain how we should behave in light of that reality.

1. There is extensive literature on narrative. For a useful survey of how narrative has been taken into the various disciplines, see POLKINGHORNE 1988. HINCHMAN and HINCHMAN 2001 contains a number of important studies on narrative and its place in the human sciences.

One example of the way in which this new focus on narrative has manifested itself in the field of religious studies is the revival of interest in “sacred biographies” (which includes, but is not limited to, works belonging to the long disparaged genre of hagiography). In the introduction to a collection of essays entitled *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, the editors suggest that sacred biographies “involve an intricate interweaving of the ‘mythic’ and ‘historical’ elements” (REYNOLDS and CAPPS 1976, 1). The term “mythic” here derives from Mircea Eliade, who used it to refer to a sacred story or, in his words, “true representation of reality” or “an account of what happened and how things are.”² Hence sacred biographies are fundamentally accounts of the ways in which the sacred (or, to use Eliade’s terminology, the mythic) is manifested in the life of a particular historic individual. Moreover, Eliade also suggests that myth provides the pattern for human behavior (REYNOLDS and CAPP 1976, 2). In other words, these biographies, inasmuch as they describe how the mythic is made manifest in the life of a specific person, also establish a pattern of ideal religious behavior that later believers can follow. Sacred biographies, then, have a dual function, descriptive and prescriptive, in that they simultaneously describe how the sacred is manifested in a particular person’s life and enjoin the readers/listeners of the biographies to fashion their lives in conformity with the vision of an ideal spiritual life depicted in them. To rephrase a formula used by Clifford Geertz to define religion in his celebrated essay, “Religion as a Cultural System” (GEERTZ 1973, 93), sacred biographies provide both a “model of” an exemplary religious life as well as a “model for” pursuing and actualizing such life.³

It is not my purpose here to argue for the importance of narratives in ordering human experience. Instead, taking my hint from Bruner’s comments above, I simply want to point out that texts in both the paradigmatic and the narrative modes played crucial roles in laying the foundation of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. As is well known, Pure Land Buddhism became firmly established in Japan during the middle of the Heian Period (794–1185). A crucial text in this development is the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集, completed by Genshin 源信 (942–1017) in 985. Although quite different from modern scientific or mathematical treatises, the *Ōjōyōshū* can be classified as a text composed in the paradigmatic mode inasmuch as it employs categorization and conceptualization to construct a comprehensive theoretical outline of Pure Land soteriology. At exactly the same time, however, Yoshishige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (931–997) composed another influential Pure Land text, one which, unlike the *Ōjōyōshū*, was written in the narrative mode. This was the *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* 日本往生極楽記 [Biographies of people who attained birth in the Pure Land; hereafter *Gokuraku-ki*], a collection

2. This definition of myth is found in CAVE 1993, 67.

3. For this formulation, I am indebted to Yōtaro Miyamoto’s paper, “*Ōjōden* and *Taishiden*: An aspect of the development of sacred biography in Japan,” presented at the XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) held in Tokyo in March 2005.

of forty-two brief biographies of people (including monks, nuns, laymen, and lay women) who were believed to have attained birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land. This was the first of many works in the genre called *ōjōden* 往生伝 (biographies of people who attained birth in the Pure Land) that were composed in Japan. Instead of constructing a "grand theory" about the Pure Land, the *Gokuraku-ki* attempts to "prove" that the Pure Land really exists by presenting stories of people who, through certain signs, could be "verified" as having gone to Amida's realm at death. However, the stories in the *Gokuraku-ki* not only attempt to persuade us to accept the reality of the Pure Land, but they also provide us with models with which to fashion ourselves into devout Pure Land believers. Hence, the narratives contained in this collection, no less than the systematic theoretical outline of Pure Land doctrine, cosmology, and practice in the *Ōjōyōshū*, helped legitimate birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land as a genuine and viable path to salvation in the minds of its readers.

The Construction of Pure Land Discourse in the Ōjōyōshū

Scholars generally agree that the first historically reliable reference to Pure Land Buddhism in Japan dates to 640 (ANDREWS 1989, 21). According to the *Nihon shoki*, in the fifth month of this year, the monk Eon 慧隱, who had returned a year earlier after a stay in China lasting over three decades, lectured on the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* (*Muryōjūkyō* 無量壽經) at court.⁴ Although Amida Buddha became an important object of devotion in the latter half of the Nara Period (710–794), it was only in the mid-900's that it became a truly popular religion, gaining the allegiance of both the nobility and the commoners. The major figure in this development was Kōya 空也 (also known as Kūya, 903–972), who proselytized in Kyoto from 938. Parallel to this development, Tendai monks also began to incorporate elements of the Pure Land teachings into their school. Prominent among them were Ryōgen 良源 (912–985), Zenyu 禪瑜 (913–990), and Senkan 千觀 (918–983), all of whom composed Pure Land liturgical texts and scholastic treatises.⁵

This interest in Pure Land teaching and practice among Tendai monks came to full flower with Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*.⁶ According to its colophon, Genshin began work on this text in the eleventh month of 984 and completed it in just six months, in the fourth month of the following year (T 84, 89b). The bulk of the *Ōjōyōshū* consists of quotations from *sutras* and treatises concerning various aspects of Pure Land teachings. The number of passages quoted in the *Ōjōyōshū*

4. ASTON 1972, pt. 2: 169–70. Eon's dates are unknown. He left for China in 608 as a member of an embassy led by Ono no Imoko 小野妹子 and returned in 639. The *Nihon shoki* also states that Eon again lectured on the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* at court in 652. See WASHIO 1903, 31.

5. The standard study on the history of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism during this period is INOUE 1956, 1–155.

6. On the Pure Land system of the *Ōjōyōshū*, see ANDREWS 1973.

is enormous: nearly a thousand from over one hundred and sixty different texts. In view of the prodigious effort needed to research all of these texts, Hanayama Shinshō has suggested that it could not possibly have been written in six months (HANAYAMA 1976, *chūki* [notes] 5). However, as Hayami Tasuku notes, after completing the brief *Amida Butsu byakugō kan* 阿彌陀佛白毫觀 [Contemplation of the tuft of white hair between the brows of Amida Buddha], his first Pure Land work, in 981, Genshin must have continued to collect notes on Pure Land Buddhism with the intention of composing a treatise on the topic in the future. Thus, Hayami concludes, although the actual writing of the *Ōjōyōshū* may have been finished in just six months, it was the fruit of several years of intensive research (HAYAMI 1988, 95–96).

The Ōjōyōshū and the Rhetoric of Easy Practice

Underlying the entire Pure Land system of the *Ōjōyōshū* is the rhetoric of “easy practice” based on the notion of the Latter Dharma (*mappō* 末法). Genshin, like many people of his age, was convinced that the world was fast approaching the age of the Latter Dharma.⁷ The notion of the Latter Dharma is the central element of a deeply pessimistic Buddhist interpretation of history that holds that the spiritual conditions of the world inevitably decline after the Buddha’s entry into nirvāṇa. This view of Buddhist history holds that the time after the Buddha’s entry into nirvāṇa is divided into three ages: (1) the age of the True Dharma (*shōbō* 正法), (2) the age of the Semblance Dharma (*zōbō* 像法), and (3) the age of Latter Dharma. In its classical form, found, for example, in the *Tacheng fa-yüan i-lin-chang* 大乘法苑義林章 (T 45, 344b), a monumental compendium of Buddhist doctrines compiled by the Fa-hsiang 法相 (Japanese: Hossō) scholar-monk Chi 基 (also known as Kuei-chi 窺基, 632–682), during the age of the True Dharma, the Buddhist teachings, their practice, and the attainment of enlightenment can all be found in the world. However, in the succeeding age of the Semblance Dharma, the world becomes increasingly corrupt, the spiritual capacities of the people decline, and it becomes less suitable for putting the Buddha’s Dharma into practice. In this age, although the Buddhist teachings and their practice exist, there is no one who can attain enlightenment. Finally, during the age of the Latter Dharma, the spiritual conditions of the world become so poor that only the Buddha’s teachings remain, and neither the practice of the Buddhist path nor the attainment of enlightenment would be possible. In such an age, it was believed that the world would be in constant strife, with the monks continually fighting each other. Several different theories concerning the lengths

7. The literature on the Latter Dharma and the theories of the decline of Buddhism is fairly extensive. On the origins of the concept of the Latter Dharma and its development in India and China, see CHAPPELL 1980 and NATTIER 1991. For the influence of the Latter Dharma theory on Japanese Buddhism, see MARRA 1988 and STONE 1985.

of each age can be found in Buddhist texts, but the *Ta-ch'eng fa-yüan i-lin-chang* maintains that the True and Semblance Dharmas each lasted a thousand years, with the Latter Dharma beginning after two thousand years.

As the historian Ishimoda Shō noted in his classic study, *Chūseiteki sekai no keisei* [Creation of the medieval world], between the Engi 延喜 (901–923) and Tenryaku 天曆 (947–957) Periods, Japan underwent far-reaching social, political and economic changes. These changes, including the breakdown of the Nara Period *ritsuryō* 律令 system of centralized government, the increasing domination of the court by the Fujiwara family, the proliferation of tax-free estates (*shōen* 莊園), the rapid and uncontrolled growth of the capital, and the emergence of an increasingly powerful warrior class in the provinces led to a thorough restructuring of Japanese society (ISHIMODA 1985, 340). In face of such widespread turmoil and unease, many people felt convinced that the world of the Latter Dharma was indeed at hand.

Genshin argues that, in the benighted age of the Latter Dharma when the spiritual conditions of the world has deteriorated to the point that it is extremely difficult to gain liberation from the cycle of transmigration by practicing in the traditional Tendai path of practice, the only feasible method of gaining salvation is to seek birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land in the next lifetime. Since the Pure Land provides an ideal environment for practicing the Buddhist path, once in that land, it is possible to gain enlightenment quickly and effortlessly. Although he does not deny the efficacy of the various Tendai exoteric and esoteric practices, this "easy path" of Pure Land practice is, in Genshin's view, the most appropriate form of Buddhist practice for people unfortunate enough to be living in the age in which the influence of the Latter Dharma is highly apparent. Genshin further maintains that the most appropriate practice for achieving birth in the Pure Land is the *nenbutsu* 念佛, literally "mindfulness on (Amida) Buddha." In his view, the *nenbutsu* refers to a variety of practices focused on Amida Buddha, from elaborate contemplative exercises in which the practitioner visualizes this Buddha and his land while in a state of *samādhi* (meditative absorption) such as those described in the *Contemplation Sutra*, down to the simple recitation of the phrase "Namu Amida Butsu."

The Pure Land Path in the Ōjōyōshū

Beginning from such premise, in the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin engages in detailed theoretical reflection on Pure Land practice, constructing a "map" of the spiritual universe from the Pure Land perspective in its early chapters and outlining the salvific path based on this cosmology in its remaining pages. In the first chapter, "Loathing the Defiled Realm" (*onri edo* 厭離穢土), he takes up the Six Paths (*rokudō* 六道) or the realms of transmigration, and describes in great detail the suffering encountered by the beings there. The Six Paths are: (1) the

realm of hell, (2) the realm of hungry ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼), (3) the realm of animals, (4) the realm of fighting spirits (*asura* 阿修羅), (5) the realm of humans, and (6) the realm of heavenly beings. It is in the first of these six sections that we find the most famous passages of the *Ōjōyōshū*, a graphic depiction of the various tortures meted out in hell. Taking up in turn each of the eight subterranean hells of Buddhist cosmology, Genshin describes how the beings there are continually tormented by being slashed, crushed, pierced, boiled, and burned by the demons, animals, and the natural phenomena of those realms. But the suffering experienced by these beings are not gratuitous; according to the laws of karma, the pain inflicted upon beings in hell are understood as just retribution of evil actions performed in the past.

However, it is not only the beings of hell that are subject to pain and anguish. Adopting the standard Buddhist position, Genshin argues that all modes of existence within the Six Paths are characterized by suffering. For example, Genshin describes human existence as marked by impurity, suffering, and impermanence, and concludes that life as a human being is highly unsatisfactory, an ordeal to be rejected promptly. Even existence as a heavenly being is fraught with suffering. This is because, even though heavenly beings may enjoy exquisite pleasure during their exceedingly long lives, they must eventually pass away and be reborn in another realm.

Hence, Genshin concludes, genuine peace of mind is impossible to obtain as long as one is attached to existence within the Six Paths. True happiness can only be obtained by transcending the Six Paths and attaining birth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. In the second chapter, “Longing for the Pure Land” (*gongu jōdo* 欣求淨土), Genshin lists ten pleasures enjoyed by beings in the Pure Land in order to urge his readers to seek birth there. Significantly, although Genshin does not deny the various sensual and material pleasures of the Pure Land (for example, he explains that the Pure Land is most pleasing to look at), he stresses those aspects of the Pure Land that nurtures one’s faith and insight into the Buddhist Dharma.

In this way, in the first two chapters of the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin contrasts the suffering of existence within the Six Paths with the blissful conditions of Amida Buddha’s Pure Land. Its purpose is to demonstrate that one should not cling to this wretched world of transmigration, and to convince the readers that salvation is possible only by obtaining birth in the Pure Land. Hence, after a brief third chapter arguing for the superiority of seeking birth in Amida Buddha’s Pure Land vis-à-vis those of other Buddhas and Maitreya (the future Buddha), Genshin turns to an analysis of the *nenbutsu*, which he claims is the central practice for attaining birth in Amida’s realm. The major portion of the *Ōjōyōshū* (chapters four to ten) are devoted to a detailed and systematic analysis of the *nenbutsu* and the proper ways to practice it. The most important section here is the fourth chapter, “Proper Practice of the *Nenbutsu*” (*shōshū nenbutsu* 正修念

佛) in which Genshin explains the correct way to practice the nenbutsu. Reflecting the emphasis traditionally placed on meditation in the Tendai sect, Genshin defines the nenbutsu primarily as the practice of visualizing, while abiding in a state of samādhi, the figure of Amida Buddha (or more specifically, Amida's marks [sō 相] or distinguishing features that, according to Buddhist iconography, adorn the bodies of all Buddhas). However, for those who are incapable of undertaking such complex practice, Genshin recommends simpler forms of Amida visualization, including the practice of visualizing Amida's *ūrṇākeśa* (*byakugō* 白毫), the tuft of white hair between the eyebrows, and the salvific light emanating from it. Finally, for those people who feel incapable of undertaking even this simplified form of visualization, Genshin recommends the recitative nenbutsu, or the recitation of "Namu Amida Butsu," citing the *Contemplation Sutra*, which declares that even thoroughly evil people can gain birth in the Pure Land just by calling out the name of Amida Buddha ten times on their deathbeds. In this way, Genshin holds the meditative nenbutsu to be the superior form of nenbutsu, but also recognizes the recitative nenbutsu as a legitimate means for achieving birth in the Pure Land.

To repeat, Genshin's central concern in the *Ōjōyōshū* was to present a systematic theoretical outline of Pure Land practice in such a way that all people could readily accept. To this end, he first set forth a Pure Land cosmology, focusing on the suffering of beings bound to the cycle of transmigration and the pleasures awaiting beings born in the Pure Land. Then, after setting forth this spiritual "map" of the universe, Genshin outlines the path of practice leading to birth in the Pure Land. Genshin's vision, set forth with exacting philosophical rigor, apparently proved quite convincing to his contemporaries. The *Ōjōyōshū* quickly became one of the most influential religious texts of his age.

The Narrative Construction of the Pure Land in the Gokuraku-ki

Although it has not received as much attention as the *Ōjōyōshū*, the *Gokuraku-ki* played an equally important role in authenticating the Pure Land faith in the minds of the many people in mid-Heian Japan. The author of this work of Buddhist hagiography was Yoshishige no Yasutane, a noted literati who served as Major Secretary (*dainaiiki* 大内記) in the court of Emperor Kazan 花山. His *Chiteiki* 池亭記 [Record of the Pond Pavilion], written in 982, is said to have been the model for Kamo no Chōmei's 鴨長明 (1153–1216) well-known *Hōjōki* 方丈記 [Ten-foot square hut].⁸ In his early thirties, Yasutane took an active part in the creation of the Kangaku-e 勸學會 (Association for the encouragement of learning), an association founded in 964, consisting of twenty students from the university and twenty monks of the Enryakuji. The members of this association

8. The *Chitei-ki* is translated in WATSON 1975, 1, 57–64. A thorough study of the *Chitei-ki* is found in ŌSONE 1974.

met twice a year, on the fifteenth of the third and ninth months, at various temples around Kyoto to compose poetry on topics taken from the *Lotus Sutra* and to practice the nenbutsu. However, Yasutane became increasingly dissatisfied with lay life, and finally became a monk in 986, adopting Jakushin 寂心 for his religious name.⁹

In the preface of the *Gokuraku-ki*, Yasutane states that he had conducted the nenbutsu since his youth, but became especially zealous in its practice after he turned forty. Henceforth, he claims,

With my mouth, I recited the name (of Amida Buddha), and in my mind, I contemplated his major and minor marks. Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, not for an instant did I forget (to practice the nenbutsu); even when surprised or stumbling, I continued (the nenbutsu).

(INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 11)

Such yearning for the Pure Land was undoubtedly decisive in persuading him to become a monk late in life.

A draft of the *Gokuraku-ki* was completed a little before Yasutane took the tonsure, sometime between 983 and 985.¹⁰ However, the *Gokuraku-ki* as we now have it was revised and augmented at least twice afterwards. According to a note appended after the second biography in the collection, that of the celebrated Nara-Period monk Gyōgi 行基, Yasutane completed the *Gokuraku-ki* and its preface while he was still a layman and even had it mounted as a scroll. However, after he took the tonsure, he learned about five or six more people who attained birth in the Pure Land and requested the Great Palace Secretary King (*chūsho daiō* 中書大王) to compose their biographies for inclusion in the collection.¹¹ Subsequently, the Great Palace Secretary King had a dream instructing him to add the biographies of Prince Shōtoku (Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子) and Gyōgi to the *Gokuraku-ki*. Since the Great Palace Secretary King was ill at that time, Yasutane wrote the biographies of these two figures himself and placed them at the beginning of the text (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 19). It may be added here that these two biographies are by far the longest in the *Gokuraku-ki*.

It has already been mentioned that narratives are both descriptive and prescriptive, that is, they serve both to provide a description of sacred reality and to indicate how we should behave in light of that reality. Yasutane had both aims

9. A short biography of Yasutane is found in GOTŌ 1993. For an important collection of essays on Yasutane, see HIRABAYASHI 2001.

10. The earliest possible date for the *Gokuraku-ki* is 983, since it mentions the death of Senkan that took place in this year. The latest date is 985, since it is mentioned in the *Ōjōyōshū*, which was completed in this year. See INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 712.

11. *Chūsho daiō* refers to the post of Nakamugyo 中務卿. He has previously been identified with Kaneakira Shinnō 兼明親王 (914–987), but Hirabayashi Moritoku has recently argued that it must refer to Tomohira Shinnō 具平親王 (964–1009). See HIRABAYASHI 2001, 99.

in mind when he composed the *Gokuraku-ki*. In the preface to this collection, he states,

However, the wisdom of sentient beings is slight and cannot reach the Sage's (that is, the Buddha's) purport. Unless I note down (descriptions of) people who actually attained birth (in the Pure Land), it is impossible to influence their minds (to seek the Pure Land). (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 11)

In other words, although many Buddhist texts refer to the Pure Land, most people find it hard to accept that such a realm really exists. For this reason, Yasutane felt compelled to gather stories about people whose actions or deathbed experiences demonstrate that they attained birth in the Pure Land. Through these examples, he hoped to confirm the reality of the Pure Land and to testify that birth in the Pure Land provides a practical and effective path to salvation. In the preface, he mentions that records of such people, including *Ch'ing-t'u lun* 淨土論 [Pure Land treatise] by Chia-ts'ai 迦才 and *Wang-sheng hsi-fang ching-t'u jui-yin-ch'uan* 往生西方淨土瑞應伝 [Miraculous biographies of (people who) attained birth in the Pure Land in the western direction, cited hereafter as *Jui-ying ch'uan*], have already been written in China, but he felt the need to compose a collection of Japanese people who attained birth in the Pure Land in order to demonstrate that the Pure Land is accessible to the people of this country, too. As this suggests, Yasutane's aim in compiling the *Gokuraku-ki* was not only descriptive but prescriptive as well, inasmuch as his ultimate aim was to make his readers arouse the desire to seek the Pure Land.

The Structure of the Gokuraku-ki

As noted above, the *Gokuraku-ki* contains the biographies of forty-two people who, Yasutane maintains, attained birth in the Pure Land. They were all chosen because their final hours were accompanied by miracles (*isō ōjō* 異相往生) confirming their entry into Amida's world. In the preface, Yasutane states that he not only perused national histories and biographies of noted monks, but also interviewed several elderly people in his search for such examples (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 11). Beginning with Prince Shōtoku, the text continues with entries, in this order, for twenty-eight monks (including two *shami*¹²), three nuns, four laymen, and six lay women. This follows the order found in the *Ching-t'u lun* and *Jui-ying ch'uan*, which Yasutane alludes to in the preface (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 715). The actual number of people treated in the text is slightly higher, since several biographies describe the birth of more than one person into the Pure Land.¹³ Although there are exceptions, the monks are generally listed in

12. A man who has shaved his head and become a monk but continues to live as a householder, often with a wife and children.

13. A passage at the end of the *Gokuraku-ki* mentions that it contains descriptions of the birth of forty-five people into the Pure Land, including two bodhisattvas (Prince Shōtoku and Gyōgi),

chronological order. Court rank seems to have been an important criterion in determining the order in which laymen were taken up in the text. Moreover in the cases of both lay men and women, those living in the capital appear before those residing in the provinces (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 715). Significantly, none of the nuns or lay women is referred to by her clerical or given name. The nuns are identified by their lineage or more well-known relative, while the lay women are identified simply by their husbands, lineage, or place of residence. While many of the people in the *Gokuraku-ki*, such as Prince Shōtoku, Gyōgi, Ennin 圓仁 (794–864), Kōya, and Senkan, are well-known figures in Japanese Buddhist history, the majority are ordinary clerics and lay people who are not mentioned in any other records from this time (meaning that the *Gokuraku-ki* is the first place in which many of them appear). A significant number were Yasutane's contemporaries (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 717).

The following are two typical biographies found in the collection. The first is that of the Tendai monk Jinjō 尋靜 (dates unknown, but probably late ninth to early tenth centuries).

Jinjō of Ryōgon-in 楞嚴院 of Enryakuji 延曆寺 (who served as one of the) Ten Meditation Masters, was by nature free of stinginess. Whenever a person came for a visit, he would first serve food and drink. For ten-odd years, he never went beyond the temple gate. He read the *Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sutra* during the day and remained mindful of Amida Buddha at night. All of the various good roots he cultivated were in the hopes of (gaining birth in) the Land of Supreme Bliss. In the first month, when he was over seventy years old, he took to bed with illness. He ordered his disciple to practice the nenbutsu samādhi during the three watches of the day (dawn, mid-day, dusk). During the early part of the second month, he related to his disciple and others, “I saw a dream. In a large halo of light, several tens of monks, bearing a palanquin and singing songs, came from the west and stood in the sky. I thought, “They came to welcome me to the Land of Supreme Bliss.” After five or six days, he bathed and, without touching any food or drink for three days, single-mindedly practiced the nenbutsu. He also ordered his disciple, “You, monk! Don't offer me any water and don't ask me any questions. They will distract me from my contemplation [*kannen* 觀念]. Then, facing west and hands pressed together in prayer, he passed away. (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 26–27)

The second is that of a nun, whose name, like those of all other nuns and lay women in the collection, remains unidentified.

twenty-six monks, three *shami* (self-ordained monks), three nuns, four laymen, and seven lay women. See INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 41. However, this passage is missing in several editions of this text, suggesting that it was a later interpolation. See INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 41; note on *shijūgo nin* (四十五人).

Nun so-and-so was the granddaughter of Emperor Kōkō 光孝天皇. She married young and had three children, but they died in successive years. Before long, her husband also died. Widowed, she perceived the impermanence of all worldly things and took the tonsure to become a nun. She refused to eat more than once a day. After a few years, she suddenly began to feel pain in her back, and was unable to stand. The doctor said, “You are physically tired. Unless you eat meat, you will be unable to cure this illness.” Having no attachment to her body or life, the nun (refused to do as the doctor ordered and simply) remained all the more mindful of Amida. The pain caused by the illness then naturally ceased. The nun was by nature gentle and her heart was filled with compassion. Although mosquitoes and horseflies bit her, she made it a point not to shoo them away. When she was fifty-odd years old, she suddenly was stricken with a minor illness. There was music in the sky. It surprised the people of nearby villages, who thought it strange. The nun said, “The Buddha has come to receive me. I am about to leave.” After saying this, she passed away.

(INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 35–36)

Although chosen at random, these biographies should suffice to indicate the overall character of the tales in the collection.

It may not be out of place here to mention that one important way in which Yasutane attempted to convince the readers of the veracity of the stories in the *Gokuraku-ki* was to give precise details about the people in question. Yasutane meticulously provides the monastic and court ranks of many of the figures in the collection, and, in cases where the subject lived outside the capital, includes exact information about the district and province in which they resided. Moreover, as Kobayashi Yasuji has noted, when the biographies in the *Gokuraku-ki* are compared with the texts that presumably served as their sources, it becomes apparent that Yasutane rarely embellished his accounts. Although some embellishment can be found in Kōya’s biography, the amount is small (KOBAYASHI 1968, 108). In these ways, Yasutane attempts to provide verisimilitude to the biographies, helping to counter the possible arguments by skeptics that these stories are nothing more than pious fantasy.

Even a cursory reading of the *Gokuraku-ki* reveals that there is a general pattern to these biographies. They normally begin by giving the individual’s name, rank and (quite frequently) place of residence, then recount the practices they undertook during their lives, and finally describe their deathbed practices and the miracles that occurred at this time.¹⁴ However, there are several stories in

14. A more detailed list of eight elements that regularly appear in these biographies is given in KOBAYASHI 1968, 109. In the order of their appearance in the biographies, they are as follows:

- (1) The status of person in question (that is, whether he or she is a monk or nun or lay person). If a monk, his rank or position.
- (2) Place of birth or residence. Family background or circumstances surrounding birth.
- (3) Personality and stories about childhood.

the collection that diverge significantly from this pattern. One example is the story of the monk Kōdō 廣道 (dates unknown), into which is imbedded a second story of how a woman living near his temple gained birth in the Pure Land.

The monk Kōdō of the Dainichiji 大日寺 was from the Tachibana 橘 clan. For several decades, he exclusively sought (birth in) the Pure Land and refused to concern himself with worldly matters. There was a poor woman living next to the temple. She had two boys and they became Tendai monks. The elder was called Zenjō 禪靜 and the younger was called En'ei 延睿. (When) their mother died, the two monks, with a single mind, read the *Lotus Sutra* during the day and remained mindful of Amida Buddha at night, praying only for their compassionate mother's birth in the Land of Supreme Bliss. At that time, Kōdō had (the following) dream. Innumerable music could be heard (from the area) between the Gokuraku 極樂 and Jōgan 貞觀 Temples. Surprised, he looked in that direction and (saw) three carts adorned with jewels, surrounded by several thousand monks holding incense burners. They proceeded directly to the deceased woman's house. Leading out the woman, they clothed her in heavenly robes. When they were about to get on (the carts) and return together, two monks read an edict (to Kōdō): "You have been kind to the mother. For this reason, you will be led to the Pure Land by Amida and his retinue." In the same dream, there were signs of Kōdō's birth in the Pure Land. Kōdō passed away within a few years. On this day, music filled the sky. Both clerics and lay people stopped to listen to the music. Many of them rejoiced and aroused the aspiration for enlightenment. (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 31)

Although the main figure of this story is the monk Kōdō, the tale of how the poor woman reached the Pure Land through the prayers of her sons is also a significant element in this account.

Another example is that of Chikō 智光 (709–Hōki 寶龜 Era [770–80]), a monk of the Nara Period, who is said to have visited the Pure Land in his dream. Virtually all of this biography is taken up with this dramatic story, already found in the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 [Miraculous tales of Japan] by the early Heian monk Kyōkai (NAKAMURA 1973, 167–71). In this famous tale, Chikō went to the Pure Land, where he met his old companion Raikō 賴光 and was granted an audience with Amida Buddha, who instructs him on the way to achieve birth in that land by contemplating the land's features. Upon awakening from the

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- (4) Circumstances surrounding the taking of the tonsure, practices undertaken while alive, and miracles that occurred during his or her lifetime.
 - (5) Year of death or age at the time of death.
 - (6) Prophecies concerning death and birth in the Pure Land.
 - (7) Practices undertaken at time of death and/or miracles that occurred at the time of death.
 - (8) Miracles that occurred after death and signs confirming the person's birth in the Pure Land.

It must be noted, however, that none of the biographies contain all eight elements.

dream, Chikō commissioned the famous Chikō Mandala, a pictorial representation of the Pure Land. The biography ends by noting that Chikō contemplated this picture throughout his life and finally attained birth in the Pure Land (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 24–25). Significantly, this story does not contain any other references to Chikō's practices, nor does it provide any details about his deathbed practice. Chronologically, it is placed out of order, after several monks of the early Heian Period. Yasutane probably included this story, not because he believed Chikō's life provided an exemplary model of Pure Land birth, but because the well-known story of his visit to the Pure Land helps confirm the existence of Amida's Pure Land.

Another story that does not follow the standard pattern concerns the Shingon monk Mukū 無空 (?–912?), the second abbot of Kōyasan 高野山. This monk is famous for his role in the struggle between Kōyasan and Tōji 東寺, another major Shingon center, over the possession of the thirty volumes of text brought to Japan by Kūkai.¹⁵ Yasutane, however, alludes neither to this monk's turbulent life nor his deathbed practice, but focuses primarily on Mukū's appearance in the dreams of Fujiwara no Nakahira 藤原仲平.

Precept Master (Risshi 律師) Mukū made the nenbutsu his everyday practice. He was always lacking food and clothing. He said to himself, "Since I am poor, after I die I am sure I will cause trouble to my disciples who survive me." Secretly, he placed ten thousand in cash in the attic of his hermitage, hoping it would pay for his burial. (Subsequently) the Precept Master took to bed with illness, and suddenly passed away without having told anyone of the cash. The Loquat Minister of the Left (Fujiwara no Nakahira) was an old friend of the Precept Master. The Minister had a dream, in which the Precept Master came to him wearing dirty clothes and having a haggard appearance. In their conversation, (Mukū) said, "Because I have some money hidden away, I have unexpectedly become a snake. I beg you use that money to copy the *Lotus Sutra*." The Minister went to (Mukū's) old hermitage, and recovered the ten thousand cash. Among the money was a small snake, which took flight when it saw people. The minister immediately made a thousand copies of the *Lotus Sutra* and held a ceremony. At a later date, (the minister) had a dream, in which the Precept Master, wearing bright clean clothes and face full of joy, approached him carrying an incense burner. He said to the Minister said, "Thanks to your kindness, I have been able to escape from the path of heretics. I will leave now for the Land of Supreme Bliss." Having finished saying so, he flew off to the west. (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 22)

15. After Kūkai's death, a struggle arose between Kōyasan and Tōji over which temple would possess the thirty volumes of text which Kūkai brought back from China and presented to the Japanese court. At this time, it was in the possession of Mukū at Kōyasan, but when Kanken 觀賢 of the Tōji, armed with an imperial decree, demanded that Mukū return it to Tōji, Mukū hid it away (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 400, note on "Mukū Risshi").

Interestingly, it is argued that Mukū was able to attain birth in the Pure Land through the merit generated from copying the *Lotus Sutra*. As I will show below, during this age, it was believed that birth in the Pure Land could be attained by undertaking a wide variety of practices, and not just devotion to Amida Buddha, the Buddha presiding over the Pure Land. But in any case, the point to notice here is that the focus of this story is not on Mukū's life or practice but on demonstrating that birth in the Pure Land is really possible, even for someone who has been reborn as a snake through his unwholesome actions in the past.

Signs of Birth in the Pure Land

As mentioned above, Yasutane's aim in writing the *Gokuraku-ki* was to convince his readers to aspire for the Pure Land by adducing examples of people whose exemplary deaths confirm that they truly achieved birth in that land. It is for this reason that the majority of the stories focus on extraordinary signs that accompanied the subject's death. Many of the biographies describe how pleasant music and wonderful fragrance filled the room as the person in question passed away. When Ennin, the third patriarch of the Tendai school, was on his deathbed, a fellow monk heard music coming from the Tōin 唐院, Ennin's cloister. When the monk entered the Tōin and asked about the music, the monks in the hall replied that they had not heard anything (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 20). When the nobleman Takashina no Mabito 高階真人 passed away, a fragrant smell filled the room and music was heard in the sky (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 37). Likewise, when the Tendai monk Zōmyō 增命 (844–927) was on his deathbed, he was suddenly bathed in golden light, purple clouds appeared, music was heard in the sky and a wonderful fragrance filled the room (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 21).

Music also accompanied the deaths of several nuns and lay women. A certain Fujiwara lady practiced the nenbutsu diligently throughout her life. As she grew old, she reported that she could hear music, which she was convinced was a sign of her coming birth in the Pure Land. Year by year, the music became more distinct, and when as she was dying, she informed the others that it could be heard from above the roof of the house (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 40). Similarly, music was heard in the sky when both the monk Hyōchin 平珍 (dates unknown) and the nun who was Emperor Kōkō's granddaughter passed away (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 32 and 36).

Though less frequent than sublime music or fragrance, other extraordinary events are also recounted the *Gokuraku-ki*. When a devout woman of Sakata 坂田 district of Ōmi 近江 province died, her body was covered by purple clouds, an auspicious sign (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 40). When Jin'yū 尋祐 (dates unknown) passed away, a brilliant light was seen at the top of the mountain on which his temple, Matsuoji 松尾寺, was located. It was so bright that the people of

the village below thought that a fire had broken out in the temple (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 35). On a more grotesque note, it is said that Takashina's body did not putrefy for several days after he died in spite of the hot weather (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 37), and that Precept Master Ryūkai's 隆海 (815–886) right hand, which had miraculously formed the *mūdra* of Amida Buddha when he died, remained unscathed even after he was cremated (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 20–1). Both of these events were interpreted as marvelous portents signaling the deceased person's entry into the Pure Land.

A rather different story of an inexplicable event at death is found in the biography of Yakuren 薬蓮, who physically disappeared when he died. The story goes as follows.

Yakuren, who lived at Nyohōji 如法寺 in Nakatsu 中津 Village of Takai 高井 District in Shinano 信濃 Province, recited the *Amida Sutra* throughout his life. He had two children, a boy and a girl. One day, he announced to his children that he would depart for the Pure Land the next morning, and asked them to wash his clothes and help him bathe. The children did as requested. At night, donning his clean clothes, Yakuren entered a hall that enshrined a Buddha and ordered his children to keep the doors shut until the next morning. After he entered the hall, exquisite music was heard from the hall all night. When the doors were opened the next day, both Yakuren and the sutra that he had carried into the hall had disappeared, leaving no trace.

(INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 34–35)

Yasutane was apparently deeply fascinated by monks with thaumaturgic powers and the *Gokuraku-ki* includes stories of several monks, including Zōmyō and Kōya, performing miracles through their extraordinary spiritual powers while they were alive. However, Yakusen is the only person described as disappearing into thin air at death.

Many people taken up in the *Gokuraku-ki* are depicted as predicting the hour of their death or as having had visions of Amida Buddha and his retinue coming to lead him or her away to the Pure Land. The *Gokuraku-ki* gives the following story about a nun, the elder sister of Major Bishop (*daisōzu* 大僧都) Kanchū 寛忠 (906–977). When Kanchū visited his aged sister, she requested,

“The day after tomorrow, I will go to the Land of Supreme Bliss. Until then, I ask you to perform the Continuous Nenbutsu [*fudan nenbutsu* 不断念佛].” With a number of monks, the Bishop performed the nenbutsu samādhi for three days and nights. (Thereupon, the nun) again spoke with the Major Bishop, saying, “A palanquin adorned with jewels has flown here, and it is now right before my eyes. However, the Buddha and bodhisattvas have gone back, because this place is polluted.” Her words were accompanied by tears. The Bishop had (the monks) recited a sutra set to melody several times. The next day, the nun said, “The holy assembly (that is, Amida Buddha and bodhisattvas) have come once

again. The hour of my birth in the Pure Land has arrived.” Sitting upright and leaning on an armrest, she (recited the) nenbutsu and passed away. (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 36)

The monk Shunso 春素 (dates unknown) also dreamed on his deathbed that Amida’s messengers came to him to take him to the Pure Land (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 27). Kōya, too, related to his disciples that Amida had come to welcome him to the Pure Land when he was about to expire (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 29). In a similar vein, when he died, Shinkaku 眞覺 (dates unknown) had a dream in which white birds with long tails flew off to the west while singing “Let’s go, let’s go” to him (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 34).

Another interesting deathbed dream predicting birth in the Pure Land concerns Genkai 玄海 (dates unknown), a monk who resided at Komatsudera 小松寺 in Niita 新田 District in Mutsu 陸奥 Province in the northern extremity of Japan. Every day he read the *Lotus Sutra* and every night he recited the *Daibutchō shingon* 大佛頂眞言 seven times. At one time he fell into a coma. While unconscious, he dreamed that he had sprouted wings and that he had flown to a land adorned with the seven treasures. When he looked at himself, he realized that his left wing consisted of the *Daibutchō shingon* and his right consisted of the eight fascicles of the *Lotus Sutra*. In that land, he encountered a monk, who informed him that he was in a region at the outskirts (*henji* 邊地) of the Pure Land. The monk further instructed Genkai to return to the world, telling him that he would be taken to the Pure Land three days hence. With this, Genkai revived. He continued reciting Shingon texts with even more fervor and passed away three years later (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 33–34).

Slightly different is a story of a dream-like vision told about the monk Myōshō 明靖 (dates unknown), a scion of the Fujiwara family. When he fell ill, he suddenly saw the fires of hell burning in front of his eyes. Realizing that nothing but the nenbutsu can save him from being cast into hell, he had monks sitting by his pillow recite the name of Amida Buddha. Thereupon the fire subsided (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 30).

The above are all dreams seen by the dying themselves, but the *Gokuraku-ki* frequently relates a different type of dream, one seen by the acquaintances of the deceased person, signaling that the latter went off to the Pure Land after death. After Shinrai 眞頼 (dates unknown) of Ishiyamaji 石山寺 died, his fellow monk Shinju 眞珠 (dates unknown) had a dream in which several tens of thousands of monks and young boys greeted the dying Shinrai and led him away. Although it is not made explicit, the reader is led to assume that they led Shinrai to Amida’s realm (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 26–27). More explicit is the dream concerning Senkan, a Tendai monk who actively proselytized the Pure Land faith in the mid-900’s. According to his biography, the daughter of Fujiwara no Atsutada 藤原敦忠 was a devout follower of this monk. When he was alive, Senkan promised

her that, if he actually attained birth in the Pure Land, he would appear in her dream to inform her of his success. Soon after his death, the woman saw a dream in which Senkan sailed off to the west on a lotus blossom boat, reciting verses in praise of Amida Buddha (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 29–30).

Practices for Birth in the Pure Land

In the section above, I have discussed a number of miraculous events experienced by the dying person (or their associates) recounted in the *Gokuraku-ki* to substantiate that the deceased reached the Pure Land. However, as stated above, narratives are prescriptive as well as descriptive, suggesting that these biographies are also to be read as ideals or models for Pure Land devotees to emulate. How, then, did Yasutane think that one can attain birth in the Pure Land? Unfortunately, he is not very clear on this point. Perhaps he was too preoccupied with demonstrating that there are people even in Japan who successfully entered the Pure Land, that he fails to specify what types of practices lead to birth there. Or perhaps it reflects the common assumption of his age (which is also apparent in Genshin) that birth in the Pure Land can be obtained by undertaking a wide variety of Buddhist practices. However, in the biographies, Yasutane regularly notes the practices undertaken by the people in question, so it is possible to gain some understanding of how he believed birth the Pure Land was made possible.

The biographies suggest that deathbed practices were of special importance in ensuring one's birth in the Pure Land. Perhaps it is only natural that the practice mentioned most often in this context is the nenbutsu.¹⁶ Ennin and Zōmyō, among others, died practicing the nenbutsu (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 20 and 21), while Enshō 延昌 (880–964), Shinrai, and the nun who was the sister of Major Bishop Kanchū had the Continuous Nenbutsu performed for them on their deathbeds (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 27, 30, and 36). However, other practices are also mentioned. Myōyū 明祐 (878–961), a monk of the Tōdaiji 東大寺, died surrounded by his disciples reciting the *Amida Sutra*. When the Precept Master Ryūkai realized his end was near, he bathed every day, practiced the nenbutsu, and, in addition, recited passages from the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* as well as the verses in praise Amida Buddha composed by Nāgārjuna (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 20).

The *Gokuraku-ki* also frequently refers to the everyday practices undertaken by the monks, nuns, and lay people. Once again, a number of them are said to have made the nenbutsu their daily practice. They include monks like Saigen 濟源 (885–960) of the Sanron school, Mukū, as well as the nun who was the sister of Major Bishop Kanchū, and the nun from Kamutsuhira 上平 Village, Iidaka 飯

16. The nenbutsu (literally, “mindfulness of the Buddha”) could refer to the recitation of the name of Amida Buddha as well as to the practice of contemplating the features of the Buddha after attaining a focused state of mind through recitation. The distinction is frequently unclear in the *Gokuraku-ki*.

高 District, Ise 伊勢 Province (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 36). However, the nenbutsu was frequently not practiced alone but was combined with other practices. Kensan 兼算 (dates unknown) of the Bonshakuji 梵釈寺 is said to have combined the nenbutsu with devotion to Fudō Myōō 不動明王 (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 26). Jinjō of Ryōgon'in is (as noted above) described as reading the *Diamond Prajñāpāramitā Sutra* during the day and practicing the nenbutsu at night. Similarly Shunso is said to have studied the *Mo ho chih kuan* 摩訶止觀 (Great contemplation and insight), the basic text of Tendai meditation, during the day and focused his mind on Amida Buddha at night. In addition to practicing the nenbutsu, Myōshō is said to have been well versed in esoteric Buddhism (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 30). Throughout his life, Yakuren is said to have recited the *Amida Sutra* along with the nenbutsu (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 34–35).

In this way, Yasutane suggests that a number of practices can lead to birth in the Pure Land. However, a striking feature of all the people included in the *Gokuraku-ki* is their exemplary character.¹⁷ Yasutane often inserts passages describing the subjects' personality into his narratives, but in all such cases, the people are described as being kind and virtuous. Kensan, for example, is said to have been without anger, Jinjō as generous and providing food and drink to all who visited him, Jin'yū as compassionate, and a nun who was the granddaughter of Emperor Kōkō as gentle and compassionate. Zensha 善謝 (724–804) is said to have shunned secular fame and secluded himself in Mount Bonfuku 梵福寺. The only possible exception is Jōi 成意 (dates unknown), a Tendai monk who was free of all attachments and consequently shocked his disciples by eating after noon in defiance of the precepts. However, in this case, too, the emphasis is on his lack of attachment, not on the unwholesome consequences of the failure to keep the precepts. Later works in the *ōjōden* genre frequently include stories of how even incorrigibly evil people were able to attain birth in the Pure Land by calling on the Amida Buddha.¹⁸ These stories focus on the power of Amida's all-encompassing compassion in saving evil beings, but no such stories are found in the *Gokuraku-ki*. Apparently Yasutane assumed that birth in the Pure Land is closely related to a moral life. The absence of stories about the birth of evil people into the Pure Land is all the more surprising because Yasutane himself mentions, in the preface to the *Gokuraku-ki*, that his desire to compose this collection was strengthened by reading stories in the *Jui-ying-ch'uan* about people who "slaughtered cattle and sold chicken" for their livelihood and yet attained birth by practicing the nenbutsu (INOUE and ŌSONE 1974, 11).

As I have repeatedly mentioned above, narratives in the *Gokuraku-ki* have a dual function. On the one hand, they are "models of" an ideal life devoted to the quest for birth in Amida's Pure Land. By focusing on their deathbed miracles,

17. This has been stressed by SEKIGUCHI 1968, 89–90.

18. According to Sekiguchi, the earliest story of birth in the Pure Land by an evil person is that of Minamoto no Yoriyoshi 源頼義 found in the *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 續本朝往生傳. SEKIGUCHI 1968, 90.

these biographies all prove that these figures were all able to attain birth in the Pure Land. Since the biographies refer to real people and real events, these stories confront us with the most compelling evidence that birth in the Pure Land is truly a viable path to salvation. But at the same time, these narratives also provide “models for” pursuing a life dedicated to the attainment of birth in the Pure Land. By following these examples, we, too, urges Yasutane, can go to the Pure Land after we expire. Hence, it can be said that narratives like the *Gokuraku-ki* is just as important in the formation of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism as theoretical treatises on Pure Land doctrine like the *Ōjōyōshū*.

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