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# Portraits of Pious Women in East Asian Buddhist Hagiography:

A Study of Accounts of Women who Attained Birth in Amida's Pure Land \*

Christoph KLEINE

This study deals with Chinese and Japanese accounts of women who were allegedly born in Amida's (skt. Amitābha or Amitāyus; chin. Amituo)<sup>1</sup> Pure Buddha Land of Utmost Bliss (*gokuraku jōdo*; skt. *Sukhāvati*), written in or before the 14th century. In the first part of this paper some remarks on the theoretical and methodological problems regarding the definition of the term "hagiography" will be made. In the second part it shall be demonstrated that the texts in question, the so-called "birth accounts" (jap. *ōjōden*; chin. *wangshengzhuan*), can be defined as hagiographies. This is important to note because as such they follow certain patterns, which must be kept in mind when it comes to analyzing and interpreting them. The third part deals with the structure and purpose of the collections of birth-accounts, followed by an analysis of the contents of the accounts of women. In the final part of the study the Japanese standard interpretation of "birth accounts of women" will be criticized. It is shown that a largely sectarian interpretation of the *ōjōden* as well as the neglect of the specific literary character of the texts as hagiographies inevitably leads to serious misunderstandings.

## Hagiography: its form, its contents, and its purpose

In the title I have used the term "Buddhist hagiography" which might need some clarification. In European Christianity until medieval times *hagiographia* meant "sacred scriptures" (Uytfanghe 1987, 151). In the course of time, however, the term came to mean almost exclusively "written life accounts of saints". For this definition of hagiography two elements are crucial: the fact that hagiographies are (1) at least technically or superficially somehow biographical in their literary form, and (2) that, regarding its contents, the protagonist of the life account is conceived of as a saint or

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1. For the sake of consistency I will use the Japanese pronunciation for technical terms throughout the text. Exceptions are only made in cases where those terms are generally known in their Sanskrit version (e.g. *saṃgha*, *Mahāyāna*, etc.). Personal names and titles of literary works will be given in the original language. The names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will be given in their better known Sanskrit version. In the case of Amida, however, I chose to use the well-known Japanese pronunciation, since in East Asian Buddhism the name refers to both Amitābha, the Buddha of "Immeasurable Light", and to Amitāyus, the Buddha of "Immeasurable Life".

holy person. Although this may sound trivial, these two points often turn out to be problematic. In many cases it is hard to decide whether a text may formally be denoted as “die Darstellung des Lebensganges eines Heiligen nach Daten und Taten in seiner äußeren und inneren Entwicklung” (Zoeopf 1908, 34) and whether the person on whom, at least seemingly, the story centers, can be denoted as a saint or holy person. Above that, hagiography has by its very nature certain purposes and intentions. If, for example, one religious author portrays another as a heretic, whom others again regard as a holy person, we can hardly say that this portrait is a hagiography.

Properly speaking, hagiography cannot be called an independent literary genre. It is rather the sufficient presence of the “hagiographic discourse” (Uytfanghe 1987, 157-8) in a text which justifies its classification as hagiography. The four gospels of the New Testament, for instance, contain a considerable amount of hagiographic elements, but the extent of the “hagiographic discourse” is surely not sufficient to denote the whole New Testament as a hagiography in the modern sense. Hagiography can adopt various literary forms, and the term hagiography does not directly and immediately indicate a certain literary genre.

L'œuvre de l'hagiographe peut être historique, mais elle ne l'est pas nécessairement. Elle peut revêtir toutes les formes littéraires propres à glorifier les saints... (Delehay 1973, 2).

However, there are some formal characteristics of hagiographic texts which enable us to distinguish them from other texts. Besides the above mentioned fact that hagiographies are formally styled as life accounts centering on a holy person, their peculiarity in comparison with similar texts lies (1) in the extreme extent of their standardization of the depicted protagonists and (2) in the fact that they standardize “nicht nur literarisch, sondern bewußt religiös-moralisierend” (Graus 1965, 62).

Festzuhalten aber bleibt, daß die Hagiographie die Frage der literarischen Gattungen übersteigt u. ein Begriff sui generis ist, der von seinem Gegenstand (Heilige u. H[eiligenverehrung]) bestimmt wird... (Uytfanghe 1987, 177).

If, as Uytfanghe puts it, the main criterion for the classification of a text as hagiographic is its subject matter, we are confronted with another serious problem. How can we define the terms “holy person”, “saint”, etc., in a way which is broad enough to transcend the narrow medieval definition of Catholic canonical law while avoiding to dilute them to the extent of making them useless. According to R. Cohn,

... sainthood may be described as a religion's acclamation of a person's spiritual perfections, however this perfection is defined. Persons so acclaimed exemplify the religion's highest values and thus function as models for others to follow ... In other words, saints are recognized by their religions as both subjects for imitation and objects of veneration. The tension between imitability and inimitability, between likeness to us and otherness than us, lies at the core of the saint's identity. (Cohn 1987, 1).

It must be kept in mind, however, that sainthood is not an objective quality or the collection of objective qualities. A saint is a saint because others perceive or recollect him/her as a saint, often only after his/her death, since “usually sainthood is a posthumous phenomenon” (Cohn 1987, 1). The fact that the ascription of holiness is a very subjective act is of crucial importance for the evaluation of hagiographic documents. To some extent hagiography makes saints rather than describing them. The holy person, whose actual career in terms of his dates and deeds is in numerous cases almost completely obscure, functions first of all as a model to be imitated and as a

symbol of the highest spiritual goals of a certain religion to be venerated. Accordingly biographies of holy persons are often stereotype and impersonal. It was not the individual in which the hagiographer was interested but the ideal, the general concept of sainthood or holiness. The description of a saint's life had to follow certain patterns in order to be accepted as the portrait of a saint. Too much individuality was not desirable and even the actual existence of a saint was of minor importance. Since the primary purpose of hagiographic literature is religious edification it is sharply to be distinguished from biographical writing in the modern sense.

Hagiography is not tentative biography but a different literary form, a way of writing with its own means and ends and not an unformed and crude prelude to something better. (Ward 1992, XIII).

### *Hagiographical texts as historical source materials*

Due to the undeniable fact that the hagiographers' main intent is edification, the propagation of religious ideas and ideals, the strengthening of people's faith, and the encouragement to lead good lives in accordance with the respective moral and religious standards in a given context, the historical reliability of any account given in hagiographic texts is highly questionable. This does not mean, however, that hagiographies are of no historical relevance whatsoever. On the contrary, if read properly they are extremely valuable source materials as they reflect the religious situation in the context of their production much better than doctrinal texts which are usually concerned with the interpretation of theoretical problems in older doctrinal texts rather than with the actual situation or the religious feelings and activities of clerics and the laity. It is regrettable therefore that in the field of Buddhist studies hagiographic texts are still mainly treated as historical and biographical documents without taking their specific character as hagiographies into account sufficiently. In terms of methodology the attempt to create a pure academic biography by eliminating everything which seems unbelievable from the modern standpoint is unsuitable and has in fact been given up in European research on Christian hagiography.<sup>2</sup>

In this study the attempt will be made to gain insight into the world of thought, the social structure, prevailing practices and ideals of the Buddhist *samgha* in China and Japan from the 7th to the 14th century with particular reference to gender specific issues.

### *Buddhist hagiographic literature and ōjōden*

#### *Brief outline of the development of Buddhist hagiographic literature*

The earliest genre of Buddhist literature in India which may be defined as hagiographic in a broader sense, are the *jātaka*, or stories about the beneficial acts of the Buddha in a former life, and the closely related *avadāna*, stories about the good or bad

2. The latest attempt to extract the "true core" from the miraculous accounts and hagiographical *topoi* in the Christian lives of the saints worth mentioning was the work of the so-called Neo-Bollandists lead by H. Delehaye, whose purpose was to save Christian hagiography and the cults of saints for modern post-enlightened Christianity.

deeds of a certain person and their karmic effects.<sup>3</sup> Both literary forms were adopted and further developed by the Chinese and consequently by the Koreans, the Japanese, etc., as a means to propagate the law of rebirth and karmic retribution which were unknown concepts in pre-Buddhist China. In contrast to their Indian prototypes, however, East Asian narratives of the *jātaka* / *avadāna* type for the most part deal with only one incarnation of the protagonist. The working of moral causality manifests itself in the present life or immediately after death. Furthermore, unlike the Indians, the Chinese were exceptionally interested in recording historical facts and data, including the biographies of prominent figures. As early as in the second century B.C. the celebrated historian Sima Qian (c.145-c.87 B.C.) set the standard for historiographic and biographic writing in China, Japan, and Korea to modern times. Roughly speaking, most of Chinese Buddhist hagiography can be described as a combination of the formal patterns of traditional “secular” historiography with the *topoi* of the *jātaka* / *avadāna* genre imported from India and Central Asia.<sup>4</sup> While the influence of the former appears to be stronger in canonized hagiographic works of the Buddhist gentry, such as the three “Lives of Eminent Monks” (*Gaoseng zhuan*) of the Liang (502-557), the Tang (618-907), and the Song (960-1279) Dynasties — written by Huijiao (497-554), Daoxuan (596-667), and Zanning (919-1001) respectively —, popular narratives and miracle stories tend to be more “avadānaic”. However, in many cases it is impossible to draw a clear distinction between the stories contained in the Lives of Eminent Monks and those contained in popular tale collections, since both genres often use the same sources (oral transmission, epigraphs, etc.) and the same story may appear in a canonized collection of monks’ biographies and in a tale collection. The distinction was further blurred when Buddhism was significantly popularized during the Sui (581-618) and Tang dynasties (618-907). In this fruitful period various doctrinal schools as well as a variety of popular cults, centering on a certain Buddha, Bodhisattva, or scripture, came into being. Subsequent hagiographic collections were for the most part compiled from a specific “confessional” perspective,<sup>5</sup> a tendency which became exceedingly strong in the sectarian hagiography and historiography of the Song period (1127-1278).<sup>6</sup> While the production of popular tales which praised the benefits of a certain cult continued under the Song dynasty, the sects that had evolved from the doctrinal schools of the Sui and Tang now tried to incorporate these tales into their respective sectarian historiography in order to gain more influence among the populace.

Perhaps the most popular among the cults of the Tang dynasty was that of the Buddha of “Immeasurable Life” (skt. Amitāyus; jap. Muryōju), also called “Immeasurable Light” (skt. Amitābha; jap. Muryōkō), and his western paradise. This cult was particularly productive in compiling hagiographic life accounts of their alleged

3. Based on earlier oral traditions, the *jātakas* were incorporated in the Pāli Canon at the time of Aśoka, i.e. in the third century B.C. The *avadāna* genre is a little younger and mainly the product of the Sarvāstivāda school.

4. For a discussion of the impact of *jātakas* and *avadānas* on East Asian tale literature see Dykstra (1979, 1980, 1983).

5. “Confessional” in this context does not mean sectarian. The authors simply confined themselves to collect biographies of people who supposedly or actually contributed to the development or represented an ideal follower of a certain cult which could, however, be practiced by anybody, regardless of his or her affiliation. Hagiographic or tale collections were thematically categorized in accordance with their religious focus. Some collections dealt with the magical and soteriologic efficacy of a certain *sūtra* (such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Flower Garland Sūtra*, the *Sūtra of Vajra-like Insight*, etc.), the protecting and salvational power of a certain Buddha or Bodhisattva (such as Amida, Kan'on, or Jizō) and so on.

6. For historiographic and biographic writing under the Song see De Jong (1979), Jan (1964), Schmidt-Glitzner (1982), and Shinohara (1992).

or actual followers and patrons. These texts, which will be described in more detail below, are at the same time a vivid expression of that energetic cult and a literary means to foster it. A considerable number of such “birth accounts” were adopted by authors of the Tiantai sect which fervently competed with the powerful Chan sect for power, popularity, and official recognition under the Song.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ōjōden as a sub-genre of Buddhist hagiographic literature**

The kind of documents on which this study is based are generally referred to as *ōjōden*, or “accounts of births [into the Pure Land of Buddha Amida]”. They are exclusively concerned with the presentation of spiritual biographies of living beings which were supposedly born in *Sukhāvātī*, the pure Buddha sphere of “Utmost Bliss”, created 10 *kalpa* ago in fulfillment of the merciful vows of Bodhisattva Dharmākara, who by the perfection of his religious practice and the realization of his wish to save all living beings, became the Buddha of “Immeasurable Life” or “Immeasurable Light”. These “birth accounts” are modeled after the format of the Chinese *liezhuan* (jap. *retsuden*; “arrayed lives”), collections of usually relatively short biographies. The most famous examples of this genre in Buddhist literature are certainly the three *Lives of Eminent Monks*. Regarding contents and style, however, the *ōjōden* are influenced by various genres and literary traditions.

The inner structure and topology of the single birth accounts identifies the *ōjōden* doubtlessly as hagiographies. The accounts are generally stereotype, following the pattern of hagiographic literature by repeating a number of standardized *topoi* which usually fail to evoke the image of an actual growing and developing human being. Most of the stories depict a certain type rather than an individual. Thus, it would be quite easy to reconstruct an ideal or typical birth account being paradigmatic and providing the framework for all birth accounts. The following elements can be found in almost every account:

- descent and birthplace of the protagonist (if known);
- character and talents;
- religious practices performed by him/her;
- dreams or visions in which his/her death is predicted;
- circumstances of his/her death;
- miracles, dreams, omens, etc., proving his/her birth in Amida’s Pure Land.

Furthermore, the stylization of the accounts is evidently “bewußt religiös-moralisierend” (Graus 1965, 62), as the authors unequivocally clarify which character traits are desirable and what kinds of religious practices lead to spiritual liberation, i.e. *ōjō*. While containing thus a good portion of *avadāna* elements by displaying the working of karmic retribution, the authors of birth accounts formally follow Chinese biographical writing styles. Although actually neither birthplace nor family name of the protagonist really matter for the story itself they are usually given if known, if unknown the authors often mention the regrettable fact that they are unable to tell anything about the descent of the person in question. Since the death, i.e. the birth into the Pure Land, is the actual climax of all birth accounts, a report about the circumstances of the protagonist’s death is never lacking. Thus, the stories in most cases cover the whole life

7. See Jan (1963), Shinohara (1992), and Schmidt-Glintzer (1982).

of a person who finally gained liberation through *ōjō*. The biographical character of the *ōjōden* is, however, merely formal and superficial. This can be easily demonstrated by comparing two accounts of the same person in a “real biography” like Baochang’s *Biqiunizhuan* (“*Lives of the Nuns*”; written in or around 516) and in some *ōjōden*.<sup>8</sup> In many cases the account is reduced to only a few elements which directly concern the protagonist’s birth into *Sukhāvātī*. Every detail which goes beyond the pattern of the typical *ōjōden*, as defined above, is omitted. Accordingly, the incorporation of birth accounts into works classified under the genre of *setsuwa* literature like *Konjaku monogatari shū* — the 15th scroll of which can actually be defined as a complete *ōjōden* collection — did not cause any problems.<sup>9</sup> It was sufficient to affix the opening phrase “*mukashi*” or “*ima wa mukashi*” to transform a birth account — which pretends to be a spiritual biography — into a religious tale or edificatory narrative. Without changing the contents of the story the focus was thus switched from the person itself to an event, i.e. the person’s *ōjō*. It is not surprising, therefore, that the lack of information about a person’s dates or deeds (except for one or a few religious activities which may as well be interpreted as mere *topoi*) was no reason for the author of an *ōjōden* to refrain from describing his or her exemplary life, calm death and the auspicious signs indicating a successful birth.

It turns out to be somewhat more problematic to define the subjects of the texts as saints or holy persons, than to classify *ōjōden* as hagiographies according to their stylistic and formal characteristics. The range of persons portrayed in the *ōjōden* is immensely broad and covers almost the whole scale of living beings. In the same text we may find the birth account of a revered Buddhist master who is regarded as the founder of a major school like “The Great Master of Tiantai” (Tiantai Dashi; 538-597) and that of a bird which is born in *Sukhāvātī* because it repeated the name of Buddha Amida (cf. *JLZ*; *JZ-Z.16.204*). Although this is a very extreme example which is not representative of the whole genre, it is evident that the protagonists of the *ōjōden* are either no holy beings at all or the notion of sainthood in Buddhism must be very inclusive. To say it in H. Waldenfels’ words, all protagonists of the birth accounts are indeed “embodiments of achieved spiritual perfection” (“Verkörperungen erlangten Heils”) and they are to be distinguished from “mankind seeking for spiritual perfection” (“heilssuchenden Menschheit”) in terms of their “realization of spiritual perfection” (“Verwirklichung von Heil”) thus fulfilling the criteria of “holy beings” (“Heilsgestalten”),<sup>10</sup> a term by which Waldenfels replaces the term “Heilige” (saints) in order to avoid to adhere too much to the Catholic definition of sainthood (Waldenfels 1992, 274). Thus, Waldenfels is in accordance with R. Cohn, whose definition of sainthood was given above, and the subjects of the *ōjōden* can therefore be classified as a certain kind of holy beings, whose “auspicious death identifies [their] holiness” (Tsai 1994, 11). The fact that we can speak of a real cult connected with the protagonists only in a few cases, is at least partly explainable by the structural differences between

8. See, for example, the account of the nun Facheng in *BZ* and in *JLZ*.

9. As a matter of fact, in Japan the *ōjōden* are treated as a sub-genre of the so-called *setsuwa* literature which is a modern and extremely inclusive term. F. Kotas (1987, 289ff) criticizes the ascription of birth accounts to the *setsuwa* genre because it neglects many characteristic features of the *ōjōden* and leads to a somewhat unjust evaluation of the *ōjōden* as unskilled and raw in comparison to *Konjaku monogatari shū* which forms the standard of the genre.

10. It should be noted that the German adjective “*heil*” has a fairly broad and ambiguous meaning, being translated as “complete, entire, unhurt, unscathed, undamaged, cured, healed”, etc. Etymologically it is closely related to the English term “whole” as well as “to heal”, etc., and indicates — in its religious usage — a state of being spiritually perfect, free from any spiritual defects. Therefore I chose to translate the noun “*Heil*” here as “spiritual perfection” rather than “salvation” with its strong connotation of being saved by a saviour, as ordinary dictionaries would suggest.

Buddhism and Christianity. The original prototype of the Mahāyāna Buddhist saint is the Bodhisattva, a being that was, however, from an early stage on elevated to a level far beyond ordinary human beings. It is the Bodhisattvas who are venerated and to whom people turn with their everyday problems. The existence of the Bodhisattvas and their cults makes a cult of lower, more human saints unnecessary. Or, to view it from the other side, Christianity did away with all former deities or divine beings thus leaving a gap which had to be filled by the saints who had to be human enough not to question the monotheistic nature of the Christian religion.

Yet another criterion for being a saint, which is often mentioned and which is crucial in Catholicism, is hardly to be found in the birth accounts: their function as mediators between men and salvation. The subjects of the *ōjōden* are only media of salvation to the extent that they are examples that may encourage people to follow the same path and thereby gain liberation. In the prefaces of the Japanese *ōjōden*, however, it is suggested that the very acts of writing down or reading the accounts of persons who gained birth in the Pure Land would establish karmic connections (*kechien*) with them. It was believed that the author as well as the reader or listener could thus share the good karma of the protagonists. In this sense, the “holy persons” of the *ōjōden* do indeed function as mediators between *Sukhāvātī* and our *sahā* world.

*Ōjōden* are neither doctrinal nor historical writings but narratives meant to edify the authors themselves as well as their audience. This purpose is explicitly formulated in the prefaces of the texts. Jiakai (7th century), the author of the oldest extant collection of birth accounts, in his *Treatise on the Pure Land* (*Jingtulun*; T#1963), states that the theoretical discussion of birth in the Pure Land, as provided by him in the first two of the three scrolls, is a very virtuous thing indeed. But since the understanding of living beings is shallow, they are unable to grasp the indications of the holy ones. It is necessary therefore, to describe concretely and lively how people actually attained birth in order to strengthen their faith (T.47.97a). The author of the *Wangsheng jingtuzhuan* (see below) emphasizes the importance of developing a solid faith especially now that the age of the Final Dharma (*mappō*) has begun and all teachings except those of Amida and his Pure Land are — according to the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* — on the verge of being extinguished: “The heart of those who see [the examples of *ōjō*] is encouraged, and the will of those who hear of it will be strengthened. This is extremely beneficial in the Final Dharma [age] (Tsukamoto 1974, 239).”

There is almost no indication that the *ōjōden* were used to promote a real cult of the saints. Only in the preface to the latest of the texts dealt with in this study — Daoyan’s (1335-1418) *Zhu shang shanren yong* — it is said that the birth accounts are to be read aloud to awaken people’s faith and to revive memory (JZ-Z.16.286a).

The prefaces of the Japanese *ōjōden* are somewhat more personal in style than the Chinese, and it can be felt that the authors — mostly laymen — did not record the accounts only for the sake of others but also for assuring themselves of the accessibility of *Sukhāvātī*. The personal motivation which drove them to write their *ōjōden* becomes especially clear in Miyoshi no Tameyasu’s preface to *Shūi ōjōden*. He describes in detail a dream he had in Shōtoku 2/8/2 (1098). On that night Amida appeared before Tameyasu and told him that, although the time of his *ōjō* had not yet come, he wished to visit him in advance as a reward for his having an upright heart. When Tameyasu awoke he realized that his dream responded somehow to a passage in the “chapter on the immeasurable life-span [of Śākyamuni]” in the *Lotus Sūtra* which says that those “Who are gentle and agreeable, straightforward and honest, all see my body” (T.9.43c; quoted from Hurvitz 1976, 244). Nevertheless, Tameyasu wondered whether his dream was a real revelation or a delusion. In order to gain certainty, he went to the Ten’ō-ji and performed the *hyakumanben nenbutsu* (“to recite the name of Amida a million times”) for nine days. After he had finished this practice he prayed to the relics stored in that



temple that they should reassemble and appear before him if his dream had been a true revelation. If he had been deceived, nothing should happen. After having prayed thus three times he heard a “voice like gold and jewels” and he saw the three relics appear before him. Now he was sure that his encounter with Amida had not been a delusion. “My faith and my respect were perfect then, and after offering my worship I went away” (*NST.7.279-80*).<sup>11</sup>

However, as indicated above, the encouragement of faith and practice was not thought to be the only benefit derived from the birth accounts. “They were not recorded in order to gain fame and profit but solely for the purpose of creating karmic ties (*kechien*) and to encourage (*kanjin*)” (*NST.7.280*). Accordingly, it was believed that spiritual benefit could be gained directly and immediately by recording and reading birth accounts and thus establishing karmic ties between the persons who were already born in the Pure Land, the authors who recorded their lives, and their audience.

The mahāyānistic attitude of benefiting oneself as well as all other living beings is expressed through some kind of vow in all Japanese *ōjōden* except *Zoku honchō ōjōden*:

I will surely be born from the continual existences into the [Land of] Utmost Bliss and quickly attain the stage of insight into the non-production [of all dharmas]. I will deeply penetrate into the various *samādhi*, [A]mida’s vows will be my vows, Samantabhadra’s practice will be my practice, Avalokiteśvara’s heart will be my heart. I will benefit all living beings in the *sahā* world and all worlds in the ten directions. (*SOD; NST.7.279*).

## Women in the *ōjōden*

### *The sources*

The present study of portraits of women in Buddhist hagiography is based upon an investigation of the following nine Chinese and seven Japanese *ōjōden* which were compiled before or in the 14th century:

#### *Chinese texts*

1. *Wangshengren xiangmao zhang* (contained in the 3rd scroll of Jiakai’s *Jingtu lun*; compiled after 653. T#1963);
2. *Wangsheng xifang jingtu ruiying zhuan* (1 scroll; compiled around 785 by Wenshen [-9th century] and Shaokang [-805]. T#2070; *JZ-Z.16.1-12*);
3. *Jingtu wangsheng zhuan* (3 scrolls; compiled 1064 by Jiezu [985-1077]. T#2071; *JZ-Z.16.13-51*);
4. *Wangsheng jingtuzhuan* (3 scrolls; date of compilation unknown, traditionally attributed to Jiezu.<sup>12</sup> Tsukamoto 1974, 234-314);
5. *Xinxiu wangsheng zhuan* (originally 3 scrolls of which only the first and the third are extant; compiled 1084 by Wanggu [-1105]. *JZ-Z.16.96-129*);

11. Fujiwara no Munetomo retells this story in this account of Tameyasu’s *ōjō* in *HSOD* (*NST.7.687b*).

12. According to Tsukamoto (1974, 219ff) the extant version of *WJZ* was compiled by a Japanese monk in the late Heian period using the birth accounts of Feizhuo’s (-1063) lost *Suiyuan wangsheng ji* as his material basis.

6. *Xinbian gujin wangsheng jingtu baozhu ji* (originally 8 scrolls of which only the first is extant; compiled 1155 by Lu Shishou [c. 1127-1279]. *JZ-Z.16.52-89*);
7. *Jingtu lijiao zhi* (3 scrolls — 27-29 of Fozu tongji— of which only the second and the third are birth accounts; compiled 1269 by Zhipan [2nd half of 13th century]. T#2035, *JZ-Z.16.149-206*);
8. *Hanjia lei ju wangsheng zhuan* (3 scrolls, of which only the second is extant; date of compilation and author unknown<sup>13</sup>);
9. *Zhu shangshanren yong* (1 scroll; compiled 1381 by Daoyan [1335-1418]. Tsukamoto 1974, 315-336).

#### Japanese texts

1. *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* (1 scroll; compiled around 986 by Yoshishige no Yasutane [-997]. *NST.7.9-41*);
2. *Zoku honchō ōjōden* (1 scroll; compiled between 1099 and 1103 by Ōe no Masafusa [1041-1111]. *NST.7.221-254*);
3. *Shūi ōjōden* (3 scrolls; first scroll compiled not before 1099, third scroll not before 1111 by Miyoshi no Tameyasu [1049-1139]. *NST.7.277-392*);
4. *Goshūi ōjōden* (3 scrolls; compiled 1137 by Miyoshi no Tameyasu. *NST.7.641-670*);
5. *Sange ōjōki* (also called *Sange ōjōden*; 1 scroll; compiled 1139 by Renzen [- c. 1149]. *NST.7.671-682*);
6. *Honchō shinshū ōjōden* (1 scroll; compiled 1151 by Fujiwara no Munetomo [dates unknown]. *NST.7.683-694*);
7. [*Nenbutsu ōjōden*]<sup>14</sup> (fragmentary; compiled by Gyōsen [-1278]. *NST.7.704-708*).

These 16 texts contain more than 150 portraits of nuns, female novices and laywomen from the 5th to the 13th centuries. A few accounts, however, occur in more than one text.

#### The formal organization of the texts

Among all the accounts in the texts I have investigated, approximately 15% (16% in the Chinese texts, 12% in the Japanese) center on women. The relatively small number of women's biographies does by no means reflect the actual share of women among the total number of Buddhists in China and Japan. It rather reflects the inferior position of women held in the *samgha* as well as in society as a whole.<sup>15</sup> Compared with other hagiographic genres of East Asian Buddhism, however, the share of women in the *ōjōden* is astonishingly large. There is only one collection of 65 life accounts of nuns extant (Baochang's *Biqiunizhuan*), whereas the three *Gaosengzhuan* together with the

13. According to Tsukamoto (1974, 209-216) the only extant copy of this text was completed in the Kamakura period by a Japanese monk like WJZ on the basis of Feizhuo's now lost *Suiyuan wangsheng ji*. Most of the accounts in *HLWZ* are in fact almost identical with those of WJZ.

14. The original title of the text is unknown. This title was given later.

15. According to a census of the Kaiyuan period (713-741) the Buddhist clergy in China was formed by 75,524 monks and 50,576 nuns (Ch'en 1973, 85). To my knowledge there exist no precise data about the numbers of monks and nuns in Japan during the Heian period. Most probably the share of officially ordained and recognized nuns in Japan was smaller than in China (see also Takagi 1988, 53f). However, during the centuries in which our *ōjōden* were compiled the number of "self-ordained" (*jido*) or "privately ordained" (*shido*) monks and nuns was in all likelihood much higher than that of officially registered ones, and it is thinkable that the share of women among these non-official practitioners was much larger.

lost *Mingsengzhuan* of Baochang alone contain more than 1,500 main biographies and more than 500 supplementary biographies of monks, not to speak of all the sectarian historiographies, genealogies, etc., which were produced on a large scale from the Song dynasty onward. Kakhun's *Haedong kosŭng chŏn*, the Korean counterpart of the Chinese *Gaosengzhuan*, also does not have a single biography of a woman, and likewise in Japan there was a collection of biographies of monks — *Nihon kōsōden yōmonshō* written by Shūshō between 1249 and 1251 — but no biographies of nuns. The fact that women do appear in the *ōjōden* at all is certainly owed to the specific character of these texts in contrast to the *Lives of Eminent Monks* genre. The protagonists in the *ōjōden* were not chosen in accordance with their historical, political, or doctrinal importance but in accordance with their piety and their spiritual achievements. As will be demonstrated below, the social and political discrimination of women in the historical context of this study, did not necessarily imply any doubts in regard to women's spiritual abilities.

It is not only the limited number of women in the *ōjōden* which indicates the fact that women were thought of as inferior to men. The authors attitude towards women is also clearly expressed by the position the accounts of women hold in the texts. There are three major criteria according to which Buddhist collections of life accounts are organized: (1) religious aspects, (2) social aspects, (3) and chronology.

In most of the nine Chinese texts the decision in which order the birth accounts are given is primarily based on a religious hierarchy according to the Buddhist classification of Seven Groups (*shichishu*)<sup>16</sup> of Buddhists. They follow the golden rule (1) ordained before non-ordained, (2) male before female. Thus the most common order is roughly as follows: (1) monks, (2) nuns, (3) laymen, (4) laywomen. The accounts within the respective groups are generally given in a chronological order. Among the clerics gender is given precedence over religious status. Thus, the accounts of male novices (*śrāmaṇera*) are given before those of fully ordained nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*). Only *Xinxiu wangsheng zhuan* is organized chronologically. Furthermore, *Wangsheng jingtu zhuan* deviates remarkably from the other texts by neglecting the hierarchical structure of the *saṃgha*, presenting the birth accounts of pious laymen before those of male and female novices.<sup>17</sup>

The formal organization of the Japanese *ōjōden* differs considerably from that of the Chinese texts. Yasutane organized his *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* according to the traditional Buddhist hierarchy ("ordained before non-ordained, male before female"). The government official Ōe no Masafusa, who was obviously less deeply involved in the world of Buddhism than the others, is the only one who ordered his birth accounts according to the social status of the protagonists. The first scroll of Tameyasu's *Shūi ōjōden* is organized in a chronological order; accounts of people with unknown dates are given at the end. In the preface to the second scroll, however, Tameyasu apologizes for being unable to keep this chronological order and for recording the accounts in the order in which he got to know them instead (*NST*.7.318). Thus the order of birth accounts in the second and third chapters of *Shūi ōjōden* is rather arbitrary, and the same holds true for the three scrolls of *Goshūi ōjōden*. Munetomo attempts to organize

16. These are: (1) *bhikṣu*, monks; (2) *bhikṣuṇī*, nuns; (3) *śikṣamānā*, female novices between the age of eighteen and twenty who observe the six precepts; (4) *śrāmaṇera*, male novices; (5) *śrāmaṇerikā*, female novices, (6) *upāsaka*, laymen; (7) *upāsikā*, laywomen. Although the seven groups are defined, the category of *śikṣamānā* can hardly be found in East Asian Buddhist hagiography.

17. This deviation from the other Chinese texts might be due to the above-mentioned fact that *WJZ*, although traditionally attributed to Jiezhu, was in all likelihood compiled by a Japanese monk towards the end of the Heian period. Although this unknown monk probably based his work on another Chinese text, the lost *Suiyuan wangsheng ji* of Feizhuo (Tsukamoto 1974, 219ff), it is possible that he changed the order of the accounts he took from *Suiyuan wangsheng ji*.

his *Honchō shinshū ōjōden* chronologically again. As far as can be seen from the thirteen extant of the formerly at least 49 accounts of *Nenbutsu ōjōden*, Gyōsen also gave up the hierarchical order in favor of a primarily chronological one. It is noteworthy that *śrāmaṇera* Renzen revives the Chinese model of hierarchical organization. The neglect of the religious hierarchy in most of the Japanese *ōjōden* can be explained by the fact that their authors were laymen, with the exception of Renzen and Gyōsen. Renzen as a novice shortly before becoming a monk might have identified himself with the Buddhist clergy to such an extent that he found it appropriate to give priority to the religious hierarchy in his *Sange ōjōki*. Gyōsen, on the other hand, was strongly influenced by Hōnen (1133-1212) and his egalitarian teaching, which did not consider the distinction between the clergy and the laity an important matter.

While, in collections of monks' biographies, the monks are classified according to their activities or clerical ranks, no such distinction is made in regard to women. They are only classified as nuns, novices, attendants, and laywomen. Nuns are usually just called *ni*, an abbreviation of *bikuni* (skt. *bhikṣuṇī*; ch. *biqiuni*). There is only one remarkable exception to that rule: Zhipan adds the title *fashi* ("teacher of the law") — which, to my knowledge, had hitherto been exclusively used as a title for monks — to each of the nun's names in the table of contents of the third scroll of his *Jingtu lijiao zhi* (JZ-Z.16.183).

### *The image of women in the birth accounts*

As shown above, both the number of accounts of women in comparison with that of men and the formal organization of the texts reveal the attitudes of the authors, the Buddhist *saṃgha*, and society in general towards women. Let us now see whether the authors give any reasons for the alleged inferiority of femininity in the birth accounts themselves. Generally speaking there are two possible sources for the relative disregard of women in Buddhist hagiography: discrimination justified by religious and by social arguments.<sup>18</sup>

According to the traditional view of Buddhism, being a woman implies "Five Obstacles" (*goshō*) because women cannot become (1) Brahma king (jap. *Bonten'ō*), (2) Indra (jap. *Taishaku*), (3) Māra king (jap. *Ma'ō*), (4) Cakravarti king (jap. *Tenrin'ō*), and (5) Buddha (*Butsu*).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, their freedom is limited by the so-called "Three Obediences" (*sanjū*), which means that, (1) when they are children they must obey their parents, (2) when they are married they must obey their husbands, and (3) when their husbands die they must obey their sons. In the Pure Land tradition it was, above all, a passage in the *Treatise on the Pure Land*, attributed to Vasubandhu, which raised doubts concerning the ability of women to be born in *Sukhāvātī*. It is maintained here that neither adherents of the "Two Vehicles"<sup>20</sup> nor women or physically handicapped people are born into Amida's Buddha Land (T.26.231a). This assertion is based on the 35th vow of Dharmākara according to the *Larger Sukhāvātī vyūha* as translated by Saṃghavarman. Here the later Buddha Amida vows that, if women "who, having heard my Name, rejoice in faith, awaken aspiration for Enlightenment and wish to renounce womanhood, should after death be reborn again as a woman, may I not attain perfect enlightenment" (T.12.268c; quoted from Inagaki 1994, 246-7; see also Kleine 1996,

18. For a discussion of women's role in Chinese religion, in general, see Overmyer (1991) and for a detailed treatment of the image of the feminine in Mahāyāna texts see Paul (1979).

19. See, for instance, the "Devadatta Chapter" in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

20. *Nijō: śrāvakas*, "hearer" of the Buddhist teachings and *pratyeka-buddhas*, "self-enlightened Buddhas"; i.e. the two kinds of followers of the Hinayāna.

271ff). The benefit of achieving a male body is also mentioned in the *Lotus Sūtra* (T.9.54b).

It comes as no surprise then, to find in the birth accounts several examples of women who passionately abhor their body. *Wangsheng jingtuzhuan*, for instance, tells the story of a woman who refrains from entering the order of nuns despite of her being encouraged by others, only because she fears that she, as a woman in her best years, might do harm to the reputation of the *samgha* (Tsukamoto 1974, 299). Zhipan presents the birth account of a woman who hated her “evil female body” (JZ-Z.16.198b) and tells of another female lay believer who, when she saw the Bodhisattvas come from the West to take her to the Pure Land, expressed her fear that the feet of a woman might be too impure to climb upon the lotus pedestal which the Bodhisattvas offered her (JZ-Z.16.199a). The nun Ming’an (dates unknown) detested her body, which she considered vulgar and filthy, like a poisonous snake. She hoped to get rid of it and to gain a male body by chanting the *nenbutsu*. While still alive she appeared to several people as a man in their dreams. Finally, she put an end to her miserable life as a woman and took a shortcut to the Pure Land by jumping into the river at the age of 48 (WJZ; Tsukamoto 1974, 300). After a housewife from Bingzhou had died, a neighbor dreamed of her appearing in a male body being just on the verge of being born on a lotus blossom in the Pure Land (WJZ; Tsukamoto 1974, 300). The most drastic description of a change of sex is given in the same collection in the birth account of the nun Fazhu (dates unknown) who also hated her female nature. Shortly after her death some people witnessed how a male sex organ (*dankon*) grew out of her corpse (Tsukamoto 1974, 287).

It is noteworthy that nowhere in the Japanese *ōjōden* is “female impurity” or “abhorrence at the female body” mentioned.<sup>21</sup> Only Yasutane gives the account of the ordained sister of *sōzu* (“vicar general”) Kanchū (c. 906-977) who, approaching death, told the bystanders that she saw the holy envoy coming from the Pure Land to welcome her but that they shrank back from the impurity. Kanchū had the monks recite the *nenbutsu* again, and on the following day the nun was brought to *Sukhāvātī* by the assembly of holy beings (NST.7.36).<sup>22</sup> The reason for the impurity which first hindered the legation from approaching the death bed is not given. Furthermore, Munetomo tells in his *Honchō shinshū ōjōden* that the nun Renmyō (-1118) hated the Five Obstacles her whole life through (NST.7.685a). It is not clear, however, whether Munetomo intended to tell that she hated the female body being burdened with these restrictions or only the obstacles as such, which would be quite natural. Masafusa states about the nun Ganshō<sup>23</sup> (c. 953?-1034) — the younger sister of Genshin (942-1017): “She has received a body with Five Obstacles, however, this is clarified when contemplating the ‘Two Truths’ (*nitai*)” (NST.7.252). What Munetomo probably intends to say here is that the theory of the inferiority of women in terms of the Five Obstacles is only based on conventional

21. It must be noted, however, that there are examples in other texts of the Heian period which could be interpreted as revealing some dislike of the female sex. In *Dainihonkoku hokkekyō genki* (III.98), for instance, we learn of the nun Shari that “though she had a female appearance, she had no vagina, but only an opening for urinating” (NST.7.179; quoted from Dykstra 1983, 119). This story is apparently influenced by an account in *Nihonkoku genpō zen’aku ryōiki*. In this story, however, only the nickname of the protagonist — Saru Hijiri — is given. NST.70.369). In the account of Gansei, an older sister of Genshin, it is said that “although she had a female appearance, she should be called a male believer” (NST.7.181), that means a male layman is conceived of as superior to a nun by priest Chingen, the author of the text.

22. This account is also given in *Konjaku monogatari shū* XV.37.

23. In the manuscript on which the NST edition is based, the nun is called Gansei. According to Inoue and Ōsone, however, this must be a mistake and the actual name must have been Ganshō (NST.7.445a).

truth (*zokutai*) and does not effect the religious value of a person if viewed from the standpoint of absolute truth (*nitai*).

There is one passage contained in the *Shūi ōjōden*'s account of Dharma Master Jōzō (891-964), however, which clearly indicates that the concept of female impurity was by no means unknown to Japanese Buddhists of the early twelfth century. A deity (*myōjin*) appears at Jōzō's summer retreat and tells him that he was ordered by Jikaku Daishi to prepare that place for a *nyohōgyō* ritual. In order to purify the place he has not only polluted earth removed but also spews fire to burn Jōzō's new *kaśāya*. Asked for the reason, he answers that this robe was sewn by an impure woman (*NST.7.320*).<sup>24</sup>

Tameyasu's account of an unknown housewife from Nara points to a dilemma in which most women were placed. This wife and mother had for more than 20 years devoted herself to the practice of the *Lotus Sūtra* to the effect that she neglected her duties as a housewife although her husband reprimanded her several times. Moreover, when she was approaching death she said to her husband:

“We have spent several decades together as man and wife. But now I am leaving this world for another world. Why don't you accompany me?” To her sons she said: “I have given birth to a number of children and have thus committed many sins. Now I am about to leave this world on my own. Why don't you follow me?” (*NST.7.347*)<sup>25</sup>

This account criticizes — at least implicitly — how women were caught between the demands of society on the one hand and of religion on the other. Society expected them to bear children and to commit themselves entirely to their housework. By bearing children, however, they polluted the divinities of the earth, the water, and the air with the blood they shed. It was a common, doubtlessly pre-Buddhist belief both in China and Japan, that the “blood of both menstruation and childbirth was spiritually polluting” (Reed 1992, 165; Overmyer 1991, 107).<sup>26</sup> Thus, they were especially in need of compensation by meritorious religious acts that they were unable to perform if they only served their families as their husbands demanded. The self-confident protagonist of Tameyasu's birth account clearly deems the way women were treated unjust. To her it is only appropriate to demand her husband's and her children's lives in return for her life that she gave as a sacrifice for them.

24. Interestingly, in *Nihon kōsō den yōmon shō* (I) the character for woman is omitted, and it only says “it was sewn by an impure person” (*DNBZ.101.19a*).

25. This account is apparently based on a story in *Dainihonkoku hokkekyō genki* (111.121; *NST.7.347*). There are thematically related stories in *Nihon ryōki* (111.9) and *Uji shūi monogatari* (VI. 1): “Again, long ago there was a man named Fujiwara Hirota (Hirota according to *Nihon ryōki*: C. K.). He died and found himself summoned to the court of Yama... The king said to him: ‘The woman who was bearing your child has died in child-birth. She is being tormented in the depths of Hell and has laid a complaint against you... here is the sense of your wife's complaint’, said the king. ‘Both my husband and I did sinful acts... but I died in giving birth to his child and am now suffering these unbearable torments, while he makes no effort even to pray for my salvation. It is not right that I alone should suffer. I beg you to bring Hirota here with me so that he may suffer just as I am suffering’”(quoted from Mills 1970, 253).

26. This belief culminated in the circulation of a text called *Sūtra of the Blood Bowl* (*Ketsubongyō*) since the Muromachi period (1336-1573) in Japan. This apocryphal sūtra depicts the pains of women who had fallen into the “Blood Pond Hell” because they had polluted the divinities with their menstruation blood or the blood shed at child-birth (Takemi 1983, Hagiwara 1983, 16ff).

*Religious practices performed by women*

In the *ōjōden* there is no perceptible difference made between the religious practices of men and women. Generally speaking, there are many practices which supposedly lead to birth in the Pure Land. Although in the *ōjōden* the most frequently mentioned practice is by far the *nenbutsu* (chin. *nianfo*) — especially as a death-bed practice — it is by no means the only one. In most cases the term *nenbutsu* is not clearly defined but seems to refer primarily to the recitation of Amida's name, perhaps accompanied by a rather unspecific mental act of recollection, reverence, etc. There are only few instances in which a more specific meditative *nenbutsu* method is mentioned, which nevertheless proves that the ability of women to perform difficult religious practices was generally accepted.<sup>27</sup> The nun Shanhui (dates unknown), for instance, conducts the *pratyutpanna-samādhi*, i.e. a method of contemplation which aims at a vision of Amida (WJZ; Tsukamoto 1974, 281).<sup>28</sup> The nun Fazhi (dates unknown) engaged in the so-called *nenbutsu zanmai* ("samādhi of being mindful of the Buddha") for seven days as explained in the *Amida Sūtra* (WJZ; Tsukamoto 1974, 284).<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Facheng (368-439) practiced the sixteen contemplations as described in the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (XGWJB; JZ-Z.16.76b, XJWZ; JZ-Z.16.104b, JLZ; JZ-Z.16.185b)<sup>30</sup>, a laywoman was instructed in the method of contemplating the Pure Land by a monk (JLZ; JZ-Z.16.200a), and another woman

27. Besides contemplational *nenbutsu* the following examples for meditational practices may be given: the nun Fasheng engaged in the practice of *dhyāna* (WXZ; T.47.98c), the meditational practice of Fazang was excellent (WXRZ; JZ-Z.16.8a). It is not said what kind of meditational practice she engaged in, but other texts suggest that she contemplated Amida, although these versions only use the term *nenbutsu*: JLZ; JZ-Z.185b, Wangshengji: JZ-Z.256: JLZ; JZ-Z.16.185b). The nun Daogui contemplated her own mind and entered *samādhi* (*kanjin nūyjō* WJZ; Tsukamoto 1974, 279). The mother of Fujiwara Shigekane practiced *vipaśyanā* (*kangyō*) and dwelled in meditation (*zenjō*) (SOD, NST.378).

28. This practice is based on the *Sūtra of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present* (*Pratyutpannabuddha-sammukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*, T#417-19) where the Buddha says to Bhadrāpāla: "In the same way, O Bhadrāpāla, if a Bodhisattva, or a śramaṇa [monk] or white-robed [layman] hears of the Amitabuddhakṣetra in the West, whatever he hears, he must constantly think of the Buddha in the quarter, never tailing in his observance of the precepts. If he recollects Him single-mindedly for a day and a night or for seven days and nights, then, when seven days are over, he shall see the Amitabuddha but, once awake, he shall not see Him (I would rather think that this passage should be interpreted as "if he does not see him while awake, he will see him in a dream", as T#419 and the Tibetan version suggest; C. K.) ... Such a Bodhisattva-mahāsattva has a penetrating vision without a divine eye, penetrating hearing without a divine ear, without magical powers he reaches the Buddhakṣetra, only to see it. Sitting where he is, he sees Amitabuddha and hears the sermons preached by Him, accepting and benefiting from all of them. When he has emerged from his *samādhi*, he can tell others all about it" (T.13.905a; from the Chinese translation attributed to Lokakṣema, quoted from Tsukamoto 1979, 850-851. See also Harrison's [1990, 32] translation of the Tibetan version).

29. The author appears to refer to a passage in the *Amida Sūtra*: "Śāriputra, if a good man or woman who hears of Amitāyus holds fast to his Name even for one day, two days, three, four, five, six or seven days with a concentrated and undistracted mind, then, at the hour of death, Amitāyus will appear with a host of holy ones." (T.12.347b: quoted from Inagaki 1994, 356). To call this method "*nenbutsu zanmai*" is a little unusual.

30. Note that her practice of the 16 contemplations is not mentioned in *BZ*, which as the oldest biography of Facheng, most probably was the model for all subsequent accounts of her life. It should also be noted that the *Contemplation Sūtra* was translated by Kālayāśas during 424-453, a fact that may raise some doubts as to whether Facheng was really acquainted with the text or the meditative practices derived from it. Thus, it may be assumed that this detail of her meditational practice was added in order to stress her affiliation with the Pure Land cult.

revered the 84,000 characteristic features of the outer appearance of Amida, which most probably means that she contemplated and visualized them (JLZ; JZ-Z.16.201a).

In some accounts the protagonists perform a special kind of invocational *nenbutsu* as supposedly propagated by the famous Pure Land master Daochuo (562-645; see JLZ; T.47.98b). While chanting the name of Amida the practitioners use small beans or wooden beads to count the number of repetitions. The consumption of the collected beans was deemed spiritually beneficial. A laywoman from Bingzhou donated the 57 *shi* (c. 10,260 l) to the monks and every single bean established a karmic connection (WJZ; Tsukamoto 1974, 299). Śrāmaṇerī Gongdao (dates unknown) collected 90 *shi* (c. 16,200 l). A poor beggar prophesied that everybody who ate one of those beans would unfaillingly be born in the Pure Land (WJZ; Tsukamoto 1974, 303). Further evidence of this practice, which is called *azuki nenbutsu* in Japan, can be found in the accounts of Myōhō who reached the amount of 57 *koku* and 3 *to* (c. 10,314 l) (SOD; NST.7.349) and of Myōren (-1134), who started to practice the *azuki nenbutsu* at the age of 42, thus only reaching 10 *koku* and 5 *to* (c. 1890 l) which she stored inside the statues of Amida and Jizō which were especially made for that purpose (GSOD; NST.7.666a).

The most frequently mentioned practice next to the *nenbutsu* is the recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* or parts of it. The cult of the *Lotus Sūtra* had always been closely connected with the religious goal of being born in *Sukhāvatī*. For women who longed for birth in *Sukhāvatī* the lotus practice was particularly attractive since Śākyamuni had predicted in that sūtra, that:

If after the extinction of the Thus Come One, within the last five hundred years, there is then a woman who, hearing this scriptural canon, practices it as preached, at the end of this life she shall straightaway go to the world-sphere Comfortable (*Sukhāvatī*) to the dwelling place of the Buddha Amitāyus, where he<sup>31</sup> is surrounded by a multitude of great bodhisattvas, there to be reborn on a jeweled throne among lotus blossoms ... (T. 9.54b, quoted from Hurvitz 1976, 300).

It was in fact not before Hōnen (1133-1212), Nichiren (1222-1282), and others who propagated the exclusive reliance on either the *nenbutsu* or the recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* (i.e. its title according to Nichiren) in 13th century Japan, that the two practices were seen as alternatives. It is not surprising, therefore, that only Gyōsen as a monk closely related to the *senju nenbutsu* movement based on Hōnen's selective teaching, seems to favor the *nenbutsu* more than the other authors. Thus, in *Nenbutsu ōjōden* we are told how the nun Myōshin-bō (dates unknown) gave up the recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* as well as her esoteric practices in favor of the "single-minded *nenbutsu*" (*ikkō nenbutsu*) after she had met Hōnen. Furthermore the nun Shōren (dates unknown), who as a married woman used to recite the *Lotus Sūtra* constantly, was after her ordination converted to the "single-minded saying of the name [of Amida]" (*ikkō shōmyō*) by a spiritual guide (*zenchishiki*) (NST.7.706).

While in the Chinese birth accounts there is still a considerable number of women who study and recite other sūtras than the *Lotus Sūtra*, in the Japanese *ōjōden* this scripture is almost the only one mentioned. All other practices like forming mystic gestures (*mudrā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), creating images, incantation of *mantra* or *dhāraṇī*, keeping certain religious diets, sacrifices, and austere asceticism are only mentioned occasionally both in the Chinese and Japanese texts. Extremely rare are accounts of religiously motivated suicides or self-mutilations. The only woman who commits suicide is the above mentioned nun Ming'an. The rareness of self-sacrifices in

31. Note the change of sex here, which is, of course, only explicit in the Sanskrit version of the text, not in the Chinese translation.



the *ōjōden* is not a matter of course. Although always disputed and in fact prohibited,<sup>32</sup> suicide as the ultimate sacrifice to the Buddha was quite widespread both in China and Japan. In each of the three *Gaoseng zhuan* monks who “abandoned their body” (*bōshin* or *ishin*) form their own category among “translators”, “meditators”, etc. In the preface to his *Biqiunizhuan*, Baochang praises the act of nuns burning themselves to death — three of the 65 nuns in his work committed this pious act — as “the epitome of the ascetic life” (T.50.934b; quoted from Tsai 1994, 16). Furthermore, the 96th volume of the *Fayuan zhulin*, the great Buddhist encyclopedia of the Tang dynasty, discusses the issue in detail and concludes, by quoting from various sūtras, that self-immolation does not represent the sin of killing a living being. Following this discussion, the author Daoshi (-683) presents the biographies of nine persons who committed suicide for religious reasons (T.53.989c-997c). Although in most cases religious suicide was inspired by the account of the self-sacrifice of Bodhisattva Sarvasattvapriyadarśana in the 23rd chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*,<sup>33</sup> it was also committed by Pure Land believers for the sake of reaching the other shore of *Sukhāvātī* as soon as possible. In the Pure Land tradition, the act of jumping from a high tree, while facing westwards and while saying the *nenbutsu* is regarded as the seventh of the “ten virtues” of Shandao (613-681)<sup>34</sup>, whose propaganda is held responsible for the suicide of more than a hundred people in Chang’an.<sup>35</sup>

There are three cases of women in the *ōjōden* who committed the act of self-mutilation.<sup>36</sup> The nun Anren (dates unknown) burned incense on her left arm (*WJZ*; Tsukamoto 1974, 283), a woman from Siming drew images of the Amida trinity using her own blood (*JLZ*; *JZ-Z.16.202*), and in Japan a nun peeled, with the help of a mysterious monk, some skin from her hand to draw a picture of *Sukhāvātī* on it (*NOG*; *NST.7.36*).

Although the majority of women portrayed in the *ōjōden* performed simple practices as the invocation of the Buddha’s name or recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, this obviously does not mean that women were believed to be unable to conduct more demanding practices, as we have seen above. The dominance of *nenbutsu* and *Lotus*

32. According to § 27 of the regulations for monks and nuns in Japan (*sōniryō*), enacted by emperor Tenmu in 701, suicide and self-mutilation were strictly prohibited. Since the *sōniryō* was largely based on the regulations for Buddhist monastics in Tang China (Ch’en 1973, 95), it is safe to assume that suicide and self-mutilation were prohibited in China as well. See also Jan 1965 and Zürcher 1959, 282.

33. This Bodhisattva — who was to become Bodhisattva Bhaiṣajyarāja in a later existence — out of his gratitude to the Buddha Candrasūryavimalaprabhāsaśrī “applied [to his body] various scents... and he also drank the fragrant oils of campaka flowers ... he painted his body with fragrant oil and, in the presence of the Buddha Pure and Bright Excellence of the Sun and Moon, wrapped his body in a garment adorned with divine jewels, anointed himself with fragrant oils ... and then burnt his body” thus offering himself to the Buddha as a living candle. The Buddha thereupon praised this devotional act as a ‘true perseverance in vigor’ and a true Dharma-offering to the Thus Come One” (T.9.53b. quoted from Hurvitz 1976, 294-295).

34. According to the 9th scroll of the *Record of the Sayings of the Venerable of Kurodani* (i.e. Hōnen; *Kurodani shōnin gotōroku*) compiled and edited by Ryōe Dōkō (1243-1330) (T.83161a-b).

35. This account is based on the missing 2nd of the three scrolls of *XWZ* and is also rendered in the 9th scroll of *Kurodani shōnin gotōroku* (T.83.158b). Daoxuan in his *Xu Gaosengzhuan* reports about a man who was at first critical in regard of the *nenbutsu*, but after listening to a sermon of Shandao was completely converted. He climbed a tree, pressed the palms of his hands together, turned towards the west, jumped down and died (T.50.648a).

36. Many Chinese considered even the shaving of the hair an unfilial act of self-mutilation (Ch’en 1973, 16; Zürcher 1959, 281). According to *Gaosengzhuan*, for instance, Huiyuan (334-416) was asked by Huan Xiang (369-404), the usurper of the Eastern Jin: “If you (Buddhists) do not dare to destroy and to do harm, why then do you cut (your hair)?” (T.50.360b; quoted from Zürcher 1959, 149).

related practices simply indicates the fact that these practices were the most popular ones then, especially among people who sought birth in the Pure Land.

In spite of the fact that women in the *ōjōden* perform the same religious practices and gain the same spiritual goals as men, several accounts in the Chinese texts reveal quite unequivocally how the role of nuns in the *samgha* was defined. They were largely seen as servants of the monks who sewed, washed, and dyed their robes. Especially in the account of Sengqing (dates unknown), “who served the assembly of monks and was born in the Pure Land” (Tsukamoto 1974, 285), it is shown that serving the monks was regarded as a salvationally effective act. In regard of a female novice of the Jishan convent in Chang’an it is told that her deceased teacher appeared to her in a dream, predicting her birth on the highest level of the lowest grade (*gebon jōshō*)<sup>37</sup> in *Sukhāvati*. When the novice, thereupon, asked why she could not be born on the highest level of the highest grade (*jōbon jōshō*)<sup>38</sup> like her teacher, so that she would soon be able to serve him again, the teacher said: “If you do the washing for the assembly of monks, recite Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the *Lotus* and the *Vajra[cchedikā]-prajñā-[pāramitā]*, keep the tenfold good<sup>39</sup> and transfer [the karmic results of these beneficial acts] upon this [goal] with a sincere heart, you will achieve it without fail” (Tsukamoto 1974, 302). Particularly praised is the subservient attitude of the nun Zunren (dates unknown; a sister of Ming’an) towards her male “colleagues”: “When she saw a monk she revered him like a Buddha and called herself ‘slave of the monks’” (Tsukamoto 1974, 283). As a general tendency, the Japanese *ōjōden* are much less concerned with the relationship between monks and nuns in terms of superiority or inferiority.

### *Secular virtues*

It is a well known historical fact that Buddhism encountered a number of difficulties when being introduced to China. In the eyes of many Chinese this religion from the barbarian regions in the west was pure superstition and, above all, antisocial because of its monastic orientation. “Celibacy was a crime against the family and, if practiced on a mass scale, could be the ruination of the state” (Reischauer 1955, 219). Men were expected to carry on the lineage of their family and to perform rites for the ancestors. Women were necessary to bear male heirs. It goes without saying that women were under these circumstances largely treated as means of family policies. They were usually married to someone they did not even know, not to speak of love. Entering a Buddhist convent was almost the only way to evade an unwanted marriage. Formally, however, neither the Buddhist *vinaya*, nor the secular conventions allowed a man or a

37. According to the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (chap. 22-30; T.12.344c-346a), there are three grades, each of which is further divided in three levels, of birth in the Pure Land, corresponding to the nine categories of Pure Land aspirants. The highest level of the lowest grade thus indicates to the 7th level of birth and the 7th category of aspirants: “Evildoers who commit various transgressions; before they die, they hear the names of Mahayana sūtras and are also told to recite the Name of Amitāyus. At their death, Amitāyus sends his transformed body and transformed bodhisattvas to escort them to the Pure Land. Seven weeks later their flowers (in which they are born; C. K.) open, and the aspirants can hear the Dharma from Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta; 10 smaller *kalpa* later they attain the First Stage of a bodhisattva.” (Inagaki 1994, 11).

38. Corresponding to the highest category of Pure Land aspirants: “Devout followers of Mahayana who awaken sincere faith and those who do meritorious deeds; at their death, Amitāyus and a host of sages appear to welcome them to the Pure Land. Having been born there, they can see the Buddha, hear the Dharma and attain higher spiritual states” (Inagaki 1994, 11).

39. *Jūzen* i. e. (1) not to kill, (2) not to steal, (3) not to commit adultery, (4) not to lie, (5) not to use immoral language, (6) not to slander, (7) not to equivocate, (8) not to covet, (9) not to give way to anger, (10) not to hold false views.

woman to enter the *samgha* without the approval of both his or her parents and the ruler (Zürcher 1959, 283). It is quite easy to imagine that this situation must have been the source of many conflicts. Thus it is not surprising that there are a number of birth accounts in which the wish of a woman to become a nun collides with the expectations of her family.

In the Chinese texts there is a certain pattern after which this conflict is usually solved. The daughter's disobedience is reinterpreted as an act of higher piety. It is the parents who profit from their daughter's becoming a nun. Sengqiong (dates unknown), for instance, was able to convince her father, who wanted her to get married, that she could benefit the soul of her deceased mother much better by becoming a nun (Tsukamoto 1974, 285). The assertion that by leading a monastic life a woman spiritually benefits not only herself but also her parents is strongly emphasized in the account of Miaoyun (dates unknown), who influenced the holy beings to release her mother, who was suffering in hell, from her pains for thirty years (Tsukamoto 1974, 281). Furthermore, in the account of Daoxiang (dates unknown) it is demonstrated even more explicitly that becoming a nun was an act of utmost piety. Daoxiang's parents had died when she was only thirteen years old. Being worried about the *post mortem* fate of her parents she vowed to save them from possible hardship in the netherworld. In a dream she heard a voice which told her that the ordination of a child released its parents from any pain for the duration of seven generations (Tsukamoto 1974, 283). Again, despite the attacks and accuses of her infidel mother, Sengche (c. 383-452) had become a nun and constantly insisted on her mother to practice the *nenbutsu*. Her mother refused and accused her of being irreverent. Only when her mother approached death, did she change her mind, and she turned towards an image of the Buddha invoking his name. Shortly before her mother died, the Bodhisattva Jizang<sup>40</sup> appeared to Sengche and told her that he had vowed to help those who demonstrated filial piety. Because of her obstinate influence, the infidel mother practiced the *nenbutsu* in the hour of her death and was thus born in the Pure Land. This was an extremely selfless act of Sengche and consequently a true cause for her own birth in *Sukhāvātī* (Tsukamoto 1974, 284). There is one case in which a daughter refrains from being ordained because of her filial piety. However, here the renunciation of becoming a nun is religiously motivated. The later nun Huimu (c. 369-441) put off her ordination because she felt obliged to chew the food for her old and toothless mother. Thus, in order not to break any regulation,<sup>41</sup> she waited to receive the precepts until her mother was dead (Tsukamoto 1974, 277).

There is a remarkable difference in the way the conflict between a daughter with religious ambitions and her parents who want her to marry is solved in Japanese *ōjōden*. In the few cases in which the problem appears the authors do not regard it necessary to comment on the young woman's decision nor to justify it by maintaining that she entered the Buddhist path not at least to benefit her parents thus demonstrating that "the choice of the monastic career was the highest manifestation of filial piety" (Tsukamoto 1979, 824). Although she knew that this would hurt the feelings of her parents the later nun Myōhō (dates unknown) escaped her marriage at the age of 20, because she wanted to take refuge in the "Three Treasures" (*SOD*; *NST*.7.678-9). A young woman from Mutsu applied a more subtle but still very effective method to avoid marriage. She

40. Jizang is commonly identified with the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha. Since this identification is historically questionable, I chose to use the Chinese name Jizang here.

41. It is not quite clear here which regulation she was afraid to break. Tsai, in her interpretation of the corresponding passage in the *BZ* version of Huimu's biography (T.50.938c), assumes that she refrained from becoming a nun because chewing her mother's food "meant that Hui-mu had to eat after noon as well as before thereby transgressing the monastic rule of not eating after mid-day" (Tsai 1994, 47).

never refused a suitor, because she had heard that Bodhisattvas obey the feelings of human beings. However, when they were sleeping with her, she did not develop a single thought of affection, but disdained what was done to her, closed her eyes and contemplated impurity. The stronger the man's desire became the more she increased this thought. This finally made all the suitors feel ashamed and they never came back to her again (*GSOD*; *NST*.7.669).

### Death and birth

As stated above, the actual climax of any *ōjōden* is the description of the protagonist's death as the moment of transition from the defiled *sahā* world to the Pure Land. This becomes particularly evident when we look at the changes of certain accounts in the older *Biqiunizhuan* when being retold as an *ōjōden*, thus transforming it from an ordinary biography of a nun into a birth account. The biographies of Daogui (c. 431-516), Daoshou (-439), Daoyuan (c. 368-438 or 439; according to *Biqiunizhuan* Daoqiong), Facheng, Fasheng (5th century), and Jinggui (dates unknown) first appear in the *Biqiunizhuan* and are adopted by one or more *ōjōden*. While *Wangsheng jingtu zhuan* and *Jingtu wangsheng zhuan* present the whole account — if necessary enriched by some details concerning the nuns' birth in the Pure Land — *Jingtu lijiao zhi* and *Zhu shangshanren yong* confine themselves to the rendering of the “essentials”, i.e. death and *ōjō*. Zhipan does not even try to follow the basic stylistic rules of biographical writing. He does not care about the secular name of the nuns and concentrates completely on the circumstances of their deaths, the auspicious signs indicating their successful birth and the practice which made it possible.

None of the protagonists suffers from mental distress and agony when her life ends. Their consciousnesses are clear, their minds settled, their bearings dignified. They know that they are about to die and make appropriate preparations. In many cases the protagonists take a bath, put on clean clothes, turn to the west sitting upright, press the palms of their hands together — sometimes they form a mystic gesture or *mudrā* instead<sup>42</sup> — and invoke the name of Amida, usually accompanied by relatives, intimates, friends, or neighbors. In the Chinese texts there are only a few cases in which more specific preparations are described. In his *Wangshengren xiangmao zhang*, Jiakai tells of a laywoman who invites a number of monks to her dying room and orders five soft whitish pieces of textile to be hung up above the monk's heads as a place for the holy assembly from the Pure Land to sit upon (T.47.99c). In Zhipan's *Jingtu lijiao zhi* there is a laywoman who, in the hour of her death, holds a banner of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin; jap. Kan'on) in her hand (*JZ-Z*.16.200a). In the Japanese *ōjōden* there are several descriptions of a dying person grasping a five-colored thread which is attached to the hand of an image of Amida placed in the west. In the Chinese texts it is only the nun Sengche who follows this method (Tsukamoto 1974, 284).<sup>43</sup> A

42. For example: The nun Fazhi formed the *dhyāna-mudrā* in the hour of death (*WJZ*. Tsukamoto 1974, 284), a laywoman the [*A*]mita-*mudrā* (*XJWZ*; *JZ-Z*.16.126b, see also *JLZ*; *JZ-Z*.16.199a), and two other laywomen some unidentified *mudrā* (*JLZ*; *JZ-Z*.16.199b.202b).

43. This kind of death bed rite was imported from China and must have been quite popular in Heian and Kamakura Japan since it is not only mentioned in the *ōjōden* (e.g. *SOD*; *NST*.7.346, *SOK*; *NST*.7.679a and *NOD*; *NST*.7.706b) but also in many other texts like *Heike monogatari* and even in doctrinal works like *Ōjōyōshū*. Genshin quotes from Daoxuan's imaginary description of an infirmary in India in his *Commentary on the Four-part Vinaya* (*Sifenlu shanfan buque xingshi chao* T.40.144a): “In the north-western corner of the Jeta-grove monastery, an infirmary named ‘Impermanence Hall’ was built: placed in it was a standing Buddha-image with his gilded face turned towards the west. His right hand was raised and over his left hand was draped a five-coloured banner, which reached the

rather elaborate ritual was performed for an old nun from Inugami district, in Ōmi province (modern Shiga prefecture). After she had predicted the exact date of her death, a considerable number of monks gathered around her dying bed, recited hymns and a special kind of melodic *nenbutsu* (*gassetsu*).<sup>44</sup> Musicians played and when the nun heard the music from the Pure Land she urged them to imitate this supra-mundane sound (*HSOD*; *NST*.7.691a).

### *Proofs of birth in the Pure Land*

Since the ultimate goal of every birth account is the demonstration of a person's attaining *ōjō*, it goes without saying that much stress is laid on phenomena which serve as evidence of the achievement of *ōjō*. Generally speaking there are two types of evidence: (1) dreams and visions, (2) miracles and apparitions. Since miracles and strange occurrences almost solely serve as proofs of the attainment of *ōjō*, "classical" miracles like magical healing, the miraculous production of food, or the rising of a dead person, which are to be found in many hagiographic texts from various religious contexts, are almost completely lacking in the *ōjōden*.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Dreams and visions*

In many cases — both in Chinese and in Japanese birth accounts — the only evidence of the protagonist's birth in the Pure Land is a dream (often in times of illness) in which a woman is informed about her forthcoming *ōjō*, including the exact date of this event. The fact that she actually dies at the predicted date is evaluated as a sufficient proof. Dreams are scarcely distinguished from visions someone has while being awake. It often remains unclear if the information from the other world was gained while being awake or while being asleep. In any case, the reliability of dreams and visions was almost undisputed. Only in very few cases a person wonders if his or her visionary experience might perhaps have been a delusion caused by demons, as we have seen in the case of Tameyasu. The nun Sengqing, for example, told her intimate Sengqiong that she had a vision of the two attendant Bodhisattvas of Amida, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, who foretold her death after seven days: "If I shall die in seven days at the hour of the monkey, I will surely be born [in the Pure Land]. If I do not die then, these were the deceiving words of a devil" (Tsukamoto 1974, 285). It comes as no surprise that everything happened as predicted by the Bodhisattvas. Likewise the nun Shanhui remained silent about the prediction of her birth on the middle level of the upper grade (*jōbon chūshō*), which she had received from the "Three Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa",<sup>46</sup> because she believed that this vision was a delusion (Tsukamoto 1974, 281).

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floor. The sick man was laid behind the statue, and was given the other end of the banner, which he held tight while aspiring to be born in the Buddha's land. The nursing devotees burnt incense and scattered flowers to adorn the sick man." (T.84.69a; quoted from Inagaki 1994, 46).

44. Literally meaning "combining six" (*satsu* is the transliteration of the Sanskrit word for the number six, *ṣaṣ*), the term *gassatsu* or *kassatsu* refers to a melodic set of six invocations of Amida's name. This practice was probably introduced to Japan by Ennin (794-864) (*Jōdōshu daijiten* 221).

45. Although any engagement of monks and nuns in magical practices was strictly prohibited in China as well as in Japan (§ 2 of the *sōniryō*), the *Gaosengzhuan* and other contemporary texts suggest that such practices were quite widespread in China (Ch'en 1973, 101-2/271 ff).

46. This refers to the three predecessors of Śākyamuni in this present world-period. i.e. Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, Kāśyapa.

In several cases a relative or intimate sees the deceased person in a dream appearing as a Bodhisattva, sitting in a lotus blossom, riding on top of a cloud, etc., sometimes directly addressing the dreamer.

An interesting kind of dream are the travels of the dreamer's "soul" to another place. *Wangsheng jingtuzhuan*, for example, tells the story of a "heretic" (*jaken*) from Qinghe who revered the gods and abused the *nenbutsu*. After she had heard Meditation Master Daochuo propagate the *nenbutsu*, it frequently happened, that she unwillingly recalled the invocation of the Buddha's name, and she regarded this as a bad omen. Once when she was seriously sick, she lost her consciousness and dreamed that she was in the palace of the king of the underworld. When the king asked her about her good deeds she remembered that she had once heard the name of Amida. The king thereupon said that this was a great merit and a real cause for her birth in the Pure Land as the final deliverance from any kind of evil existence. After three days she awoke, thinking that only a few hours had past. She was thus converted to faith in the Buddha, practiced the *nenbutsu* and was finally born in the Pure Land (Tsukamoto 1974, 299).

In another account the wife of a brahman in old India persuades her infidel husband to say the name of Amida at least once a day, while closing the gate at dusk in the evening. Unless he did so she would refuse to obey him. Later the brahman fell ill and died but returned to life after five days. He reported that he had been in hell where *rākṣasas* with iron staffs drove the sinners into a boiler. The brahman unconsciously called out the name of Amida. All of a sudden the hell was transformed into a clear pond full of lotus blossoms and the sinners were all born in the Pure Land (*WJZ*; Tsukamoto 1974, 307).<sup>47</sup> For our study it is also interesting to note here that the wife's disobedience is clearly justified as a means to save her husband, just as the above mentioned daughter's disobedience to her parents was.

A very specific and extremely frequent kind of vision is the dying protagonist's perception of Amida and his holy assembly coming from the West to welcome her and take her to the Pure Land (*raikō* or *raigō*). The idea of the appearance of the inhabitants of *Sukhāvātī* in the hour of a person's death is based on the 19th vow of Dharmākara and inspired many painters to produce so-called *raigōe* ("pictures of the Buddha coming to welcome [a dying person]").<sup>48</sup> It runs:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the ten directions, who awaken aspiration for Enlightenment, do various meritorious deeds and sincerely desire to be born in my land, should not, at their death, see me appear before them surrounded by a multitude of sages, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment (T.12.268a-b, quoted from Inagaki 1994, 243-4).

In a few cases it is not only the dying person who sees the envoy from the West but also the nursing attendants (e.g. *JLZ*; *JZ-Z.201b*).

The cases in which the dying persons see lotus blossoms rain down on them (*NOD*; *NST.7.706a/707a*) seem to be inspired by the accounts of Śākyamuni's entering *parinirvāṇa* like in the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa-sūtra*, where it says that in the moment of the Buddha's death all the *devas* and *nāgas* who filled the sky scattered flowers like rain (T.1.188c).

### *Miracles and apparitions*

In contrast to dreams and visions, miracles and apparitions are perceivable not only by one person but in principle by everybody. People of the historical contexts in

47. For travels to another world see also *JLZ* (*JZ-Z.296-7*) and *SOD* (*NST.7.349*).

48. See Okazaki (1977, 95ff).

question took the existence of intersubjectively perceptible manifestations of another sphere for granted. However, such strange occurrences were not conceived of as something natural like the setting of the sun and certain prerequisites for the occurrence of miracles as well as for their perception were required. Generally speaking someone who had a strong contact with the other world sphere — in this case the Pure Land — was needed to enable the breakthrough of this transcendent sphere into our world. But even when this happened people had to be sensitive to perceive the manifestations of the sacred. Accordingly, in some of the birth accounts, it is reported that only a limited number among the spectators were able to see the auspicious signs. When a *śrāmaṇerī* of the Jishan convent in Chang'an died only two or three among the bystanders saw the strange light that illuminated the convent (Tsukamoto 1974, 302). At the time of the death of an old nun at the foot of Mount Hira “eight persons from the neighborhood perceived some fragrance, six people saw light and a cloud” (*SOK*; *NST.7.679b*). In the *Shūi ōjōden* the reason for the inability of some people to perceive the miraculous signs is given. A dying nun said to the bystanders at her bedside:

“In the Northwest there are music and fragrance. In this world there is nothing that compares to this sound and fragrance. Do you hear this sound, do you perceive this scent?” The bystanders replied: “We do not hear [the music] and we do not perceive [the scent].” Again she spoke: “The music gradually comes closer and the fragrance becomes fuller. Because your sinful karma is heavy, you can neither hear [the music] nor perceive [the scent]” (*NST.7.348*).

As is the case with dreams and visions, strange apparitions sometimes cause doubts as to whether they could be delusions by evil spirits. In *Wangsheng jingtuzhuan* it is reported that, when a certain laywoman was practicing the *nenbutsu*, with every breath “transformation Buddhas” (*kebutsu*) went in and out of her mouth. A monk witnessed this strange apparition and she told him that this had happened to her regularly for the last one or two years. Because she was afraid that this might be a delusion she had never told anybody about it. One of the transformation Buddhas had predicted her death at noon of the 15th day of the 3rd month in the next year. On the foretold day the monk set out for the woman's house and he saw shining aura at both sides of the way. However, he could not manage to arrive in time. The locals informed him that the woman had died exactly at mid-day (Tsukamoto 1974, 300).

In the Chinese *ōjōden* the most frequent miracle is the appearance of a strange, often golden light from the west, out of a cloud or from the forehead of a statue of the Buddha which shines upon the body of the dying person, illumines her room or the whole convent. The prominence of such wonders comes without surprise, since Amida is the “Buddha of Immeasurable Light” (skt. Amitābha; jap. Muryōkōbustu).<sup>49</sup> In Japanese *ōjōden* the occurrence of supra-mundane music plays an equally important role. Next to light and music come fragrance and the appearance of purple or dark clouds above the room in which the protagonist is dying.

As light symbolizes Amida, the lotus symbolizes his Buddha sphere. Thus, both *Xinxiu wangsheng zhuan* (*JZ-Z.16.126b*) and *Jingtu lijiao zhi* (*JZ-Z.16.199a/199b*) report that lotus blossoms grow out of the ashes of the deceased, and, according to *Wangsheng jingtu zhuan* (Tsukamoto 1974, 281), in front of Shanhui's training hall. Yasutane renders the story of a dying woman who held a lotus stem in her hand, which, as she told, she had received from a messenger of the Pure Land (*NST.7.40-1*).

49. It should be noted, however that the appearance of light as an auspicious sign can also be found in other cultural and religious contexts, such as Christianity (see Blank 1962).

In some birth accounts it is maintained that the corps of the person who has been born in the Pure Land remains incorrupt, turns gold, or the face maintains a fresh complexion. In one instance the corpse miraculously disappears (Tsukamoto 1974, 287), in another it moves strangely as if it was trying to walk to the west (*GSOD*; *NST.7.669b*). Cases in which a number of miracles appear in combination are quite frequent. Sometimes the author confines himself to the statement that, as in the case of Ganshō, “there was not enough time to write down every strange appearance (*isō*) when her life ended”, or that the many lucky omens at her death did not leave room for any doubt that she had achieved birth in the Pure Land (*ZHOD*; *NST.7.252*, see also *GSOD*; *NST.7.661a*).

### The Misinterpretation of *Ōjōden* in Japanese Sectarian Scholarship

Being largely written from a non-sectarian and non-doctrinal standpoint, the collections of birth accounts on which this study is based can be used as historical source materials of high value. In order to appropriately evaluate these hagiographic texts, however, we must read between the lines. If we take them as historical documents which provide information about the actual dates and deeds of a historical person, the result of our research is certainly disappointing. The crucial point is not if a certain nun really had a gentle and upright character and passionately practiced the *nenbutsu*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, etc., but the fact that this was expected as an ideal conduct from people who sought birth in the Pure Land. In terms of the gender problem it is the same. It does not matter if a young woman’s decision to enter a convent despite of her parents’ will was actually caused by her wish to benefit her parents spiritually, thus demonstrating utmost filial piety. The point to note here is that there existed a discourse about the contradiction of filial piety and religious ambitions. The texts do in fact reflect many discourses on both a religious and a social level, and the main problem is how to interpret these reflections. As indicated in the introduction it is my intention to demonstrate the methodological necessity of being aware of the specific literary character of the *ōjōden* as hagiographic documents by having a critical look at two works of a Japanese expert in the field of *ōjōden* and especially birth accounts of women which represent the Japanese standard interpretation. Furthermore, it shall be shown how sectarian presuppositions, the attachment to traditional hermeneutical paradigms, and a complete neglect of the methodological demands of modern scholarship lead to serious misunderstandings.

Kasahara Kazuo, a renowned Japanese scholar, dealt with the birth of women in the Pure Land in two books, confining himself to Japanese Buddhism. In 1975 he published his *Nyonin ōjō shisō no keifu* (Genealogy of the idea of women’s birth [in the Pure Land]) followed by a pocket book entitled simply *Nyonin ōjō* (Women’s birth [in the Pure Land]) in 1983. It may be said that Kasahara’s views represent the Japanese standard interpretation of “women’s birth accounts”. Roughly speaking the general thesis of his first book states that, unlike the *Nihon ryōiki* and the *Hokkekyō genki*, which focused on this worldly benefits, the *ōjōden* of the Heian period (794-1185) are concerned with spiritual fruits gained in the next world. In none of the texts are women excluded from religious achievements, thus it may be said that there is no discrimination in that genre whatsoever. In terms of spiritual achievements women are treated just like men. Women who attained *ōjō* had to fulfill two sorts of prerequisites: (1) religious prerequisites (*shūkyōteki jōken*), i.e. religious practices, (2) human prerequisites (*ningenteki jōken*), such as a gentle and compassionate character.



According to Kasahara, the remarkable fact that the genre of *ōjōden* — containing a number of accounts of women who attained birth (*nyonin ōjōden*) — was flourishing in the Heian period while theoretical and doctrinal texts concerning the possibility of and prerequisites for women's birth in the Pure Land (*nyonin ōjōron*) were totally lacking, results from the isolation of monks from women. The major centers of Buddhist learning were confined to monks, and women were not allowed to enter, for example, Mount Hiei and Mount Kōya. Because they had no contact with women at all, the thinkers of Japanese Buddhism in the Heian period simply did not care about their salvation. It was the Kamakura pioneers, such as Hōnen and Shinran (1173-1262), being directly confronted with women in their missionary work, who replaced the “accounts of women who attained *ōjō*” (*nyonin ōjōden*) by “doctrinal discourse on women's *ōjō*” (*nyonin ōjōron*). Being concerned with the demonstration that “even” (Hōnen) or “first of all” (Shinran)<sup>50</sup> evil persons do have the right disposition to be saved by Amida (*akunin shōki*), they also showed why and how women could be born in *Sukhāvātī* instead of just asserting that there had been good and pious women who attained birth. For Kasahara this is clearly a step forward since now both the religious and the human prerequisites, demanded in the *ōjōden*, became unnecessary. In my eyes, however, Kasahara's thesis is untenable for several reasons.

First of all, it is not true that there was no theoretical discussion about women's *ōjō* before the Kamakura period (1185-1382). In his *Nihon chūsei no shakai to bukkyō* (Society and Buddhism in Medieval Japan), the historian Taira Masayuki counters Kasahara's thesis by listing a number of Heian works which dealt with the problem of how women, despite their obstacles, are able to attain birth (1992, 399).<sup>51</sup> But even if we concede that outstanding Pure Land thinkers of the Heian period such as Genshin and Yōkan (1033-1111) did not address women explicitly, this does not necessarily mean that they simply ignored them. Every *sūtra* which Pure Land faith is based upon, is directed towards human beings in general, regardless of their sex. Even more, the addressee of the Buddha's sermon about *Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* is a woman, queen Vaidehī, who, together with her 500 female attendants, finally gains birth in *Sukhāvātī*. Why then should the monks have bothered about the question if and how women could be born? They most probably took it for granted that they could be just like men, even if they first had to be transformed into men. This fact is clearly reflected in the *ōjōden*. Furthermore, Kasahara's assertion that monks were completely isolated from women and thus unaware of their needs, is historically questionable (Taira 1992, 398). In the *ōjōden* we find many cases in which monks are present at a nun's or laywoman's death, and nuns regularly took part in religious events conducted by monks. Moreover, monks were ordinary human beings who had mothers and often also sisters. Accordingly some women in the *ōjōden* were even related to outstanding monks such as the two vicar generals (*sōzu*) Kanchū and Genshin. In the case of Kanchū's sister, we know that this monk, indeed, did care for the salvation of his sister, and it is perhaps safe to assume that Kanchū's behaviour was by no means exceptional. Furthermore, Genshin's three sisters all became nuns, as well as their mother (Rhodes 1996b, 33), and it is not very likely that Genshin did not bother about their spiritual well-being.

50. Kasahara adheres to the traditional view that the theory of the evil having the better conditions for being saved by Amida was developed by Shinran. However, Kajimura Noboru (1993) has produced strong evidence that it was actually Hōnen who is to be credited for this revolutionary idea. See also Kleine 1996, 130ff.

51. Taira mentions Chikō's (709-770~80?) *Shijūhachigan shaku*, Ryōgen's (912-985) *Kubon ōjō gi*, Jōshō's (-1003) *Amida nyorai Shijūhachigan shaku*, Kōnen's (1121-1203) *Gojūkanshō*, *Anyōshō* (author unknown), and *Jōdo gonshoku shō*.

Further one can not assume that the birth of women should have been taken as a matter of course in the genre of *ōjōden* while it was doubted on the doctrinal level. Although most of the Japanese authors were laymen, two of them were ordained and Yasutane had close contact to the Buddhist priesthood that he actually entered shortly after he had finished *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it can be suggested that at least some of the authors were well aware of the doctrinal discourse about the birth of women, which, as Taira (1992, 399) shows, existed in the Heian period. The same is true for Tang China where both the equivalents of *nyonin ōjōden* and *nyonin ōjōron* existed at the same time.

For example, in his *Exposition on the Merit of the Samādhi of Meditation on the Ocean-Like Figure of Amida Buddha*, Shandao argues:

The implication is that, due to Amida's Original Vow-Power, those women who call the Buddha's Name will, at their death, be transformed into men; Amida will take their hands and Bodhisattvas will hold their bodies to have them sit on the jeweled flower-pedestals.

Then, following the Buddha, they will be born in his Land, join the Buddha's great assembly and realize non-origination.<sup>53</sup> Again, unless they rely on Amida's Name and Vow-Power, women will not be able to leave their bodies as women even after a thousand or ten thousand kalpas or a period of kalpas as innumerable as the sandgrains of the River Ganges. If a monk or a layman says that women will not be able to be born in the Pure Land, this person is telling a lie. You should not believe him.<sup>54</sup>

In another example, the author of the *Ten Doubts Regarding the Pure Land*<sup>55</sup> takes a similar position:

As for "women, those with defective sense organs, and persons of the two yānas are not born therein" — this merely argues that among those who have been born in that land there are not any women nor any who are deaf and dumb; it does not mean that in this world women and those with defective sense organs will not obtain rebirth in the Pure Land. Anyone who speaks in this way is totally ignorant, and understands nothing of the meaning of the scripture. When Lady Vaidehī asked to be born in the Pure Land, she and five hundred of her serving maids were all predicted to be born therein. However, women, as well as the blind, the deaf and the dumb of this world, if they but meditate on the Buddha O-mi-t'o (i.e. Amida; C. K.), will all be born in that Land, and from that time on they shall never again receive the body of a woman, nor shall they receive the body of one with defective organs.<sup>56</sup>

This way of arguing for the ability of women to be born in the Pure Land, while still maintaining their inferiority, is clearly reflected in several Chinese birth accounts as we have seen above. The discussion of women's birth was led on the same level in Heian Japan, and it is therefore even more remarkable that Japanese *ōjōden* do not show the same misogynic attitude as some of the Chinese do.

52. Yasutane was ordained in 985 (Inoue 1974, 713). According to a notice following the account of Gyōgi (668-749) in *NOG*, the text had been completed before Yasutane entered priesthood, but he — now under the priestly name Jakushin — added the accounts of Shōtoku Taishi (574-622) and Gyōgi thereafter (*NST*.7.19).

53. Insight in the non-production of all *dharma*s due to their voidness.

54. *Guannian Amituofo xianghai sanmei gongde famen* (T.47.27b, quoted from Inagaki 1984, 34).

55. *Jingtu shiyi lun*. This text was traditionally attributed to Zhiyi. However, since the Kamakura period Zhiyi's authorship has been doubted and it is assumed that the actual author might have been Shandao's disciple Huaigan (7th century). See Pruden 1973.

56. T.47.80b, quoted from Pruden 1973, 153.

Furthermore, Kasahara's suggestion that Hōnen particularly committed himself to the doctrinal aspects of women's *ōjō* is as incorrect as is his assertion that Hōnen was the first one to do so. As a matter of fact, there is only one writing attributed to him which concretely discusses that issue.<sup>57</sup> Besides that, this text, the so-called *Interpretation of the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life (Muryōjukyō shaku)*, is generally believed to reflect quite an early stage of Hōnen's Pure Land thought, and he did not occupy himself with that issue again in later writings. Moreover, I think it is safe to assume that in *Muryōjukyō shaku*, as well as later in the writings of Nichiren, for instance — the issue of women's salvation was mainly used as an apologetic means to demonstrate the superiority of the respective teaching and practice. In a rather discriminatory way women were treated by Hōnen and other Kamakura leaders, except Dōgen (1200-1253),<sup>58</sup> as a social group which was, due to their inferiority, especially dependent on an extremely easy way of salvation and particular assurance of the possibility to get saved. Accordingly, Hōnen states:

[Question] "The Vow of Birth through the *Nenbutsu* (i.e. the 18th vow) does not distinguish between men and women, and again both the Vow of [Amida's] Welcoming [a dying person] (i.e. the 19th vow) and the Vow of Connecting Thoughts [with the Pure Land] (i.e. the 20th vow) accord to both men and women. Now what is the meaning of [Amida's] establishing this [35th] vow [especially for women]?"... [Answer] "Because the karmic obstacles of women are heavy, they might doubt [their ability to gain *ōjō*]. Therefore [Dharmākara] established a vow especially for the birth of women." (T.83.108b)

Thus, by pointing out that Dharmākara proclaimed his 35th vow because women, who are by their very nature burdened with bad karma, needed further assurance of their salvation, he did not overcome the doctrinal discrimination of women and did not contribute to their religious reevaluation. Here, Hōnen evidently did not go beyond the theory of women being transformed into men before birth if they practice the *nenbutsu*, as stressed by Heian orthodoxy as well as by Shandao and the author of the *Ten Doubts*. Furthermore, in the same text, he says:

The Great Master [Dengyō] (Saichō; 767-822) himself drew a boundary around the valley, and the impure bodies of women gain no entrance to the peak [of Mount Hiei]. The Peak of the One Vehicle is high, but the Five Obstacles are not taken away from them. Saichō's Valley of the One Taste is deep, but it has no connection to the Three Obediences. Although women hear about the holy image of the Medicine King Bhaiṣajyaguru they cannot see it with their eyes.

Again, Mount Kōya is the peak of the holy district of the Great Master Kōbō (i.e. Kūkai; 774-835). It is a place where the excellent *mantra* Vehicle prospers. The Moon Disk of the Three Mysteries shines in all directions but it does not enlighten the darkness of women's inability. Although the Wisdom Water of the Five Vases flows without discrimination, it does not shower upon the impure nature of women. (T.83.109a)

Here, instead of criticizing the ascription of the Five Obstacles or the Three Obediences to women, Hōnen just expresses his regrets about the seemingly undeniable fact that these poor impure beings are burdened with it. Only by completely adopting

57. Interestingly enough, Kasahara (1983, 58-71) quotes several passages from Hōnen's writings although none of these passages — except those from *Muryōjukyō shaku* — concretely deal with the question of how women can be born in the Pure Land. In his *Letter in Response to the Wife of Tarō Sanehide of Ōgo*, not even the character for woman, nun, female, etc., can be found.

58. In the *Raihai tokuzui* chapter of *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen criticizes the exclusion of women from certain Buddhist locations as ridiculous and denotes that tradition as a false custom.

the apologetic rhetoric of the *Muryōjūkyō shaku*, can we assert that Hōnen really did something in favor of female believers, as Kasahara does. Although he admits that the *ōjōden* were non-discriminatory towards women, he maintains that the religious and human prerequisites for birth in the Pure Land were too hard for the average woman to fulfill. Therefore, Hōnen's theory of "the right disposition of the evil ones" (*akunin shōki*) — note the shift from *nyonin ōjō* to *akunin shōki* — was necessary to assure women of their possibility to attain *ōjō*. By identifying women with evil sinners, he unwillingly reveals a truly misogynic attitude. As becomes clear by reading the *ōjōden*, women in the Heian period were not thought to be particularly evil and thus in need of a special method leading to deliverance.

Furthermore, I cannot see why the prerequisites for women's *ōjō* were especially hard, and they were certainly not harder than those for men. Only if we regard women's abilities as inferior, we may agree with Kasahara's thesis that the *akunin shōki setsu* was especially important for women. By comparing a story about four women who supposedly attained *ōjō* in *Heike monogatari* to some *ōjōden*, Kasahara tries to show in his second book on *nyonin ōjō* that, under the influence of Hōnen's teaching, it had become much easier to attain birth. For the sake of his argument he distorts the facts, when he maintains that much less was demanded from the women in *Heike monogatari* than from those in the *ōjōden*, because "the only prerequisite for [their] birth was, that they left the secular world and spent their days by silently practicing the *nenbutsu zanmai*<sup>59</sup> in a remote mountain area" (1983, 25-26). This alone is indeed much more than some of the protagonists of the *ōjōden* did for their salvation. Above that, when read thoroughly there were many more "prerequisites" for the birth of the four women given in the text. The story roughly goes as follows.

The dancer (*shirabyōshi*) Giō gains the particular favor of Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181) who has her and her sister Ginyo live in his residence and builds a fine house for her mother Toji whom he also supports financially. When another young and talented entertainer named Hotoke visits the house of Kiyomori to perform her dance before the "greatest man of the day", she is harshly dismissed by him. Giō, feeling sorry for the young girl, persuades her patron to receive her. Kiyomori is struck by Hotoke's beauty and the skill of her performance and thus wants her to stay in his house. Hotoke, however, first refuses, thinking that this would embarrass Giō. Thereupon, Kiyomori sends Giō away and stops any support for the whole family. In the following year Kiyomori calls for Giō to amuse the seemingly bored Hotoke. This was too much for her to bear, and as a result of further distress caused by the tactless behavior of her former patron, Giō decides to commit suicide. Her sister Ginyo, being extremely loyal to her, promises to follow and so does her mother. However, Toji objects that "it must be accounted one of the Five Deadly Sins<sup>60</sup> to make a parent drown before her time". Thus, in order to avoid this grave offence, Giō gives up the idea of suicide and becomes a nun instead, together with her mother and sister. The three women build a hermitage deep in the Saga mountains and earnestly practice the *nenbutsu*. One night they hear someone knocking at the door. Fearing that this was a malevolent spirit, they go on with their *nenbutsu* invocations, because they are convinced that "the heavenly host comes to meet believers, led by the sound of their voices (McCullough 1988, 36)". However, the

59. This is another inaccuracy by Kasahara, since the technical term "*nenbutsu zanmai*" is nowhere to be found in the text. What the three women did is simply called *nenbutsu* or more specifically "*ikkō senju ni nenbutsu shite...*" (NKBT.32.104).

60. *Gogyakuzai*, skt. *pañcāvīci-karmāni*. These are: (1) killing one's father, (2) killing one's mother, (3) killing an *arhat*, (4) injuring a Buddha, (5) causing disunity in the *saṃgha*. Toji obviously fears that, although unwillingly, causing one's mother to commit suicide is equivalent to killing one's mother. According to the 18th vow of Dharmākara only those who commit the Five Cardinal Sins and those who slander the Dharma are excluded from birth in the Pure Land.

“malevolent spirit” turns out to be Hotoke who has fled from Kiyomori to share the secluded life of the three other women. Resulting from this, Giō is relieved from her fear that she might be unable to be born in the Pure Land, because of her feelings of jealousy of Hotoke. “Secluded in a single dwelling, the four women offered flowers and incense before the sacred images morning and evening; and their prayers never flagged. I have heard that all of the four nuns achieved their goal of rebirth in the Pure Land... (McCullough 1988, 37)” (*NKBT.32.95-107*).

Contrary to Kasahara’s assertion, each of the women in this story is described as having a good character in one way or another. They all become nuns, retire from the world, practice the *nenbutsu* single-mindedly, earnestly long for the Pure Land, and offer flowers and incense before the sacred images. Not only is the necessity of religious practice stressed, it is also indicated that birth in the Pure Land requires the incessant invocation of Amida’s name in the hour of one’s death. Not only do the Five Deadly Sins obstruct *ōjō* but also the feeling of jealousy. Thus we do have a set of human and religious prerequisites for birth in *Heike monogatari* which are not necessarily found in the *ōjōden*, which, on the contrary, contain stories in which neither the *nenbutsu* nor any moral quality are mentioned. To illustrate this, it shall suffice to render the following account of the *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*.

A woman from Sakata district in Ōmi province, being an offspring of the Okinaga clan, picked a lotus blossom every year in the bay of Tsukuma and offered it to Amida. She earnestly longed for *Sukhāvātī*. Thus the years past by, and when her life ended, a purple cloud surrounded her. (*NST.7.40*)

Even if Kasahara’s claim that the *ōjōden* demanded more from their protagonists than *Heike monogatari* was correct, it is methodologically incorrect to compare the respective accounts with those of *Heike monogatari* anyhow. The latter work belongs to the so-called *gunki* genre and is as such non-hagiographic. The rather stereotyped characterization of women in the *ōjōden* as being upright, gentle, compassionate, etc., is merely a typical feature of any hagiographic text, the protagonists of which were meant to be “both subjects for imitation and objects of veneration”, as we have seen above. While the rather dramatically told account of Giō and the others in *Heike monogatari* were told because “theirs were touching histories”, the authors of the *ōjōden* simply did not care for any detailed and differentiated description of their protagonists’ characters, thus confining themselves to the monotonous repetition of phrases like “her character was gentle and upright”.

Unfortunately Kasahara is only one example of many Japanese Buddhologists, who are unable or unwilling to proceed beyond the traditional sectarian views of Buddhist history in Japan and who largely neglect any basic methodological considerations. Thus, the immense knowledge of Japanese scholarship all too often fails to produce new and relevant results beyond the constant repetition of the interpretative patterns, provided by the traditions of their respective denominations.

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Birth accounts are hagiographic texts which were written to demonstrate the accessibility of birth in Amida’s Pure Land, thus strengthening peoples faith, and to encourage people to perform practices which lead to that spiritual goal. The protagonists of these texts, covering a broad range of living beings with different abilities, are both “subjects for imitation and objects of veneration”. This being the case, they may be denoted as saints in a very broad sense. As such they are not portrayed as historical

individuals but as highly standardized models. Thus, the *ōjōden* give valuable information about the social and ideological background of their production rather than about the actual dates and deeds of actual personalities.

Both the formal organization of the collections and the contents of many birth accounts claim women's inferiority to men. However, their ability to achieve the same spiritual goals as men is nowhere questioned. They conducted the same practices, had the same qualities, and gained birth under the same auspicious signs as their male counterparts. Therefore it may be said that the discourse among Chinese and Japanese clerics about the question whether or under which circumstances women could be born in the Pure Land or not, did not contribute to any improvement of their position in the *samgha* or in society. On the contrary, by concluding that women could achieve *ōjō* despite their alleged spiritual inferiority and impurity, because it was for the most wicked and inferior people that Amida proclaimed his merciful vows, women as a whole were subsumed under the category of evil sinners completely dependent on Amida's grace. As non-sectarian edificatory texts the *ōjōden* stress that a firm belief and good conduct in general, both secular and religious, lead to birth in the Pure Land. Buddhist thinkers such as Hōnen, in their doctrinal and apologetic writings, on the other hand, claim that only the central practice of their respective sect assures salvation, thus demonstrating the superiority of their teachings. Accordingly, any comparison of texts regarding a certain religious problem requires the awareness of the genres these texts belong to, since every genre follows its own structural rules and has its own purpose.

### Abbreviations

- BZ* = *Biqiunizhuan*  
*GSOD* = *Goshūi ōjōden*  
*GZ* = *Gaosengzhuan*  
*HLWZ* = *Hanjia leiju wangsheng zhuan*  
*HSOD* = *Honchō shinshū ōjōden*  
*JLZ* = *Jingtu lijiao zhi*  
*JWZ* = *Jingtu wangsheng zhuan*  
*JZ-Z* = *Jōdoshū zensho, zoku*  
*NKBT* = *Nihon koten bungaku taikai*  
*NOD* = *Nenbutsu ōjōden*  
*NOG* = *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*  
*NST* = *Nihon shisō taikai*  
*SOD* = *Shūi ōjōden*  
*SOK* = *Sange ōjōki*  
*T* = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*  
*WJZ* = *Wangsheng jingtuzhuan*  
*WXJRZ* = *Wangsheng xifang jingtu ruiying zhuan*  
*WXZ* = *Wangshengren xiangmao zhang*  
*XGWJB* = *Xinbian gujin wangsheng jingtu baozhu ji*  
*XJWZ* = *Xinxiu jingtu wangsheng zhuan*  
*ZHOD* = *Zoku honchō ōjōden*  
*ZSY* = *Zhu shangshanren yong*

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### Glossary

- akunin shōki 惡人正機  
Akunin-shōki-setsu 惡人正機説  
Amida nyorai shijūhachigan shaku 阿彌陀如来四十八願釋  
Amida'in 彌陀印  
Amida 阿彌陀  
Anren 安忍  
An'yōshō 安養鈔  
Aomori 青森  
azuki nenbutsu 小豆念佛  
Baochang 寶唱

bikuni 比丘尼  
 Biquinizhuan 比丘尼傳  
 Bingzhou 并州  
 Bonten'ō 梵天王  
 bōshin 亡身  
 Bukkyōshi no naka no nyonin 佛教史の中の女人  
 Butsu 佛  
 Chan sect 禪宗  
 Chang'an 長安  
 Chikō 智光  
 Chingen 鎮源  
 Dainihonkoku hokkekyō genki 大日本國法華經驗記  
 dankon 男根  
 Daochuo 道綽  
 Daogui 道貴  
 Daoqiong 道瓊  
 Daoshi 道世  
 Daoshou 道壽  
 Daoxiang 道香  
 Daoxuan 道宣  
 Daoyan 道衍  
 Dōgen 道元  
 Endō Yoshimoto 遠藤嘉基  
 Ennin 圓仁  
 Facheng 法盛  
 Fasheng 法勝  
 fashi 法師  
 Fayuan zhulin 法苑珠林  
 Fazang 法藏  
 Fazhi 法智  
 Fazhu 法諸  
 Feizhuo 非濁  
 Fozu tongji 佛祖統紀  
 Fujiwara no Munetomo 藤原宗友  
 Fujiwara Shigekane 藤原重兼  
 Gansei 願西  
 Ganshō 願証  
 Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳  
 gassetsu 合殺  
 gebon jōshō 下品上生  
 Genshin 源信  
 Ginyo 祇女  
 Giō 祇王  
 Gogyakuzai 五逆罪  
 Gojūkanshō 五十卷鈔  
 gokuraku jōdo 極樂淨土  
 Gongdao 空道  
 goshō 五障  
 Goshūi ōjōden 後拾遺往生傳  
 Guannian Amitufo xianghai sanmei gongde famen  
 觀念阿彌陀佛相海三昧功德法門  
 Guanyin (Jap. Kan'on) 觀音

gunki 軍記  
 Gyōgi 行基  
 Gyōsen 行仙  
 Haedong kosūng chōn 海東高僧傳  
 Hagiwara Tatsuo 萩原龍夫  
 Hanjia leiju wangsheng zhuan 漢家類聚往生傳  
 Heike monogatari 平家物語.  
 Hira 比良  
 Hokke-genki 法華驗記  
 Honchō shinshū ōjōden 本朝新修往生傳  
 Hōnen 法然  
 Huaigan 懷感  
 Huan Xuang 桓玄  
 Huijiao 慧皎  
 Huimu 惠木  
 Huiyuan 慧遠  
 hyakumanben nenbutsu 百萬遍念佛  
 ikkō nenbutsu 一向念佛  
 ikkō shōmyō 一向稱名  
 ima wa mukashi 今昔  
 Inoue Mitsusada 井上光貞  
 Inugami 犬上  
 ishin 遺身  
 isō 異相  
 jaken 邪見  
 Jakushin 寂心  
 Jiakai 迦才  
 jido 自度  
 Jiezhū 戒珠  
 Jingui 淨珪  
 Jingtū lijiao zhi 淨土立教志  
 Jingtū lun 淨土論  
 Jingtū shiyi lun 淨土十疑論  
 Jingtū wangsheng zhuan 淨土往生傳  
 Jishan convent 積善寺  
 Jizang 地藏  
 jō'in 定印  
 jōbon chūshō 上品中生  
 jōbon jōshō 上品上生  
 Jōdo gonshoku shō 淨土嚴飾抄  
 Jōdo-shū Kaishū Happyakunen Kinen Keisan Junkyoku  
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 Jōdo-shū dai-jiten 淨土宗大辭典  
 Jōdo-shū Kaishū Happyakunen Kinen Shuppan  
 淨土宗開宗八百年記念出版  
 Jōdo-shū zensho 淨土宗全書  
 Jōdo-shū zensho, zoku 淨土宗全書續  
 Jōdoshūten kankōkai 淨土宗典刊行會  
 Jōshō 靜照  
 Jūzen 十善  
 Kajimura Noboru 梶村昇  
 Kakhun 覺順

Kanchū 寬忠  
 kangyō 觀行  
 kanjin nyūjo 觀心入定  
 kanjin 勸進  
 Kasahara Kazuo 笠原一男  
 Kasuga Kazuo 春日和男  
 kebutsu 化佛  
 kechien 結緣  
 Ketsubongyō 血盆經  
 koku 斛  
 Kōnen 興然  
 Konjaku monogatari shū 今昔物語集  
 Kubon ōjō gi 九品往生義  
 Kurodani shōnin gotōroku 黒谷上人語燈録  
 Kūkai 空海  
 liezhuan 列傳  
 Lu Shishou 陸師寿  
 Ma'ō 魔王  
 mappō 末法  
 Miaoyun 妙運  
 Miko to bukkyōshi 巫女と佛教史  
 Ming'an 明安  
 Mingsengzhuan 名僧傳  
 Miyoshi no Tameyasu 三善爲康  
 mukashi 昔  
 Muryōju 無量壽  
 Muryōjukyō shaku 無量壽經釋  
 Muryōkō 無量光  
 Muryōkōbutsu 無量光佛  
 Mutsu 陸奥  
 Myōhō 妙法  
 Myōren 妙蓮  
 Myōshin-bō 妙眞房  
 nenbutsu 念佛  
 Nenbutsu ōjōden 念佛往生傳  
 nenbutsu zanmai 念佛  
 ni 尼  
 nianfo 念佛  
 Nichiren 日蓮  
 Nihon bukkyō kōshōshi kenkyū 日本佛教交渉史研究  
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 Nihon ōjō gokurakuki 日本往生極樂記  
 Nihon ryōiki 日本靈異記  
 Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki 日本國現報善惡靈異記  
 Nijō 二乘  
 ningenteki jōken 人間的條件  
 nitai 二諦  
 nitai 眞諦  
 Nyōnin ōjō 女人往生  
 Nyōnin ōjō shisō no keifu 女人往生思想の系譜  
 nyōnin ōjōden 女人往生傳

nyonin ōjōron 女人往生論  
 Ōe no Masafusa 大江匡房  
 ōjōden 往生傳  
 Ōmi 近江  
 Ōsone Shōsuke 大曾根章介  
 Qinghe 清河  
 raikō (or raigō) 來迎  
 raikōe 來迎繪  
 Renmyō 蓮妙  
 Renzen 蓮禪  
 Ryōe Dōkō 了惠道光  
 Ryōgen 良源  
 Saichō 最澄  
 Sange ōjōden 三外往生傳  
 Sange ōjōki 三外往生記  
 sanjū 三從  
 Saru Hijiri 猴聖  
 Sengche 僧徹  
 Sengqing 僧慶  
 Sengqiong 僧瓊  
 setsuwa 說話  
 Shandao 善導  
 Shanhui 善惠  
 Shaokang 少康  
 Shari 舍利  
 shi 石  
 shichishu 七衆  
 shido 私度  
 Shiga 滋賀  
 Shijūhachigan shaku 四十八願釋  
 Shinran 親鸞  
 shirabyōshi 白拍子  
 Shōren 青蓮  
 Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子  
 Shūi ōjōden 拾遺往生傳  
 shūkyōteki jōken 宗教的條件  
 Shūshō 宗性  
 Sifenlu shanfan buque xingshi chao 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔  
 Sima Qian 司馬遷  
 sōniryō 僧尼令  
 sōzu 僧頭  
 Suiyuan wangsheng ji 隨願往生集  
 Taira Masayuki 平雅行  
 Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛  
 Taishaku[ten] 帝釋[天]  
 Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經  
 Takagi Ichinosuke 高木市之助  
 Takagi Yutaka 高木豊  
 Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎  
 Ten'ō-ji 天王寺  
 Tenrin'ō 轉輪王  
 Tiantai sect 天台宗

Tiantai Dashi 天臺大師  
 to 斗  
 Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆  
 Wanggu 王古  
 Wangsheng jingtu zhuan 往生淨土傳  
 Wangsheng xifang jingtu ruiying shanzhuan  
 往生西方淨土瑞應刪傳  
 Wangshengren xiangmao zhang 往生人相貌章  
 Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭  
 Wenshen 文身、楊  
 Xinbian gujin wangsheng jingtu baozhu ji  
 新編古今往生淨土寶珠集  
 Xinxiu wangsheng zhuan 新修往生傳  
 Yōkan 永觀  
 Yoshishige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤  
 Zanning 贊寧  
 zenchishiki 善智識  
 zenjō 禪定  
 Zhipan 志磐  
 Zhu shangshanren yong 諸上善人詠  
 Zoku honchō ōjōden 續本朝往生傳  
 zokutai 俗諦  
 Zunren 尊忍

### Résumé

#### Portraits de saintes bouddhistes dans les textes hagiographiques de l'Asie orientale : études des récits de femmes ayant obtenu de renaître dans la Terre Pure d'Amida

Cette étude analyse les biographies de nonnes bouddhistes censées avoir connu une renaissance dans la Terre Pure d'Amida (jap. *ōjōden*). La première partie examine certains problèmes théoriques et méthodologiques propres à l'analyse de textes de ce type. Il y est montré que ces *ōjōden* doivent être considérés, afin d'éviter des erreurs d'interprétation, comme un sous-genre de la littérature hagiographique bouddhique. La seconde partie analyse l'organisation formelle et les contenus des textes eux-mêmes avec une attention particulière portée sur la condition féminine. Dans la dernière section est examinée la façon partielle et sectaire dont les *ōjōden* sont traités par l'érudition japonaise. Est ainsi démontré qu'une prise en compte erronée de la nature hagiographique et édifiante des *ōjōden* peut induire de sérieux contresens.