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Approaching the Land of Bliss

*Religious Praxis in the
Cult of Amitābha*

EDITED BY

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By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu
 Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan

JACQUELINE I. STONE

RESEARCHERS IN THE FIELD of Japanese Buddhism have long noted the remarkable rise of Pure Land thought and practice in the late tenth through thirteenth centuries. Scholar-monks of the Heian period (794–1185), such as the Tendai prelates Senkan (918–983) and Genshin (942–1017), the Sanron masters Eikan (1033–1111) and Chinkai (c. 1091–1152), and the Shingon figure Kakuban (1095–1143), developed Pure Land doctrine within the framework of their respective schools. Distinctively Pure Land forms of art and architecture were sponsored by the aristocracy, while itinerant monks such as Kūya (or Kōya, 903–972) and Ryōnin (1072–1132) spread the chanted nenbutsu among people of all classes. And in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), independent Pure Land sectarian movements led by Hōnen (1133–1212), Shinran (1173–1262), and Ippen (1239–1289) emerged. Less well recognized, however, is the central role played in much of early medieval Pure Land Buddhism by deathbed practices and accompanying beliefs about the radical salvific power of one's last nenbutsu, whether understood as the contemplation of the Buddha Amitābha (or Amitāyus, Jpn. Amida) or the invocation of his name. Although Buddhism in general has held that the last moment of consciousness can influence one's post-mortem fate, in the Pure Land tradition, "right mindfulness at the last moment" (*rinjū shōnen*) was deemed the essential prerequisite to experiencing the *raigō*—Amitābha's descent, together with his holy retinue, to welcome practitioners at the time of their death and escort them to his Pure Land. Since birth in the Pure Land (*ōjō*) was equated with the stage of non-retrogression on the bodhisattva path, dying with one's mind fixed on Amitābha was thought to release the practitioner once and for all from the round of samsara and to guar-

antee one's eventual Buddhahood. Early medieval concerns for a ritually correct death were not limited to Pure Land devotees; other Buddhists focused their postmortem aspirations on the Tūṣita heaven, where the future Buddha Miroku (Maitreya) dwells; or Mt. Fudaraku (Potalaka), home of the bodhisattva Kannon (Avalokiteśvara); or Sacred Vulture Peak (Ryōjusen), where the eternal Śākya-muni Buddha constantly preaches. Overwhelmingly, however, people sought birth after death in Amitābha's Pure Land of Utmost Bliss (Skt. Sukhāvātī, Jpn. Gokuraku jōdo), countless world-spheres away to the west, and the medieval discourse of a death with right mindfulness was dominated by a Pure Land idiom. This chapter will briefly trace the major developments in Pure Land deathbed practices in early medieval Japan, along with concomitant ideas about the liberative power of one's dying thoughts of the Buddha.

Genshin and the Nijūgozanmai-e

On the twenty-third day of the fifth month, 986, a group of twenty-five monks of the Yokawa retreat on Mt. Hiei, the great Tendai center northeast of the imperial capital, met and put their names to an oath. It reads in part:

We pledge together to be "good friends" to one another and, at life's last moment, to help one other contemplate the Buddha [Amitābha]. We hereby set the number of our society at twenty-five. If one among us should fall ill, then by the power of the vow uniting us, without concern for whether the day be auspicious or not, we shall go to him and inquire after him and encourage [his deathbed contemplation]. And if he happens to achieve birth in [the Pure Land of] Utmost Bliss, then—whether by the power of his own vow or by relying on the Buddha's supernatural powers, whether in a dream or in waking reality—he shall so communicate this to the society. Or, if he has fallen into the evil paths, he shall communicate that as well. Our society shall at regular times perform together with like mind those practices leading to the Pure Land. In particular, on the evening of the fifteenth day of each month, we shall cultivate the *samādhi* of mindfulness of the Buddha (*nenbutsu zanmai*) and pray that we may be able to complete ten reflections [on Amitābha] in our last moments.¹

The newly formed association called itself the Nijūgozanmai-e, or Samādhi Society of Twenty-Five.² Two sets of rules were promulgated to govern the group. An original set of eight regulations, dated

986, has been attributed to Yoshishige no Yasutane (c. 931–1002), a scholar of Chinese studies who had recently been ordained as the monk Jakushin.³ A revised set of twelve regulations, dated 988, is said to have been written by the monk Genshin, who was active in the society's later development. Although exhibiting some differences in style and orientation, both sets of regulations stipulate that the society should devote the fifteenth of each month to nenbutsu practice with the aim of achieving birth in Amitābha's Pure Land; perform the mantra of light (*kōmyō shingon*) empowering earth and sand, to be sprinkled on the corpses of deceased members; nurse any members of the society who should fall sick and remove them to a separate chapel called the Ōjōin (Chapel for Birth in the Pure Land), to be established for this purpose; and establish a gravesite for members and perform funerals, centering around nenbutsu practice.⁴ As these regulations suggest, deathbed practice was part of a continuum that encompassed, at one end, one's habitual practice during ordinary times, and at the other, funerary rites conducted after one's death. Within that continuum, however, practice during one's last hours held a special place, as the potential of this liminal moment was deemed to set it apart from ordinary time and offer a unique opportunity for securing birth in the Pure Land.

The deathbed observances of the Nijūgozanmai-e as set forth in these regulations resonate with slightly earlier prescriptions given in Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* (Essentials of birth in the Pure Land), completed in the fourth month of 985, the year before the society was established.⁵ This work would come to exert a profound influence on the rise of Japanese Pure Land thought and practice. It is justly famous for its vivid opening descriptions of the hells and others of the six realms of deluded rebirth, toward which one is to cultivate aversion, and of the splendors of Amitābha's Pure Land, toward which one is to aspire. The heart of the text, however, is devoted to instructions for practice to achieve birth in the Pure Land, among which the contemplative nenbutsu—the visualization of Amitābha—holds a preeminent place. The sixth chapter, "On the Nenbutsu for Special Times," contains a set of detailed instructions for deathbed nenbutsu practice, the first ever compiled in Japan.⁶

In the first part of this section, dealing with deathbed ritual (*rinjū gyōgi*) itself, Genshin draws primarily on Chinese texts. He first cites a "Chinese transmission" (*zhongguo benzhuān*), quoted in the commentary on the four-part *vinaya* written by Daoxuan (596–667), in

a section on "Caring for the Sick and Sending off the Deceased" that purports to describe the care of the terminally ill at the Jetavana monastery in Śrāvastī in India. The sick person is removed to a "chapel of impermanence" (*mujōin*), so that the sight of his familiar surroundings and robe, bowl, and other possessions will not generate thoughts of attachment. There he should be placed behind a standing Buddha image to whose right hand has been affixed one end of a trailing five-colored pennant. The dying person should be made to grasp the other end of this pennant, to help him generate thoughts of following the Buddha to his pure realm. Those in attendance are to burn incense, scatter flowers, and promptly remove any vomit or excrement.⁷ Alternatively, Genshin cites the recommendation of Daoshi (d. 668?) that the Buddha image should face east, and the sick person should be placed in front of and facing it.⁸

Genshin also cites the instructions by the Chinese Pure Land teacher Shandao (613–681) that the dying should face west, visualize the coming of Amitābha's holy retinue, and continually recite his name. Of particular importance to the later Japanese tradition is Shandao's insistence that those in attendance should write down any visions described by the dying:

If the sick are unable to speak, then those caring for them should by all means ask from time to time what they are seeing. If they describe scenes of painful punishment, then those by their side should say the nenbutsu for them and assist them by performing repentance with them, so that they may eradicate all their sins without fail. And if their sins are thus eradicated, then the saintly host bearing the lotus pedestal will appear before them in accord with their thoughts. That also should be recorded as before.⁹

Genshin further quotes Shandao to the effect that relatives and other visitors who have recently consumed meat, alcohol, or the five pungent roots should be refused access to the dying. Otherwise, this might cause them to lose their correct concentration, allowing demons to confuse them and make them fall into the evil paths.¹⁰

Another Chinese Pure Land master cited by Genshin is Daochuo (562–645), who comments on the difficulty of sustaining the ten continuous thoughts of Amitābha in one's last moments, deemed necessary in order to achieve birth in the Pure Land:

To have ten uninterrupted reflections in succession would not seem difficult. But most unenlightened individuals have a mind as untamed as a wild horse, a consciousness more restless than a monkey. . . .

Once the winds of dissolution arise [at the moment of death], a hundred pains will gather in the body. If you have not trained prior to this time, how can you assume that you will be able to contemplate the Buddha on that occasion? Each person should thus make a pact in advance with three to five people of like conviction. Whenever the time of death approaches [for any of them], they should offer each other encouragement. They should chant the name of Amitābha for the dying person, desire that person's birth in the Pure Land, and continue chanting to induce [in him] the ten moments of reflection.¹¹

In Japan, Daochuo's suggestion of a pact among like-minded practitioners to encourage one another's deathbed practice was first realized in the founding of the Nijūgozanmai-e.

The "ten uninterrupted thoughts" mentioned here refers, on one hand, to Amitābha's famous eighteenth vow, which promises birth in his Pure Land to all who aspire to this goal with sincerity and call him to mind "even ten times";¹² it also refers to a passage in the *Contemplation Sūtra*, which, in describing the lowest of the nine levels of birth in the Pure Land, says that even an evil person, if he encounters a good friend (*zenchishiki*) who instructs him at the hour of death so that he is able to sustain ten thoughts of Amitābha, shall, with each thought, erase the sins of eight billion *kalpas* and be born in Amitābha's Pure Land.¹³ By Genshin's time, the ten thoughts or ten reflections at the time of death had been subject to considerable interpretation, but he himself took them to mean chanting the nenbutsu ten times while single-mindedly focusing on Amitābha.

Following these instructions for deathbed observances, Genshin gives his own recommendations for encouragement to the dying. These consist of ten items of exhortation, centering on visualization of Amitābha's physical marks, his radiant light, and his descent, together with his holy retinue, to escort the practitioner to the Pure Land. As the moment of death approaches, the person in attendance is to say:

Child of the Buddha, do you realize that now is your last thought? This single reflection [on the Buddha] at death outweighs the karmic acts of a hundred years. If this instant should pass you by, rebirth [in samsara] will be unavoidable. Now is precisely the time. Reflect on the Buddha single-mindedly, and you will surely be born on a seven-jewelled lotus pedestal in the pond of eight virtues in the subtle and wondrous Pure Land of Utmost Bliss in the west.¹⁴

The instructions for deathbed practice given in Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* and in the regulations of the Nijūgozanmai-e mark the entry into

Japanese Buddhist discourse of a concern with dying in a state of right mindfulness and belief in the power of one's last thoughts, ritually focused, to determine one's postmortem fate. The *Ōjō yōshū* drew attention in court circles; Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1027), the most powerful courtier of his day, kept a personal copy close at hand.¹⁵ The idealized account of Michinaga's death given in the historical tale *Eiga monogatari* (A tale of flowering fortunes, c. 1092) is clearly based on Genshin's description of deathbed ritual. Michinaga is depicted as dying lying down facing west, calmly chanting the nenbutsu while holding cords attached to nine full-size images of Amitābha, representing the nine levels of birth in the Pure Land.¹⁶

Aspirations for the Pure Land as set forth in Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* also stimulated developments in architecture, sculpture, and painting, giving rise to a distinctive Heian-period Pure Land visual culture. Personal chapels for Pure Land devotion (*Amida-dō*) were sponsored by the aristocracy, such as the Hōjōji, completed by Michinaga in 1022, and the even more famous Byōdōin at Uji, begun by his son Yorimichi in 1052. Similar structures were built in considerable numbers up until about the thirteenth century.¹⁷ The late Heian period also saw the emergence of the *raigōzu*, a new form of painting depicting Amitābha descending with his retinue of bodhisattvas to welcome the practitioner at death. So closely were *raigōzu* associated with the Pure Land thought of the *Ōjō yōshū* that, by the twelfth century, it was believed that Genshin had introduced the genre.¹⁸ *Raigōzu* were on occasion used in the deathbed setting, and some surviving examples have threads remaining where cords were once attached for the dying person to hold.¹⁹

Genshin is also credited with another sort of representation of Amida's descent, the *mukaekō*, or "welcoming rite," a ceremonial procession that actually enacted the descent of Amitābha and his retinue, performed by monks and young novices in costume and accompanied by music and nenbutsu chanting. The *mukaekō* may originally have been performed at the Kedaiin, a chapel established by Genshin at Yokawa, and spread to other locations. Unlike privately commissioned *raigōzu*, *mukaekō* performances were witnessed by people of a range of social classes. Genshin's biography in *Hokke genki* (Accounts of the wondrous powers of the *Lotus Sūtra*, compiled 1040–1044) says that those who witnessed the ceremony, "from the monks and laity, old and young, down to the dissolute

and those of false views, all wept spontaneously, forming the karma for *ōjō*, and prostrated themselves, planting the seeds of enlightened insight."²⁰ The monk Nōgu, a disciple of Genshin, is said to have dreamed of his deceased teacher being escorted to the Pure Land by a procession of monks and four gorgeously arrayed youths, "on the whole, like the welcoming rite of Yokawa"²¹—thus hinting at the power of such performances to shape the dreams and visions of the living concerning the *ōjō* of the deceased.

Instructions for Deathbed Ritual after Genshin

Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* did much to inspire subsequent ritualization of the deathbed scene. The "deathbed practice" section of the *Ōjō yōshū* itself circulated in a somewhat modified, *kana* version as an independent text;²² it also seems also to have been read on occasion to the dying. For example, Shōnen Ajari (d. 1015), a member of the Nijūgozanmai-e, when he fell ill, reportedly "requested that worldly matters not be discussed in his presence but solely had the *rinjū gyōgi* section of the *Ōjō yōshū* read to him, learning its admonitions." On the night of his death, he had his attendant monks recite it, along with the "Fathoming the Tathāgata's Lifespan" chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*.²³

The "deathbed practice" section of the *Ōjō yōshū* also formed the prototype for a number of subsequent *rinjū gyōgi* texts, or "deathbed manuals," as they might be termed, compiled during the latter Heian and Kamakura periods. These texts retain and elaborate on the basic features of Genshin's instructions: the removal of the dying to a separate place; the enshrinement of a Buddha image with a cord fastened to its hand for the dying person to hold; the offering of flowers and incense; the shielding of the dying person from talk of worldly affairs or the intrusion of those who have recently consumed meat, alcohol, or the five pungent roots, or of those who would be likely to arouse strong feelings, either of love or aversion; and the need throughout to create a quiet and dignified atmosphere conducive to contemplation in one's last hours. Genshin's exhortation to the dying person is frequently quoted: "You should not visualize any form except the features of the Buddha. You should not hear any sounds except the Buddha's words of Dharma. You should not speak of anything except the true teachings of the Buddha. You should not think of anything except birth in the Pure Land."²⁴

Underscored above all is the decisive influence of the last moment in determining the dying person's postmortem fate, and hence, the vital role of the person or persons in attendance—variously referred to as the *kanbyō* (carer for the sick) or *zenchishiki* (*kalyāṇamitra*), often shortened to *chishiki* (literally, a “good friend” or religious guide)—in offering encouragement, guiding deathbed reflection and repentance, and chanting the nenbutsu. This shared framework, however, was quickly assimilated to a range of practices and doctrinal interpretations. An early example is the *Rinjū gyōgi chūki* (Annotations on deathbed practice), written by Tanshū (1066–1120?), a Kōfukuji monk learned in Hossō doctrine.²⁵ Tanshū identifies right thoughts at the last moment with the aspiration for enlightenment (Skt. *bodhicitta*, Jpn. *bodai shin*), which marks the beginning of the bodhisattva path; so long as one has aroused the *bodhicitta*, one will not suffer at the time of death, even if one should fall into the evil paths. Tanshū's instructions for deathbed observance reflect the eclectic and nonexclusive character of much Heian-period Pure Land practice. In addition to chanting the Buddha's name, he says, if death is not imminent, other measures may be taken: Someone versed in the *Lotus Sūtra* may expound its meaning for the dying person, or a companion in practice may read the *Daihannya rishubun* (Scripture on the guiding principle of great wisdom).²⁶ He also suggests having the bodhisattva precepts recited for the dying person to hear, as an unrivalled source of merit. Tanshū's instructions for deathbed practice allow for aspiration to sacred realms other than Amitābha's Pure Land: If the dying person seeks birth in the Tuṣita heaven, for example, then an image of Maitreya should be substituted for that of Amitābha, and the dying person should visualize being born there.²⁷

A number of texts of deathbed ritual instruction were also produced by monks active in the development of the *himitsu nenbutsu*, or esoteric Pure Land tradition. The earliest example is the *Byōchū shugyōki* (Notes on practice during illness) by Jichihan (c. 1089–1144), which draws on elements from Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* but reinterprets them in an esoteric mode, emphasizing the non-duality of Amitābha and the *shingon* practitioner.²⁸ For example, Genshin had stressed the visualization of the radiant light emanating from the white curl (*ūrnā*) between Amitābha's brows. This light embraces the practitioner and enables him to eradicate sin, focus his deathbed contemplation, and achieve birth in the Pure Land. Jichihan

suggests that the white curl should be visualized as a transformation of the letter *hūm*, endowed with Amida's four inseparable mandalas. He further equates the name “Amida” with three fundamental esoteric meanings of the letter “A”: A indicating originally unborn, which is the middle Way; *mi*, the non-self that is the great self, which freely abides; and *da*, moment-to-moment accordance with suchness, which is liberation. Deathbed nenbutsu is for Jichihan a form of empowerment through ritual union with the three secrets of a cosmic buddha (*sanmitsu kaji*): the practitioner's reverent posture corresponds to the secret of the Buddha's body; the chanting of his name, to the secret of his speech; and the contemplation of the name's meaning, to the secret of his mind. Another figure to develop *himitsu nenbutsu* practice in the deathbed context was Kakuban, revered as the founder of “new doctrine” (*shingi*) Shingon, whose synthesis of Pure Land and esoteric thought is discussed in James Sanford's essay in this volume. Kakuban's *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* (Esoteric collection of essentials for life's end), which explicitly draws on Jichihan's *Byōchū shugyōki*, also equates the deathbed nenbutsu with esoteric three secrets practice. Kakuban's text is sometimes regarded as embodying a more “orthodox” esoteric position than Jichihan's in explicitly defining Amitābha as an aspect of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi (Mahāvairocana), but the two are alike in stressing union with the Buddha as the focus of the *shingon* practitioner's deathbed contemplation. Kakuban writes:

Amida is Dainichi's function as wisdom. Dainichi is Amida's essence as principle. . . . When one contemplates in this way, then, without leaving the *sahā* world, one dwells in [the Pure Land] of Utmost Bliss. One's own person enters Amida, and Amida, without transformation, is precisely Dainichi. One's own person emerges from Dainichi; this is the subtle contemplation for realizing buddhahood in this very body.²⁹

The deathbed scene in Kakuban's instructions even appears to be arranged in a mandalic structure: four *chishiki* who assist the dying person's nenbutsu take up their positions around him so that together they reproduce the configuration of the five wisdom buddhas, the dying person occupying the central position of Dainichi.

Although Genshin had encouraged those in attendance to chant the nenbutsu together with the dying to help them focus their contemplation, in light of his *Ōjō yōshū*, it is ultimately the dying person's own deathbed practice that determines his or her success or

failure in achieving the Pure Land. However, *rinjū gyōgi* texts of the late Heian and Kamakura periods take cognizance, as the *Ōjō yōshū* does not, of the fact that many people lapse into unconsciousness before dying, and these texts therefore increasingly stress the power of the *chishiki*'s nenbutsu to lead the dying person to the Pure Land.³⁰ Kakuban's instructions, for example, advise that, should the dying person lapse into unconsciousness, the *chishiki* are to observe his breathing carefully and match their breathing to his, chanting the nenbutsu in unison on the outbreath, for a day, two days, a week, or as long as necessary until death transpires. In this way, the dying person can be freed of sins and achieve the Pure Land, because the power of Amitābha's original vow must inevitably respond to the invocation of his name. Moreover, the *chishiki* are to visualize their nenbutsu, chanted on the outbreath, as the six syllables *Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu* in Siddham letters, entering the dying person's mouth with the inbreath, transforming into six sun disks, and dispelling with their brilliance the darkness of the obstructions of sins associated with the six sense faculties. Here the deathbed chanting of the nenbutsu by the *chishiki* in attendance is assimilated to the visualization and breath meditations that were to figure largely in the esoteric nenbutsu tradition.³¹

A similar theme appears in the *Kanbyō yōjin shō* (also known as the *Kanbyō yōjin* or *Kanbyō goyōjin*, Admonitions for attending the sick), a very detailed set of deathbed instructions compiled by Nen'a Ryōchū (1199–1287), third patriarch of Hōnen's Pure Land sect.³² Ryōchū places immense responsibility on the *kanbyō* to encourage the dying person's chanting of the nenbutsu with wholehearted reliance on Amitābha as the "foremost essential" and to let him hear the nenbutsu chanted when he himself can no longer chant it; so long as the aural faculty is still operative, Ryōchū suggests, hearing the nenbutsu alone can be sufficient to enable the dying to reach the Pure Land. The *kanbyō* must watch over the dying person with compassion, attentive to the exact moment at which life ends, and then continue chanting the nenbutsu for two to four hours after the person has died. "Perform the transfer of merit in all sincerity so that, by the virtue of this deed, the dead person will achieve *ōjō*, even from the interim state."³³ Ryōchū's emphasis on the *kanbyō*'s ritual influence over the dying person's passage to the Pure Land may seem at odds with the spirit of abandoning reliance on the power

of one's own efforts and instead placing wholehearted trust in the "other power" of Amitābha's original vow, which is often associated with Hōnen's Pure Land thought. However, it must be borne in mind that Hōnen's disciples embraced widely varying understandings of his teaching, a point underscored by their divergent attitudes toward deathbed practice, to which we will return.

The thrust of such deathbed ritual instructions was to emphasize the authority of the *chishiki* or *kanbyō* as an emerging religious specialist. With him rested the ritual control of the final moment with its brief window onto the possibility of escape from samsaric suffering, and thus a large share in the responsibility for a dying person's success or failure in reaching the Pure Land. Kakuban stipulates that the chief *chishiki* should be a person of wisdom and aspiration for the Way; the sick person should look upon him as the bodhisattva Kannon come to lead him to the Pure Land.³⁴ Ryōchū for his part writes: "Without the compassionate encouragement of the *chishiki*, how could this sole great matter [of birth in the Pure Land] be achieved? Thus the sick person should look upon the *chishiki* as the Buddha, while the *chishiki* should extend compassion to the sick person, as though toward his only child."³⁵ The *chishiki*'s authority in turn worked to strengthen the larger religious networks, old and new, in which it was embedded: monastic fraternities; nenbutsu societies (*kessha*), sometimes including laypeople; or the ties between lay patrons and the ritual specialists who served their religious needs. In the founding regulations of the Nijūgozanmai-e, the dying person and the attending *chishiki* are assumed to be fellow monks; later, deathbed ritual became a service also performed by monks for lay patrons. Hōnen and his disciples, for example, are known to have acted as *chishiki* to lay followers as well as fellow clerics.³⁶ A recent study by Jonathan Todd Brown analyzes how Ta'amidabutsu Shinkyō (1237–1319), successor to Ippen as leader of the Jishū, skillfully secured this fledgling movement an institutional base among the *bushi* of the eastern provinces by emphasizing how hard it is for those professionally engaged in the sin of killing to reach the Pure Land, and thus, the immense benefits to be gained by any warrior who supported a local Jishū practice hall, thus ensuring himself the presence of a *chishiki* in his last hours.³⁷ In later medieval times, as is well known, Jishū "camp priests" (*jinsō*) chanted the nenbutsu on the battlefield to ensure the *ōjō* of

the fallen and dying—an extension of the *chishiki*'s role at the deathbed and of belief that, by hearing the chanted nenbutsu, the newly deceased could be guided to the Pure Land.³⁸

Good and Bad Deaths

What was the ideal death supposed to look like? While *rinjū gyōgi* texts emphasize how deathbed scenes should be conducted, images of exemplary deaths were circulated in a very different sort of literature known as *ōjōden* (literally, accounts of *ōjōnin*, or persons who achieved birth in the Pure Land). The first of these, *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* (A record of Japanese who achieved birth in [the Pure Land] of Utmost Bliss, c. 985), was compiled by Yoshishige no Yasutane, the scholar of Chinese learning and close associate of Genshin traditionally said to be the author of the Nijūgozanmai-e's initial regulations.³⁹ Yasutane was inspired by earlier Tang-dynasty accounts recording the ideal deaths of men and women believed to have reached the Pure Land, such as Jiakai's *Jingtu lun* (Treatise on the Pure Land, c. seventh century), whose sixth chapter contains twenty such biographies of both clergy and laity, and the *Wangsheng xifang jingtu ruiying zhuan* (Accounts of auspicious responses accompanying birth in the western Pure Land), compiled by Wenshen (n.d.) and Shaokang (d. 805), which contains forty-eight such accounts. Yasutane's own collection includes forty-two accounts that he discovered in older records and through personal inquiry, of individuals said to have died exemplary deaths. His collection was followed by five subsequent major and several minor *ōjōden* collections, chiefly written in the latter part of the Heian period.⁴⁰ Typically these include examples of the *ōjō* of monks, laymen, nuns, and laywomen, representing a range of social classes. In these accounts, the lives of *ōjōnin* tend to be summarized in a few sentences, as though mere headnotes to their deaths, which are often described in detail. The stated purpose of this literature, for both compilers and readers, was to form a karmic tie, or *kechien*, conducive to birth in the Pure Land by gathering or reading stories of those believed to have reached this goal. Yasutane quotes Jiakai on this point: "The wisdom of the beings is shallow, and they cannot understand the sagely intent [set forth in sūtras and treatises]. Unless one records examples of those who actually achieved *ōjō*, one will not be able to encourage them."⁴¹ But in addition, *ōjōden* served to circulate

images and thus, expectations, of what a death with "right mindfulness" should look like.

Where texts of instruction for deathbed practice tend to stress the importance and authority of the *chishiki*, the men and women whose stories are recounted in *ōjōden* are in most cases very much the principle agents in their own deathbed scenes. Death never takes them by surprise; they foresee it to the day and announce it to disciples or family. They bathe, put on clean clothes, then sit upright in the posture of meditation or lie down facing west. They die peacefully, as though sinking deep into contemplation or falling asleep. Though no doubt considerably idealized, such accounts provide a useful index to the range of deathbed practices carried out in the latter Heian period. Some *ōjōnin* are described as entering meditation in their last hours, but, for most, deathbed practice seems to have entailed some form of vocalization, whether of mantras, *dhāraṇīs*, sūtras, or other sacred texts. Most popular was the invocation of Amitābha's name, *Namu-Amida-butsu*. Genshin had recognized the value of the chanted nenbutsu as an aid to deathbed visualization, and although the emphasis on contemplative practice remains paramount in his Pure Land thought, he also argued that invoking the name of Amitābha in one's last moments carried an immense salvific potency that it did not possess at ordinary times.⁴² In addition, contemplation was thought to be extremely difficult to practice in one's last moments, when the "winds of dissolution" (*danmatsuma no kaze*) were said to wrack the body with excruciating pain. Even for those trained in meditation, the chanted nenbutsu may well have proved more practicable at a time when one was greatly weakened and perhaps suffering. It was at least partly in the context of deathbed practice that the practice of chanting the nenbutsu spread.

Takagi Yutaka, tabulating the evidence from seven Heian-period *ōjōden* collections, found sixty-seven examples, dating from 951 to 1153, of people who died chanting the nenbutsu in their last hours. Most of these are concentrated after 1051.⁴³ The year 1052, of course, was widely thought to mark the beginning of the Final Dharma age (*mappō*), when sentient beings are said to be greatly burdened by ignorance and evil, and liberation becomes exceedingly difficult to achieve. Although consciousness of *mappō* has often been invoked uncritically as a convenient explanation for a range of complex religious phenomena, the growing popularity of the invocational nenbutsu may in part have stemmed from its rep-

utation as a practice suited to benighted worldlings of the last age. Certainly it was accessible to people across the boundaries of class and level of education. The examples identified by Takagi of *ōjōnin* who chanted the nenbutsu as their deathbed practice include not only aristocrats and literati but also warriors of both high and low rank, as well as provincial officials and commoners.

A second form of deathbed practice, also aimed at achieving birth in Amitābha's Pure Land, was reciting the *Lotus Sūtra*, or individual chapters, verses, or phrases from the *Lotus Sūtra*. In the same survey of *ōjōden*, Takagi found examples of thirty-six individuals who chanted the *Lotus Sūtra* or some portion thereof on their deathbed. This is a much smaller percentage than those who employed the invocational nenbutsu and includes only seven lay-people. Reciting the *Lotus Sūtra* would presuppose either literacy and access to a copy of the text or proximity to a teacher who could instruct one in recitation and memorization. Sūtra recitation as a deathbed practice would also have carried the risk that one might fall unconscious or die in mid-sentence, a death that one imagines would have been viewed as both inauspicious and unaesthetic.⁴⁴ In contrast, one could die at any point while chanting the nenbutsu and it could still be said of that person that he or she died in admirable fashion, invoking the Buddha's name.

However, while some *ōjōnin* relied solely on the chanted nenbutsu, this was not yet linked to a doctrine of the nenbutsu's exclusive validity, such as would emerge in the Kamakura period with Hōnen, founder of the independent Japanese Pure Land sect. The mainstream of early medieval Pure Land thought recognized a spectrum of practices as efficacious for achieving birth in the Pure Land, and both *ōjōden* as well as court diaries and other historical accounts describe the use of a range of deathbed invocations.⁴⁵ Sacred texts other than the *Lotus* were also employed; Genshin himself, when near death, in addition to chanting the nenbutsu, is said to have recited from the "Twelve Salutations" (Chn. *Shi-er li*, Jpn. *Jūnirai*), twelve verses in praise of Amitābha attributed to Nāgārjuna, a practice that may also have been adopted by some members of the Nijūgozanmai-e and others.⁴⁶ Deathbed invocations included *dhāraṇīs* believed able to dissolve karmic hindrances, such as the name of the bodhisattva Kokūzō (Ākāśagarbha) or the *dhāraṇī* of the Augustly Victorious One (Skt. *uṣṇīṣavijaya dhāraṇī*, Jpn. *sonshō darani*). Also employed were so-called "hell-harrowing texts," or

hajigokumon, sūtra passages believed to protect the reciter against falling into hell. A famous example is taken from the *Flower Garland Sūtra* (*Avatamsaka sūtra*): "One who desires the knowledge of the Buddhas of the three time periods should contemplate the dharmarealm as being entirely mind-created."⁴⁷ Others derive from the *Lotus Sūtra* (for example, "One who with a pure mind believes and reveres and does not give rise to doubt will not fall into [the realms of] the hells, hungry ghosts, or beasts but will be born in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions"), or from the *Larger Sūtra*: "By the power of that Buddha's [Amitābha's] original vow, those who hear his name and desire birth in his Pure Land shall at once arrive at that land, where they will achieve [the stage of] non-retrogression."⁴⁸ The efficacy of *hajigokumon* is also stressed in some deathbed ritual texts; Ryōchū recommends several examples to be recited by the *chishiki* should the dying person become deranged by extreme pain.⁴⁹

Such vocalization practices were accompanied by other ritual acts, such as holding a five-colored pennant or cord tied to the hand of a Buddha image, recommended by Daoxuan and specified in instructions for deathbed practice from the *Ōjō yōshū* on. Alternatively, some *ōjōnin* are described as forming mudras on their deathbed or holding ritual implements, such as *vajras* or incense burners or, in some cases, a written vow to be born in Pure Land or a record of the good deeds they had performed in their lifetime.⁵⁰ Here again we find a resonance between descriptions in *ōjōden* and instructions in *rinjū gyōgi* texts. Both Tanshū's *Rinjū gyōgi chūki* and the *Kōyōshū* (Collection on filial conduct), a collection attributed to Kaku-ban and containing a set of instructions for deathbed practice, specify that a record should be made of the dying person's good deeds in that lifetime, which is then to be read aloud and praised at the deathbed to encourage that person.⁵¹

Ishida Mizumaro writes: "Right mindfulness in one's last moments is a subjective matter, and whether or not the sick person had in fact achieved it could not easily be known. . . . To inspire confidence in those attending, some more immediately recognizable, outwardly visible sign of a good death was required."⁵² This helps account for the fact that "right thoughts at the last moment," or *rinjū shōnen*, quickly came to be understood, less in terms of the dying person's inward state of mind, inaccessible to outward observers, than as a matter of conformity to prescribed ritual behavior,

which was assumed to reflect a proper mental attitude. Dying calmly, holding a cord attached to the hand of a Buddha image with the name of Amitābha on one's lips, was itself deemed proof of *ōjō*. However, additional evidence was sought, and three kinds of indicators are particularly stressed in *ōjōden*. First are wondrous signs appearing at the time of death or shortly after. Yasutane records that when the prelate Zōmyō, chief abbot (*zasu*) of Enryakuji, passed away: "That evening a golden light suddenly illuminated the place, and purple clouds arose of themselves. Music spread through the heavens and a fragrance filled his room."⁵³ Mysterious fragrance or radiant light in the death chamber, music of unearthly beauty heard in the air, or purple clouds rising in the west all appear in Yasutane's Chinese prototypes and became staples of Japanese *ōjōden* and other deathbed accounts. Sometimes these signs were described as perceptible only to the dying person, but in other cases they were depicted as objectively evident to bystanders or even unrelated persons at a distance.

The second and most widely reported index to a person's *ōjō* was the revelatory dream, examples of which were recorded in immense variety.⁵⁴ Such dreams could be precognitive, indicating that the dying person would reach the Pure Land and appear either to the individual concerned or to other parties. More common were dreams after the fact, indicating that the dead person had indeed achieved *ōjō*. Dreams of this variety recall the charter oath of the Nijūgozanmai-e, which mandated that deceased members should make contact with those still living and inform them of their post-mortem fate. Dreams appearing to more than one person were deemed especially reliable. An example is the case of the monk Ryōhan, a member of the Nijūgozanmai-e, who died while still a very young man. Both his parents subsequently dreamed that he appeared to them and announced, "I am now in the land of Utmost Bliss, where my name is Bodhisattva Benevolent Wisdom (Ninne)."⁵⁵ As in this case, dreams could reveal not only the fact of *ōjō* but the level of birth achieved: Ōe no Masafusa (1041–1111), in whose *ōjōden* collection this account appears, concluded that Ryōhan must have achieved the ninth and highest grade of birth, presumably because he referred to himself as "bodhisattva." The dreams and the visions reported by the dying, and their artistic and literary representations in *raigōzu*, *ōjōden* and, other sources, probably stood in a circular relationship: reports of dreams and death-

bed visions would have informed the representations, and the representations in turn shaped the dreams and visions; people saw what they knew they were supposed to see.

A third class of indicators was the appearance of the corpse. Numerous accounts tell of *ōjōnin* whose bodies did not decay but emitted wondrous fragrance. Even in the crematory fires, their bodies retained the posture of meditation and their hands, the mudras they had formed. In the liminal period right before and after death, the body, normally opaque, became in effect a lens opening onto the individual's postmortem fate. *Ōjōden* report only success stories, but behind such accounts lurked the specter of a bad death and consequent rebirth in the evil realms, which, it was thought, could also be known from the manner of dying and the subsequent appearance of the body. "When those who do evil are about to die," Genshin had written, "the wind and fire elements depart first, so they are restless and feverish, and suffer greatly. When those who do good are about to die, the earth and water elements depart first, so they are calm, and experience no pain."⁵⁶ Passages in canonical Buddhist texts dealing with corporeal indices to a dying person's realm of rebirth attracted considerable interest in the late Heian and Kamakura periods. For example, Kakuban's instructions for deathbed practice cite the Chinese esoteric scripture *Shouhu guojiezhu tuoluoni jing* (Sūtra of the *dhāraṇī* for protecting the ruler of the realm), which enumerates fifteen signs that the dying will fall into the hells (such as crying aloud with grief or choking with tears, urinating or defecating without awareness, refusing to open the eyes, foul breath, or lying face down); eight signs that the dying will fall into the realm of hungry ghosts (such as burning with fever or suffering from hunger or thirst); and seven signs presaging a descent into the bestial realm (such as contorting of the hands and feet, foaming at the mouth, or sweating from the entire body)—all signs requiring the *chishiki's* immediate ritual intervention.⁵⁷ Although further evidence is needed, one suspects that the emphasis on dying with right mindfulness may have served in part to counter fears about *onryō* (vengeful ghosts), the products of painful or untimely deaths, who could vent their resentment on the living in the form of sickness or other disasters. The manner of death of both worldly and religious leaders was appropriated for a variety of polemical agendas. The epic *Tale of the Heike*, for example, represents the usurper Taira no Kiyomori as dying in an agony of fever and convulsions, while his wife

dreams that horse- and ox-headed demons arrive to carry him off to the Avīci hell.⁵⁸ The treatise on poetics *Nomori no kagami*, attributed to Minamoto no Arifusa, criticizes the death of the Jishū founder, Ippen:

Beforehand, people insisted that [when Ippen died,] purple clouds would rise and lotus blossoms would fall from the skies, but when the time actually came, there was no sign of Amitābha's descent. His body was in such a state that his disciples' expectations that he would achieve the Pure Land were completely thwarted, and they had to hurry to cremate him before others could see it.⁵⁹

The monk Nichiren (1222–1282), who preached exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* and opposed Pure Land practices in any form, argued his case not only on doctrinal grounds but by charging that, among the leaders of the exclusive nenbutsu movement in particular:

There are some who have died without [auspicious] signs appearing [even] in two weeks' time, or who have broken out in evil sores, or spit blood, or had hot sweat pour from their entire bodies. In general, of Hōnen's more than eighty disciples, not one has died a good death.⁶⁰

Nichiren also lamented the frequency with which his contemporaries concealed the facts of a teacher's or parent's inauspicious death and instead claimed that the deceased had achieved birth in the western Pure Land⁶¹—thus hinting indirectly at a crisis of interpretation that must have arisen with some frequency when a deceased loved one's reputation for virtue or piety was not borne out by the manner of his or her death.

The Last Nenbutsu and the *ōjō* of Evil Men

Many of the *ōjōden* biographies simply tell how virtuous persons died exemplary deaths, and thus offer no moral or soteriological surprises. But these collections also include accounts of the *ōjō* of persons who, according to ordinary social morality or conventional understandings of karmic causality, might be thought to face great, even insurmountable hindrances to achieving the Pure Land. By including such cases, *ōjōden* reinforce the notion of life's final moment as a realm of unique liberative potential, radically discontinuous with society's values, ordinary moral codes, and even the

efficacy of everyday practice. One notes, for example, accounts of female *ōjōnin*, both nuns and laywomen. Although not barred from Buddhist liberation, in being bound by the “five hindrances and three obediences” and subject to the pollution restrictions associated with menstruation and childbirth, women were often thought to constitute a soteriologically challenged category. The treatment of women in *ōjōden* is ambivalent; not infrequently, they are represented as potential hindrances to the deathbed contemplation of men.⁶² Nonetheless, by including tales of women *ōjōnin*, these collections underscore the point that, by right mindfulness at the last moment, anyone—even those thought to have severe karmic limitations—could at once escape the round of rebirth and achieve the Pure Land.

Also significant in this regard are accounts celebrating the *ōjō* of people who deliberately reject conventional values, including those of the religious establishment. Examples include *hijiri*, or holy men who leave their Buddhist temples, renouncing the possibility of high monastic office, fame, and remuneration to lead an ascetic life or practice in reclusion; monks like Zōga and Ninga who deliberately feign madness to avoid the snares of clerical promotion and worldly honor;⁶³ and the nun Myōhō, who defies her noble parents' plans for her marriage in order to take the tonsure.⁶⁴ Laypeople, too, although on more modest a scale, are sometimes depicted as subverting social norms in their aspiration for the Pure Land. A woman from Nara stubbornly ignores her household duties despite her husband's rebukes and spends her time reciting the *Lotus Sūtra*. Her death is calm and exemplary, and her body emits fragrance for several days.⁶⁵ Such nonconformist *ōjōnin* may flaunt this-worldly conventions, but they know how to prepare for the last moment, whose rules are clearly not those of quotidian reality.

But the strongest emphasis in *ōjōden* on the extraordinary soteric potential of the last moment lies in their examples of the *ōjō* of “evil men” (*akunin*). Yasutane's original *ōjōden* collection contains no such examples, although he notes that one of his sources of inspiration, the Tang-dynasty collection *Ruiying zhuan*, includes cases of people who butchered cattle or sold chickens and yet still were able to achieve *ōjō* by meeting a “good friend” and completing ten deathbed thoughts of Amitābha.⁶⁶ By the latter Heian period, however, accounts of evil men achieving the Pure Land (*akunin ōjō*) begin to appear with some frequency. The emblematic “evil men” of these

Japanese collections are not butchers or poultry dealers but warriors (*bushi*), a group emerging as a powerful force within medieval society but whose professional obligation to engage in killing—of animals in the hunt, as a form of war training, and of men on the battlefield—was seen from a traditional Buddhist perspective as deeply sinful.

The first two examples of evil men's *ōjō* in Japanese *ōjōden* occur in the second such collection, compiled more than a hundred years after Yasutane's by Ōe no Masafusa. An official, Minamoto no Noritō no Ason, governor of Tajima, amasses great wealth and is stingy; nevertheless, he reads the *Amitābha sūtra* forty-nine times a day and dies in a state of right mindfulness, being welcomed by the Buddha.⁶⁷ In the second example, Minamoto no Yoriyoshi no Ason, former governor of Iyo and an outstanding military leader ("the number of heads he cut off and exposed and the lives he took were beyond calculation") repents of his sins and practices the nenbutsu: his birth in the Pure Land is confirmed by the dreams of many. Masafusa comments: "Thus we may surely know that even those who commit the ten evils and five perverse offenses may be welcomed into the Pure Land. All the more so, those who are guilty of other [that is, lesser] offenses! In considering these two cases, we may be greatly reassured."⁶⁸ Some tales make explicit that the power of the deathbed nenbutsu is what enables such sinful men to achieve the Pure Land. *Sange ōjōki* tells of Tanba no Taifu, a warrior from Kai province who hunts and exacts harsh tribute from the peasants on his estates; his atrocities are "too many to record." But in later life, he repents his evils and dies calmly, after having chanted the nenbutsu. Renzen, the compiler, remarks: "Surely this shows that even those who commit the ten evils and five perverse offenses can achieve birth in the Pure Land, by the power of the last nenbutsu!"⁶⁹

Obara Hitoshi has argued that the evil of warriors as described in *ōjōden*—that is, their identification as *akunin*—is inseparable from their social status and occupation and so reflects an aristocratic bias on the part of the compilers; warriors themselves did not necessarily regard their profession as sinful.⁷⁰ It may be, as Masafusa's comment suggests, that the *ōjō* of warriors who kill served in these collections as extreme examples, reassuring in their very extremity to the merely ordinarily sinful aristocratic reader: If even such evil men as these can attain the Pure Land, surely one's own

hopes for *ōjō* are not unreasonable! But in fact, most *ōjōden* compilers were aristocrats of rather low rank, and a majority of the *ōjōnin* whose deaths are described in their collections come, not from the highest social levels, but from the lesser nobility and literati down to local officials, nameless monks and warriors, and even servants. These facts have led some scholars to argue, in a manner opposite to Obara's view, that *ōjōden* reflect an attitude critical of the aristocracy and a nascent religious egalitarianism.⁷¹ Although this argument has sometimes been carried to excess, the presence in these collections of many humble *ōjōnin* does suggest both the spread of Pure Land practices in the Heian period among a range of social groups and a growing belief in the possibility of liberation for anyone who could face death with a mind fixed reverently on the Buddha, even the lowly and evil. It should also be noted that *ōjōden* contain examples, although very few, of persons whose wrongdoings cannot be attributed to their social circumstances but appear to be gratuitous. A notable case is the monk Jungen. An accomplished scholar, he is clever in exegesis but gives no sign that he ever meditates or chants the nenbutsu. At one point, he engages in sexual relations with his daughter. When reproached, he responds speciously: "Haven't you read the Buddha's teachings? All women are our mothers and children, our elder and younger sisters. How should one distinguish who is a relative, and who a stranger?" But when death comes, he meets it well, chanting the nenbutsu and facing west, and the god Bishamon (*Vaiśravaṇa*) escorts him to the Pure Land.⁷²

In short, in these collections, the last moment is represented as a realm apart: its rules are not those of this world, nor can it be calculated by ordinary standards. An ideal death is not the monopoly of the highborn, the virtuous, or the socially conforming. Especially in accounts of the *ōjō* of evil men, we see an implicit questioning of a direct causal relation between morality or merit-accumulation and salvation, which was to become one of the dominant themes of Kamakura-period Buddhist thinkers.⁷³

Anxieties and Extreme Acts

As suggested above, the notion of life's last moment as a unique window of liberative opportunity was on one hand a hopeful one; it was linked to, and helped promote, popular doctrines of universal

salvation, especially for those unable to keep the Buddhist precepts or perform demanding practices. Yet precisely because the last moment was seen as discontinuous with ordinary karmic causality, it was also deemed potentially dangerous. That is, even a virtuous Buddhist who had practiced devoutly throughout life could inadvertently negate such accumulated efforts at the last moment by a stray doubt or distracted thought. Hōnen eloquently voices such concerns:

Even though you may have admirably accumulated the merit of the nenbutsu over days and years, if you should meet with some evil influence at the time of death and in the end give rise to evil thoughts, you will lose [the opportunity of] birth in the Pure Land immediately after death and be swept away to suffer in the currents of samsara for another lifetime or two lifetimes. How vexing that would be!⁷⁴

In other words, one had to be concerned that, whether due to insufficiency of training in practice or to a lack of good roots, one might not be able to focus on chanting the nenbutsu when death overtook one. In this sense, the demand for right mindfulness at the last moment could be terrifying.

Sudden or distractingly painful death might, of course, come upon anyone. But for some groups of people this posed a particular danger. Most obvious were the *bushi*, who could be cut down suddenly in battle with no time to fix their minds on the Buddha. We see such concerns reflected in the recorded teachings of religious leaders who counted many warriors among their following, such as Hōnen or Ippen's successor, Shinkyō. Such writings may of course reflect the efforts of Buddhist proselytizers to convince warriors that they were in fact "evil men" in need of salvation, as well as the warriors' own spontaneous concerns. But in either event, Buddhist teachers addressing themselves to *bushi* were often willing to abridge many of the conventions of deathbed ritual. Hōnen, for example, is said to have counseled the samurai Amakasu Tadatsuna as follows:

Since [A]mitābha's original vow was made entirely for the sinful, the sinful person just as he is can achieve birth in the Pure Land by chanting the name. . . . Even someone born into a warrior house who loses his life on the battlefield, if he dies having said the nenbutsu, then, in accordance with the original vow, Amitābha will come to welcome him and he will achieve birth in the Pure Land.⁷⁵

Tadatsuna, a retainer of the Minamoto, is said to have achieved *ōjō* on the battlefield, fighting against the armed monks of Mt. Hiei.⁷⁶

Shinkyō, too, taught his warrior patrons that many of the conventions of deathbed practices could be dispensed with: one need not be reclining or sitting upright, nor was it necessary to place the palms together. One need only chant the nenbutsu, even once:

When you face [the enemy's] military camp, or when you are about to fight a hated foe, your desire to destroy your opponent at all costs must indeed be very powerful. Such [feelings] are karmic causes which should make you fall immediately into the evil realms. But for those who faithfully practice the nenbutsu, since they end their lives after having chanted the name, their sins are extinguished by its sound, and they definitely achieve birth in the Pure Land.⁷⁷

Parenthetically, it should be noted that the sufficiency of a single battlefield nenbutsu was not an idea altogether original to these Kamakura-period teachers. Two twelfth-century *ōjōden* include the example of the warrior Sukeshide, who is struck down by an arrow from behind but achieves birth in the Pure Land by uttering a single *Namu-Amida-butsu*.⁷⁸

While willing to simplify greatly the ritual requirements of the last moment, both Hōnen and Shinkyō stressed the importance of chanting up until the moment of death; Shinkyō in particular is explicit about the absolute necessity of chanting at least one last nenbutsu as one's final conscious act.⁷⁹ This very simplification throws the ambivalence of the *rinjū shōnen* ideal into stark relief: So great is the power of one's dying nenbutsu that it can remove even a warrior's grave karmic hindrances; but if he fails to chant that single nenbutsu, he will at once be dragged down into the evil realms. Fears about inability to chant even a final nenbutsu in the thick of battle led to the emergence, in the Muromachi period, of the *jinsō* mentioned above, who followed their warrior patrons to the battlefield and conferred on them the ten nenbutsu—the traditional basic requirement of *ōjō*—in advance of the fighting.⁸⁰

How could one maximize one's chances of dying with one's mind serenely fixed on the Buddha? Probably the most common strategy was to accumulate enough religious merit during one's life that one would be predisposed to right thoughts at the last moment. Genshin had cited Daochuo on this point: "If a person accumulates good practices, then at death there will be no evil thoughts. When a tree

leans and topples over, it inevitably falls the direction in which it has been bent.”⁸¹ This accounts in large measure for what art historian Willa Tanabe has termed the “merit of surfeit,” a quantitative approach to merit-making seen in an emphasis on reciting the *Lotus Sūtra* hundreds of times, or chanting millions of nenbutsu, or, if one had the means, commissioning dozens of Buddha images or sūtra transcriptions, or tens of thousands of miniature votive stupas.⁸² All such efforts were geared, ultimately, to the final moment, in the hope that virtue accumulated in this life would enable one to meet one’s end with a calm and focused mind. Examples abound: Shōnen, a member of the Nijūgozanmi-e mentioned above, is said to have practiced the Amitābha offering rite (*Mida kuyōhō*) twice daily and chanted the nenbutsu ten thousand times at each of the six divisions of the day and another hundred times together with prostrations at each of the twelve divisions of the day, every day for fifteen years, during which period he also recited the *Lotus Sūtra* 4,200 times.⁸³ Miyoshi no Tameyasu, compiler of two twelfth-century *ōjōden*, is said to have recited the *Heart Sūtra* three hundred times, the nenbutsu ten thousand times, the smaller *Amitābha sūtra* nine times, the *Diamond Wisdom Sūtra* (Skt. *Vajracchedikā-prajñā-pāramitā sutra*, Jpn. *Kongō hannya kyō*) three times, and the invocation of *nyoirin* Kannon a thousand times, every day for the last twelve years of his life.⁸⁴ This quantitative emphasis is especially marked in later Heian *ōjōden*: A monk of Kuramadera chants the nenbutsu twelve thousand times daily for four thousand days (about thirteen years), counting his recitations with small beans. At the end of the period, he has accumulated 287 *koku*, 6 *to* of beans—an amount that Frederic Kotas has calculated at about thirteen thousand dry gallons.⁸⁵ Even Hōnen, while insisting that *ōjō* is achieved through the power of Amitābha’s compassion and not by one’s own amassed merit, nevertheless stressed continual chanting of large quantities of nenbutsu as the practice conforming to Amitābha’s original vow and essential to ensuring that one would be able to chant the nenbutsu at the moment of death. He himself for years chanted the nenbutsu first sixty thousand, and then seventy thousand, times a day. He is even said to have remarked: “Sometimes one dies from choking on food while eating. You should chant *Namu-Amida-butsu* whenever you chew and *Namu-Amida-butsu* whenever you swallow.”⁸⁶

The demand for a proper death encouraged such unremitting efforts in continuous practice and merit accumulation while at the same time undercutting any certainty that such efforts would ultimately be efficacious. The resultant anxiety sheds light on the obsessive quality of much of late Heian aristocratic Buddhist practice. The Pure Land devotions of the nobility have often been characterized as overly aestheticized, preoccupied with ceremony and outward display. But as Nishiguchi Junko writes:

Behind the proliferation of Amida halls, the various Buddhist ceremonies that were conducted, the cultivation of good deeds, the burial of sūtras, pilgrimages, nenbutsu chanting, and sūtra recitation, lay the severe demands of *ōjō*. Unless we understand such phenomena in this light, we do no more than skim the surface of aristocratic Pure Land devotion. Similarly, the quantitative approach to faith that spread among ordinary people should be understood in the same way. For those who chanted the nenbutsu so many hundreds or thousands of times daily, counting their recitations with small beans, such efforts did not in themselves translate into a guarantee of *ōjō*. In the figures of these people, fully aware of this uncertainty and yet continuing to count their beans, we cannot fail to see the distress of those who aspired to the Pure Land.⁸⁷

Some individuals are said to have turned to even greater extremes in coping with the uncertainty of the last moment. Rather than await a natural death, when senility or the pain of illness might interfere with deathbed contemplation, they literally took matters into their own hands and deliberately ended their lives while in full possession of their faculties. The reasoning behind such acts is voiced by a *hijiri* of Mt. Shosha described in the *Hosshinshū* (A collection of religious awakenings) by Kamo no Chōmei (1155–1216), who embarks on a terminal fast: “Although I am deeply resolved to meet death with right mindfulness and so achieve birth in the Pure Land, it is impossible to know how one will die. So I am resolved to cast aside this body now, while no particular deluded thoughts are troubling me and I am free from bodily illness.”⁸⁸ Religious suicide, committed in hopes of quickly achieving the Pure Land (*jigai ōjō*), is especially well documented around the late Heian period, and a range of methods was employed.⁸⁹ Among the most widely publicized was auto-cremation, which has its textual basis in the *Lotus Sūtra*, where a bodhisattva called Beheld with Joy by All Living Beings (Skt. *Sarvasattvapriyadarśana*, Jpn. Issai Shujō Kiken) burns

his body in offering to the sūtra. Auto-cremation in Japan is attested from the late tenth century and was soon assimilated to aspirations for birth in Amitābha's Pure Land, much more consistently so than on the continent.⁹⁰ The *Hokke genki*, for example, relates the case of an unknown monk from Satsuma who resolves to immolate himself as an offering to the three treasures, in emulation of the bodhisattva described in the *Lotus Sūtra*. As he approaches the act, he vows:

"By virtue of my thousand recitations of the [*Lotus*] *Sūtra*, I will surely be born in the land of Utmost Bliss. After my body has burned, there will be marvellous signs." Though no wind was blowing, as his body burned, the smoke rapidly drifted toward the west, and though the skies were clear, purple clouds rose in the east. The monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen who had assembled all shed tears of rejoicing.⁹¹

Drowning was another common method of religious suicide. A preferred spot was in the sea off Shintennōji, a temple founded by Prince Shōtoku on the shore at Naniwa, now Osaka. According to tradition, the western gate of this temple, which faced the ocean, communicated directly with the eastern gate of Amitābha's Pure Land. Devotees habitually gathered there to chant the nenbutsu, and *ōjōnin* would sometimes row out from the western gate and throw themselves into the sea. Again, people gathered to watch, and wondrous signs were recorded.⁹² A particularly poignant case, also described in *Hosshinshū*, is that of a woman of the court, who, grieving over the untimely death of her daughter, goes to Shintennōji and practices intense nenbutsu recitation for twenty-one days. Telling the landlord where she lodges that she wishes to see the famous coast at Naniwa before returning to the capital, she persuades him to row her out to sea, where she faces west, chants the nenbutsu, and flings herself into the waves. Purple clouds rise and envelop the boat, and there is a strange fragrance. A dream diary, discovered in her room, reveals that on the successive weeks of her stay she had dreamed of being welcomed, first by Jizō (Kṣitigarbha) and Ryūju (Nāgārjuna), then by Fugen (Samantabhadra) and Monju (Mañjuśrī), and finally, by the Tathāgata Amitābha and his retinue.⁹³

Religious suicide for the stated purpose of quickly achieving the Pure Land, including such forms as fasting, auto-cremation, self-burial, drowning, and the like, clearly exhibited continuities with earlier forms of ascetic practice, of both Buddhist and non-Bud-

dhist traditions. Tales such as that of the grieving mother who drowns herself in the sea off the Shintennōji also suggest that the explanatory net of "aspiration for the Pure Land" was drawn around suicides that were prompted primarily by grief and thus could otherwise be understood only as delusive and tragic.

Acts of religious suicide did not escape criticism. "Such a thing is not to be done," says the monk Tōren in *Hosshinshū*, voicing a common objection as he remonstrates with the *hijiri* Rengejō against drowning himself. "You would do better to [remain alive and] accumulate the merit of the nenbutsu, even by a single day."⁹⁴ Other critics, however, did not condemn religious suicide per se but raised questions about underlying motives and mental states. In his diary, the courtier Nakayama Tadachika (1131–1195) criticized contemporaneous acts of burning the body as heretical. He argued that the bodhisattva whose self-immolation is described in the *Lotus Sūtra* had already achieved the stage of acquiescence to the unbornness of the dharmas, so such an act was appropriate for him. But when deluded people attempt it, he said, it merely results in karmic retribution.⁹⁵

Witnessing the death of an *ōjōnin*, including an act of religious suicide, was thought to create a karmic tie that would assist one's own birth in the Pure Land. Those intent on such acts would sometimes announce their intentions in advance, drawing crowds of spectators. However, the presence of observers inevitably lent the death an aspect of performance. Concerns were voiced that this performative aspect of religious suicide could lead to egotistic motives of display and the desire to be seen as holy, which could interfere with one's salvation. Tadachika's criticism may in fact have been prompted by the auto-cremation of an ascetic at Funaoka on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, 1174, which "high and low gathered in a crowd" to watch.⁹⁶ By the Kamakura period, cautionary tales began to appear about suicides that go wrong when the individual concerned loses right mindfulness at the crucial moment. Mujō Ichien (1226–1312), in his *Shasekishū* (Collection of sand and pebbles), offers two paired accounts illustrating first the wrong attitude, and then the right attitude, in which to go about religious suicide.⁹⁷ In the first account, a monk of Ōhara, eager to abandon this wretched world, decides to hang himself after observing thirty-seven days of silence. He announces his intentions, and the abbot of his temple, deeply impressed, arranges for several special nenbutsu

services so that others can establish a karmic tie with this holy monk, and also issues invitations to ranking prelates. When the day arrives, the monk's resolve fails him, but, ashamed to back out after all the publicity, he hangs himself anyway. Six months later, the abbot falls ill. He has been possessed by the spirit of the dead man, who has fallen into the demonic realms for his deluded thoughts and is nurturing a grudge because no one prevented his reluctant suicide.

In the second story, an unnamed monk resolves to drown himself in order to quickly reach the Pure Land, and prevails on a companion to row out onto a lake with him to render assistance. He worries, however, that under the discomfort of drowning, delusive thoughts might arise at the last moment and impede his salvation. He has his companion fasten a rope to him, instructing that he will jerk on it if he changes his mind. Once in the water, his resolve wavers; he tugs on the line and is hauled out, dripping. After some days' interval he makes a second, and then a third, unsuccessful attempt. Finally, the day arrives when he dives in and does not jerk on the rope. "In the sky, celestial music was heard and a purple cloud trailed over the waves. When his friend beheld these auspicious signs, tears of gratitude fell with the water dripping from the oars." Here, dignity of performance is humbly sacrificed in the interests of insuring death with right mindfulness, and the monk achieves the Pure Land.

Contestation and Routinization

The beginnings in Japan of concern with a properly ritualized death, leading to birth in Amitābha's Pure Land or other ideal realm, are fairly easy to pinpoint in the *Ōjō yōshū* and the regulations of the Nijūgozanmai-e. Identifying its end, however, is more complex. Deathbed rituals continued to be performed, and instructions for deathbed practice to be compiled and published, throughout the early modern period (1603–1868). It may even be the case that, under the Tokugawa system of mandatory temple registration, deathbed rituals became available at this time to all social classes, as one of the standard ritual functions provided by local priests to their parishioner families. However, concern for dying in a state of right mindfulness does not figure as prominently in early modern literature as it did during the medieval period. Tokugawa-period

texts of deathbed ritual instruction are for the most part simply collections or reworkings of early medieval *rinjū gyōgi* texts and show little new development of content. Although the postmedieval development of deathbed practice requires further study, one might say, at least as a preliminary thesis, that it became routinized.

By the Kamakura period, a number of fault lines and points of contestation were becoming evident in the discourse of death with right mindfulness. A major social factor in this process, as suggested above, was the emergence of warriors as a new and influential body of religious consumers, whose needs mandated some modification of traditional deathbed ritual. Another was the appearance of doctrinal challenges to one or another fundamental component of the *rinjū shōnen* ideal, leading to loss of consensus.

Hōnen, for example, as noted above, maintained the necessity of chanting the nenbutsu up until the moment of death; nevertheless, his conviction that *ōjō* is achieved solely through wholehearted reliance on the "other power" of Amitābha's vow led him to deemphasize the ritual aspects of deathbed practice, especially in his later teachings.⁹⁸ In a famous letter to the nun Shōnyo-bō (d. 1201), a daughter of the retired emperor Goshirakawa, Hōnen—having just embarked on an intensive nenbutsu retreat—declined her request that he visit her in her final illness, explaining that Amitābha would come to welcome those who chanted the nenbutsu in all sincerity, whether a *zenchishiki* was in attendance or not. "You should abandon thought of a *zenchishiki* who is an ordinary worldling, and rely on the Buddha as your *zenchishiki*," he said.⁹⁹ Contrary to the accepted idea that right mindfulness on the part of the dying practitioner is what brings about Amitābha's welcoming descent, Hōnen argued that Amitābha comes to welcome the dying person because he or she has practiced in accordance with the original vow all along, and that it is rather the appearance of Amitābha and his retinue before the dying that induces in them the state of right mindfulness.¹⁰⁰ This reversal of traditional ideas about the *raigō* is linked to Hōnen's radical denial of the by then traditional position that one's deathbed nenbutsu possessed a particular efficacy that it did not have at ordinary times. "How could the nenbutsu at ordinary times be in any way distinguished from the nenbutsu at the moment of death? If one dies while chanting nenbutsu as one's ordinary practice, then that is the deathbed nenbutsu, and if one's deathbed nenbutsu were to be prolonged, it would be the nenbutsu of ordi-

nary times.”¹⁰¹ Hōnen’s reading thus allowed for an abridgment of deathbed formalities, and he understood the deathbed nenbutsu—as he did the nenbutsu in general—less in terms of exerting personal control over one’s last moments than of entrusting oneself to the compassionate power of Amitābha’s vow. According to some biographical accounts, on his own deathbed, Hōnen refused up until the end to seize hold of the cords fastened to the hand of the Buddha image, saying, “That is people’s usual way of practice, but it is not necessarily appropriate for me.”¹⁰² This may have been the reason why his contemporary Jien (1155–1225), the eminent Tendai prelate, criticized Hōnen’s manner of death, saying, “People gathered there [at Ōtani], saying over and over that he had attained the Pure Land, but it is by no means a certain thing. There was nothing remarkable about his deathbed observances, as there was in the case of Zōga Shōnin and others.”¹⁰³

Hōnen’s disciple Shinran, revered as the founder of Jōdo Shinshū, denied the necessity not only of the *chishiki* but of deathbed nenbutsu altogether. In keeping with his understanding of Hōnen’s teaching as one of absolute reliance on the absolute “other power” of Amitābha’s original vow, Shinran understood the decisive moment in one’s salvation to be, not the moment of death, but the moment when—abandoning all calculation and reliance on personal effort and entrusting oneself wholly to Amitābha—one is seized by the power of the Buddha’s compassion, never to be let go, and faith arises in one’s heart: “When faith is established, one’s attainment of the Pure Land is also established; there is no need for deathbed rituals to prepare one for Amitābha’s coming.” He also wrote, “Those whose faith is not yet established are the ones who await Amitābha’s coming at the time of death.”¹⁰⁴

The Jishū organizer Shinkyō, as seen above, insisted on the need for both a *chishiki* and the final nenbutsu. But, as Jonathan Todd Brown has noted, Shinkyō also undercut the tyranny of inauspicious signs by ingeniously arguing that the good or evil omens accompanying a death reflect, not the dead person’s success or failure in achieving the Pure Land, but the good or evil of that person’s deeds in this samsaric realm:

When purple clouds form and flowers fall from the sky, this [indicates] the *ōjō* of a good person. When there are bad omens, this [indicates] the *ōjō* of an evil person. In either case, if the person died

chanting the nenbutsu, then he or she achieved birth in the Pure Land.¹⁰⁵

By shifting the referents of good and evil omens from one’s post-mortem destination to relatively insignificant matters of this life, Shinkyō mitigated some of the fears associated with demands for an ideal death.

Such innovations met with criticism, even within the new Pure Land movements, from those who took a more conservative stance. For example, Benchō (also known as Ben’a or Shōkō, 1162–1238) of the Pure Land Chinzei lineage, the second Jōdoshū patriarch, understood his teacher Hōnen as having mandated the deathbed presence of a *zenchishiki*.¹⁰⁶ Benchō’s own view of deathbed signs was traditional and severe:

A good death is when [the pain of] the last illness abates, so that the dying do not suffer but pass away as though sleeping, with a composed mind and palms pressed together, or when they die saying *Namu-Amida-butsu* as their final words. Or, if purple clouds gather, or if the dying see radiant light or behold a manifestation of the Buddha, that is the highest form of death. . . . A bad death is when they thrash about, spit blood, or become deranged before dying. . . . All such persons fall into the three evil paths. One hears of those who say that whatever the manner of their death, nenbutsu practitioners achieve the Pure Land. But theirs is a distorted understanding of the nenbutsu.¹⁰⁷

Benchō’s very vehemence, along with his reference to those of distorted understanding, suggests that traditional understandings of *rinjū shōnen* were now being contested.

Such contestations did not mean that deathbed practice declined, simply that unanimity on the subject was fragmenting and mechanisms were being devised for coping with some of the more acute anxieties surrounding the demand for right thoughts at the last moment. By the end of the Heian and early Kamakura periods, although stories of ideal deaths continue to appear in tale collections, they are increasingly accompanied by others, some clearly intended to amuse, of people whose death fell short of the mark—suggesting that the ideal was now subject to criticism. By the latter part of the thirteenth century, *ōjōden* ceased to be produced as a genre.¹⁰⁸ This same period also saw the proliferation of great variety of mortuary rituals (*tsuizen kuyō*) performed by survivors on

behalf of the deceased, a development linked to the spread of Buddhism among an increasingly wider social range.¹⁰⁹ Especially among the *bushi*, one notes the growing popularity of *gyakushu*, or “preemptive funerals”—services performed for an individual’s post-mortem welfare but held while he or she was still alive.¹¹⁰ Both *gyakushu* and mortuary ritual aimed at ensuring postmortem welfare but did not depend on the person involved dying in a state of right mindfulness. This was equally true of the standardized funerals that began to spread among people of all classes in the late medieval and early modern period.¹¹¹ Increasingly, the energy of ritual efforts to influence the postmortem state shifted from deathbed practice to funerary ritual. Deathbed practices aimed at birth in the Pure Land, and the ideal of a good death, remained important throughout the medieval and early modern periods, but in a more routinized way, and accompanied by new ritual forms.

Notes

This essay is preliminary to an in-progress booklength study of deathbed practices in medieval Japan. I would like to thank Yasuko Makino, Gail Chin, and Sarah Horton for helping me obtain relevant sources.

1. *Ryōgon-in nijūgozanmai konpon kesshū nijūgonin rensho hotsuganmon*, in *Nijūgozanmai shiki, Dainihon Bukkyō zensho* (hereafter, *DNBZ*), ed. and pub. Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan (Tokyo: 1970–1973), 49.31b. Though this text has been attributed to Genshin, his name does not appear on the list of founding members; thus this attribution was probably made retrospectively.

2. On the *Nijūgozanmai-e* in English, see Richard Bowring, “Preparing for the Pure Land in Late Tenth-Century Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25, nos. 3–4 (1998): 221–257; Paul Groner, “Japanese Tendai Pure Land Organizations in the Late Tenth Century,” in *The “Earthy” Pure Land and Contemporary Society: The Proceedings of the Third Chung-Hwa International Conference on Buddhism*, ed. Sandra Wawrytko (Westport: Greenwood Press, in press); Robert F. Rhodes, “Seeing the Pure Land in Heian Japan: The Practices of the Monks of the Nijūgo Zanmai-e,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 33, no. 1 (2000): 56–79; and Sara Johanna Horton, “The Role of Genshin and Religious Associations in the Mid-Heian Spread of Pure Land Buddhism” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2001), 91–149.

It is not clear whether the group was so named because it had twenty-five members or whether the number of members was set at twenty-five to correspond to the “twenty-five *samādhis*” (*nijūgozanmai*). The “twenty-five *samādhis*” originally referred to twenty-five contemplations aimed at escaping the twenty-five realms of samsaric existence (*Da banniepan jing*, T 12.690b; see also Zhiyi’s *Ssujiao*, T 46.755c–758b, which correlates the twenty-five *samādhis* with stages of the bodhisattva path). Eventually, however, they came to be associated with twenty-five bodhisattvas who protect the believer in Amitābha (*Foshuo shiwangsheng Amituofu guo*

jing, *Xu zangjing* 1, 87.292b verso–293a recto), a view also found in Genshin’s *Ōjō yōshū*, in *Genshin, Nihon shisō taikēi* 6, ed. Ishida Mizumaro (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), 235. In time, these twenty-five bodhisattvas were identified with the bodhisattvas who accompany Amitābha when he descends to escort the dying person to his Pure Land. Against prevailing scholarly opinion that places this development in the Muromachi period (1392–1568), Fujii Chikai argues that its origins can be traced to Genshin’s time (“Nijūgo bosatsu raigō ni tsuite,” *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 12, no. 1 [1964]: 118–123).

3. In 964 Yasutane had played a leading role in establishing an earlier association called the Kangaku-e (Society for the Promotion of Learning), comprising both lay scholars of Chinese history and literature and Tendai monks of Mt. Hiei. The members met twice yearly for lectures on the *Lotus Sūtra*, nenbutsu recitation, and the composition of Chinese poetry, often on Buddhist themes. Since the Kangaku-e ceased to meet around the time of Yasutane’s ordination, the Nijūgozanmai-e has often been considered a successor group to the earlier Kangaku-e, although organized with more explicitly religious aims. However, the relationship between the two societies is far from clear, and, though Yasutane has traditionally been considered the author of the eight-article regulations, he himself appears never to have joined the Nijūgozanmai-e. For a summary of the Japanese scholarship on these issues, see Horton, “The Role of Genshin and Religious Associations,” 94–103.

4. The two sets of regulations are the eight-article *Kishō hachikajō* (*DNBZ* 49.28c–30b; T 84.878b–880b) and the twelve-article *Yokawa Shuryōgon-in nijūgozanmai kishō* (a.k.a. *Jūnikajō*) (*DNBZ* 31.301–305; T 84.876b–878b). The printed versions of these texts are all ultimately derived from a manuscript, possibly dating to the Kamakura period, held at the Chūshōin at Tōdaiji, but they contain numerous discrepancies in titles, misprints, and other errors. These have been detailed in Koyama Masazumi, “Tōdaiji Chūshōin shozō *Yokawa Shuryōgon-in nijūgozanmai* (*Eshin, Yasutane*) *rinjū gyōgi* no saikentō: Sōshobon no goshoku ni yoru mondaiten,” *Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 53 (1997): 56–95. Koyama also provides a critical edition of the two sets of regulations based on the Chūshōin manuscript; the titles *Kishō hachikajō* and *Yokawa Shuryōgon-in nijūgozanmai kishō* as used here follow Koyama’s edition.

5. It has often been assumed that articles four and five of the eight-article regulations, which deal with treatment of the dying, represent a summary of the “deathbed practice” (*rinjū gyōgi*) section of the *Ōjō yōshū*. However, Koyama Masazumi notes that these articles of the *Kishō hachikajō* draw primarily, not from the *Ōjō yōshū*, but from the *Fayuan zhulin* by Daoshi (d. 668?) (*ibid.*, 63–65; see also n. 8 below). Yet, even though the exact nature of the connection between Genshin’s *Ōjō yōshū* and the *Nijūgozanmai-e* documents remains obscure, both clearly reflect an emerging concern with deathbed practice aimed at achieving birth in the Pure Land.

6. *Ōjō yōshū*, in *Genshin*, 206–217. For a partial translation, see James C. Dobbin, “Genshin’s Deathbed Nenbutsu Ritual in Pure Land Buddhism,” in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. George J. Tanabe, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 166–175.

7. *Sifenlü shanfan buque xingshi chao*, T 40.144a; cited in *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 206.

8. *Fayuan zhulin*, T 53.987a; cited in *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 206, although Genshin does not mention this text, or its author, Daoshi, by name. Daoshi and Daoxuan were

close associates, and Daoshi's *Fayuan zhulin* contains a description of purported deathbed practices at the Jetavana monastery very similar to that occurring in Daoxuan's *vinaya* commentary.

9. *Guannian Amitufo xianghai sanmei gongde famen*, T 47.24b; cited in *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 207. Translation from Dobbins, "Genshin's Deathbed Nembutsu Ritual," 169, slightly modified.

10. *Ibid.*, T 47.24b-c, cited in *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 207.

11. *Anluoji*, T 47.11b, cited in *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 208. Translation from Dobbins, "Genshin's Deathbed Nembutsu Ritual," 170, slightly modified.

12. *Wuliangshou jing*, T 12.268a.

13. *Guan wuliangshou fo jing*, T 12.346a.

14. *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 214. Translation from Dobbins, "Genshin's Deathbed Nembutsu Ritual," 174, slightly modified.

15. The calligrapher Fujiwara no Kōzei (972–1027) records in his diary that in 1005, he returned to Michinaga his personal copy of the *Ōjō yōshū*, from which Michinaga had asked him to make a new transcription (*Gonki*, entry for Kankō 2/9/17, in *Zōho shiryō taisei*, ed. Zōho Shiryō Taisei Kankōkai [Tokyo: Rinsen Shoten, 1965], 5:39).

16. *Eiga monogatari*, ed. Matsumura Hiroji and Yamanaka Yutaka, *Nihon koten bungaku taikēi shinsōban* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), 2:325–328; William H. and Helen Craig McCullough, trans., *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 2:762–764. However, Michinaga's serene and dignified death as described in *Eiga monogatari* is at variance with the rather grim account of his agonized last days given by the contemporary diarist Ononomiya Sanesuke (see *Shōyūki* VIII, entries for Manju 4 [1027], 11/10 to 12/4, in *Dainihon kokiroku*, ed. Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo [Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959–1976], 37–45). For discussion, see G. Cameron Hurst III, "Michinaga's Maladies: A Medical Report on Fujiwara no Michinaga," *Monumenta Nipponica* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 101–112; and Hayami Tasuku, *Jigoku to gokuraku: Ōjō yōshū to kizoku shakai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1998), 141–145. Michinaga's case illustrates the broader problem of disjunction between reality and representation in descriptions of idealized deathbed scenes.

17. See Inoue Mitsusada, *Shintei Nihon Jōdokyō seiritsushi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppan, 1975), 189–197.

18. According to a collection of Pure Land biographical accounts compiled around 1134, Genshin inscribed a mandala depicting Amitābha's coming for Taira no Koreshige to use in his deathbed contemplation. The compiler, Miyoshi no Tameyasu, notes: "Probably this was the origin of the spread in our country of mandalas depicting Amitābha descending and welcoming [the dying]" (*Goshūi ōjōden* II:15, in *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, *Zoku Nihon Bukkyō no shisō* 1, new edition of the 1974 *Nihon shisō taikēi* 7, ed. Inoue Mitsusada and Oosone Shōsuke [Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995], 659). This account in turn probably derives from Genshin's biography in the obituaries of the Nijūgozanmai-e, which says that he drew a picture of the *raigō* based on his study of scriptural passages (*Ryōgon-in nijūgozanmai kesshū kakochō*, *Zoku Tendaishū zensho*, ed. Tendai Shūten Hensanjo [Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1987–], *Shiden* 2:289a). For discussion of Genshin's relation to *raigōzu*, see Hayami Tasuku, *Genshin* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1988), 216–220.

19. An example is the famous Kamakura-period "Amitābha crossing the mountain" (*yamagoe no Amida*) painting held by Konkaikōmyōji in Kyoto. For an introduction to Japanese Pure Land art, see, for example, Murayama Shūichi, *Jōdo geijutsu to Mida shinkō* (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1966); and Ōgushi Sumio, *Raigō geijutsu* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1983).

20. *Dainihonkoku Hokekyō kenki* (hereafter, *Hokke genki*) III:83, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 160. For discussion of other early medieval references to the *mukaekō*, see Itō Shintetsu, "Mukaekō no ichi kōsatsu," *Bukkyō bunka kenkyū* 4 (1966): 65–87; and Horton, "The Role of Genshin and Religious Associations," 179–195.

21. *Ryōgon-in nijūgozanmai kesshū kakochō*, *Zoku Tendaishū zensho*, *Shiden* 2:288b.

22. *Rinjū gyōgi*, *Eshin Sōzu zenshū*, ed. Hiezan Senshūin and Eizan Gakuin (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1971), 1:589–600.

23. *Ryōgon-in nijūgozanmai kesshū kakochō*, *Zoku Tendaishū zensho*, *Shiden* 2:285b. Variant accounts occur in *Shūi ōjōden* III:28; *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 387–388; and in *Sange ōjōki* 12, *ibid.*, 673–674. This monk's name appears in these sources variously as Shōnen, Shōkin, or Shōzen.

24. *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 209. Translation from Dobbins, "Genshin's Deathbed Nembutsu Ritual," 170, slightly modified.

25. This work was discovered by Ishii Kyōdō at the Chūshōin of Tōdaiji in Nara. It is part of a composite text, a transcription possibly dating to the Kamakura period with the outer title *Yokawa Shuryōgon-in nijūgozanmai (Eshin, Yasutane) rinjū gyōgi*, consisting of Tanshū's instructions preceded by the two sets of regulations for the Nijūgozanmai-e mentioned in n. 4 above. Its existence suggests a close connection between Tanshū's work and the deathbed protocols of the Nijūgozanmai-e; it also refers explicitly to the *rinjū gyōgi* of "Yokawa Sōzu," or Genshin (*Rinjū gyōgi chūki*, *DNBZ* 49.48a).

26. A version of the *Rishukyō*, an esoteric sūtra recited in a number of ritual contexts. Its recitation was said to remove sins and karmic hindrances and to protect the practitioner from falling into the hells. See Ian Astley, *The Rishukyō: The Sino-Japanese Tantric Prajāpāramitā in 150 Verses (Amoghavajra's Version)* (Tring, England: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1991).

27. *Rinjū gyōgi chūki*, *DNBZ* 49.48a–49b.

28. *Byōchū shugyōki*, *Shingonshū anjin zensho*, ed. Hase Hōshū (Kyoto: Rokudaishinbōsha, 1913–1914), 2:781–785. For discussion, see Ōtani Teruo, "Jichihan *Byōchū shugyōki* ni tsuite," *Bukkyō bunka kenkyū* 13 (1966): 43–58; and Marc Bunjsters, "Jichihan and the Restoration and Innovation of Buddhist Practice," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 1–2 (Spring 1999), 65–69.

29. *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū*, *Kōgyō Daishi senjutsu shū*, rev. ed., ed. Miyasaka Yūshō (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1989), 1:172. Although some researchers have questioned Kakuban's authorship, scholarly consensus generally holds this work to be authentic.

30. On this theme see Ikemi Chōryū, "Rinjū nembutsu kō: Kiku, kikaseru," *Nihongaku* 10 (Dec. 1987): 199–208.

31. *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū*, *Kōgyō Daishi senjutsu shū*, 1:173–174. This represents Kakuban's esoteric reading of the *nissōkan*, or contemplation of the [setting] sun, the first of sixteen meditations leading to birth in Amida's Pure Land set forth in

the *Guan wuliangshou fo jing* (T 12.341c–342a). On Kakuban's deathbed instructions, see Tachibana Nobuo, "Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū ni okeru 'rinjū gyōgi' ni tsuite," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 36, no. 2 (1988): 611–613. On the *himitsu nenbutsu* tradition generally, see James H. Sanford, "Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu," in *Esoteric Buddhism in Japan*, ed. Ian Astley (Copenhagen and Aarhus: Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1994), 25–52.

32. This text has been reproduced in Itō Shintetsu, *Nihon Jōdokyō bunkashi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ryūbunkan, 1975), 440–461; and in Tamayama Jōgen, "Ryōchū no Kanbyō yōjin shō ni tsuite," in *Ryōchū Shōnin kenkyū*, ed. Ryōchū Shōnin Kenkyūkai (Kamakura: Daihonzan Kōmyōji, 1986), 339–355. For discussion, see, for example, Suzuki Jōgen, "Kanbyō yōjin shō ni tsuite," *Nihon rekishi* 139 (Jan. 1960): 105–118; Kuge Noboru, "Ryōchū Shōnin ni okeru rinjū gyōgi no sōshō," in *Genchi, Benchō, Ryōchū: San shōnin kenkyū*, ed. San Shōnin Goonki Kinen Shuppankai (Kyoto: Dōbōsha, 1987), 245–274; and Sasada Kyōshō, "Kanbyō yōjin shō no ichi kōsatsu: Mitori no ishiki to zenchishiki no yakuwari o megutte," *ibid.*, 361–394.

33. *Kanbyō yōjin*, in *Nihon Jōdokyō bunkashi kenkyū*, 456; Tamayama, "Ryōchū no Kanbyō yōjin shō ni tsuite," 348. The text says "one or two hours": the day was divided into twelve hours, so this would be two for four hours by our current way of measuring time. Scholarly discussions of the *Kanbyō yōjin shō* sometimes note a similar passage in the *Rinjū no yōi* attributed to Gedatsu-bō Jōkei (1155–1213): "When the dying person's life has ended, you should chant in his ear for at least two hours. Although he may to outward appearances be dead, consciousness may remain, or the spirit may not have departed but be lingering near the dead person. Even if he should be destined for the evil paths, because he hears the name, he may be born in the Pure Land even from the interim state" (*Nihon daizōkyō*, 51 vols., ed. Naka Takkei et al. [Tokyo: Nihon Daizōkyō Hensankai, 1914–1919], 64:25b). However, Jōkei's authorship is problematic, and this may be a considerably later text (see Mitake Moritsuna, "Chūsei no rinjū gyōgi to Myōe," *Ōkurayama ronshū* 44 [1999]: 22–25).

34. *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū, Kōgyō Daishi senjutsu shū*, 1:173.

35. *Kanbyō yōjin*, *Nihon Jōdokyō bunkashi kenkyū*, 447; Tamayama, "Ryōchū no Kanbyō yōjin shō ni tsuite," 340.

36. Hōnen is said to have acted as *chishiki* at the deathbed of his disciple Shin-kan-bō Kansei (see *Shōkō-bō ni shimesarekeru onkotoba* and *Jakue Shōnin tsutaekiki no onkotoba*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, ed. Ishii Kyōdō [Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1955], 747, 769). The diary of Kujō Kaneyane records that Hōnen ("Kurodani Shōnin") served as *zenchishiki* to a courtier and lay monk known as Kunitsuna Nyūdō (*Gyokuyō*, entry for Jishō 5 [1181], 2 (intercalary)/23, ed. and pub. Kokusho Kankōkai [Tokyo: 1906], 2:490a). According to the forty-eight fascicle biography, Hōnen attended the deathbed of the retired emperor Goshirakawa and of Fujiwara no Tsunemune, Minister of the Left, and also dispatched his disciples Anraku and Jūren to serve in this capacity for Gon-no-daibu Takanobu no Ason (*Jōdoshū zensho* [Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1970–1972], 16:201b, 214a–b, 215b–216a). However, Tamura Enchō has noted that the monk who attended Goshirakawa as *zenchishiki* was not Hōnen but one Honjō-bō Tankyō (a.k.a. Tangō) of Ōhara (*Hōnen Shōnin den no kenkyū* [Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1972], 143–144).

37. Jonathan Todd Brown, "Warrior Patronage, Institutional Change, and Doctrinal Innovation in the Early Jishū" (Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 1999). See, for example, pp. 198–210, 400–407.

38. On the battlefield practice of Jishū clerics, see Ōhashi Shunnō, *Ippen to Jishū kyōdan* (Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1978), 143–151; Imari Masaharu, *Chūsei shakai to Jishū no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1985), 365–378; Sybil Anne Thorton, "The Propaganda Tradition of the Yūgyō Ha: The Campaign to Establish the Jishū as an Independent School of Japanese Buddhism (1300–1700)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1988), 76–111; and Brown, "Warrior Patronage, Institutional Change, and Doctrinal Innovation in the Early Jishū," 444–446.

39. *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* is translated in Peter Michael Wetzler, "Yoshishige no Yasutane: Lineage, Learning, Office and Amida's Pure Land" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1977), 193–266. For a recent study, see Hirabayashi Moritoku, *Yoshishige no Yasutane to Jōdo shisō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001), 71–98.

40. In the Heian period, Yasutane's *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* was followed by Ōe no Masafusa's *Zoku honchō ōjōden*; Miyoshi no Tameyasu's *Shūi ōjōden* and *Goshūi ōjōden*; Renzen's *Sange ōjōki*; and Fujiwara no Munetomo's *Honchō shinshū ōjōden*, all from the twelfth century. These collections are included in *Ōjōden, Hokke genki*, cited in n. 18 above), as is the *Dainihonkoku Hokekyō kenki*, which, while not exclusively an *ōjōden* collection, contains many such stories. Kamakura-period *ōjōden* include Nyojaku's *Kōyasan ōjōden* and Shōren's *Mii ōjōden*, dealing with accounts of the *ōjō* of monks of Mt. Kōya and Onjōji, respectively, and also Gyōsen's late thirteenth-century *Nenbutsu ōjōden*, which appears to have been influenced by Hōnen's thought. The *Kōyasan* and *Nenbutsu ōjōden* appear in *Ōjōden, Hokke genki*; *Mii ōjōden* is in *Zoku Tendaishū zensho, Shiden 2*. Individual *ōjōden* accounts also appear in various *setsuwa* (tale) collections, such as *Hosshinshū* and *Konjaku monogatari shū* (vol. 15).

41. *Jingtu lun*, T 47.97a, cited in Yasutane's introduction to *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki, Ōjōden, Hokke genki*, 11. Yasutane's wording of this passage differs slightly from the Taishō version of the *Jingtu lun*. On the perceived value of compiling such accounts for strengthening one's own merit conducive to birth in the Pure Land, see Frederic J. Kotas, "Ōjōden: Accounts of Rebirth in the Pure Land" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1987), 35, 302–305.

42. *Ōjō yōshū, Genshin*, 296.

43. Takagi Yutaka, *Heian jidai Hokke Bukkyōshi kenkyū* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1973), 451–463.

44. Takagi notes that *ōjōden* accounts of *Lotus Sūtra* recitation as a deathbed practice always describe the dying person as completing recitation of the sūtra, or of individual chapters, before passing away. Takagi suggests that, whether this was indeed the case or the product of editorial intervention, it reflects an importance placed on proper completion of the deathbed practice (*ibid.*, 462).

45. See Ishida Mizumaro, *Ōjō no shisō* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1968), 237–246.

46. *Ibid.*, 229–230, 238. The *Shi-er li* verses (*Xu zangjing* 1, 2:195a *recto*–*verso*) were incorporated into influential Pure Land texts, including Shandao's *Wangsheng lizan ji* (T 47.442a–c) and the *Nijūgozanmai shiki* (DNBZ 49.32a–33c).

47. *Dafanguang fo huayen jing* (T 10.102a–b). This is an example of a subset of *hajigokumon* whose content deals with the emptiness of the dharmas. As *hajigokumon*, however, they were understood less as philosophical propositions than as magical incantations able literally to "empty" situations of fear and suffering.

48. *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T 9.35a; *Wuliangshou jing*, T 12.273a.

49. *Kanbyō yōjin*, *Nihon Jōdokyō bunkashi kenkyū*, 454; Tamayama, "Ryōchū no *Kanbyō yōjin shō* ni tsuite," 346. Ryōchū's *hajigokumon* consist of verses taken from Shandao's *Wangsheng lizan ji* (T no. 1980) and *Banzhou ji* (T no. 1981).

50. For examples, see Ishida, *Ōjō no shisō*, 235–236.

51. *Rinjū gyōgi chūki*, *DNBZ* 49.48c; *Kōyōshū*, *DNBZ* 43.28a. Kakuban's authorship of the *Kōyōshū* is unlikely, and this is almost certainly a later text, perhaps from the Kamakura period.

52. Ishida, *Ōjō no shisō*, 228.

53. *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* I:6, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 21. Translation from Kotas, "Ōjōden," 325.

54. In surveying the 346 accounts contained in the six major *ōjōden* collections, Nishiguchi Junko finds 72 examples of precognitive dreams and 116 examples of revelatory dreams after the person's death ("Jōdo ganshōsha no kunō: Ōjōden ni okeru kizui to mukoku," *Ōjōden no kenkyū*, ed. Kōten Isan no Kai [Tokyo: Shindokusho-sha, 1968], 140). For discussion of dreams as indices to *ōjō*, see also Ishida Mizumaro, *Ōjō no shisō*, 266–273; and Kotas, "Ōjōden," 272–279.

55. *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 19, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 241.

56. *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 53.

57. T 19.574a, cited in *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū*, *Kōgyō Daishi senjutsu shū*, 1:174–176.

58. *Heike monogatari*, ed. Takagi Ichinosuke et al., *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 32 (1959; reprint, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 1:406–410; Helen Craig McCullough, trans., *The Tale of the Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 209–212.

59. *Nomori no kagami*, *Gunsho ruijū* (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1939–1943), no. 484, 27:481a.

60. Fragment no. 200, *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, rev. ed., *Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo* (Minobu-chō, Yamanashi prefecture: Minobusan Kuonji, 1988), 4:2925.

61. *Myōhō-ama gozen gohenji*, *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun* 2:1535.

62. An extreme case concerns a monk from Higo who achieves the Pure Land despite the intentions of his wife, who confesses to having served him over many lifetimes solely in order to obstruct his enlightenment (*Shūi ōjōden* III:20, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 375; Kotas, "Ōjōden," 508–509). Nishiguchi Junko has also called attention to other *ōjōden* accounts of men who abandon their wives shortly before dying or bar their daughters from their deathbed (*Onna no chikara* [Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987], 10–11).

63. *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 12 and 13, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 237–238.

64. *Sange ōjōki* 36, *ibid.*, 678–679.

65. *Hokke genki* III:121, *ibid.*, 205–206; *Shūi ōjōden* II:29, *ibid.*, 347.

66. *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 11. Yasutane is probably referring to accounts 38 and 39 (*Wangsheng xifang jingtu ruiying zhuan*, T 50.107c).

67. *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 35, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 249–250.

68. *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 36, *ibid.*, 250. The claim that even those who commit the ten evils and five perverse offenses can achieve birth in the Pure Land if they complete ten deathbed thoughts of the Buddha appears in the *Guan wuliangshou fo jing* (T 12.346a). However, this contradicts the text of the eighteenth vow, which specifically excludes from the Pure Land those guilty of the five perverse offenses (*Wuliang-*

shou jing, T 12.268a). For an example of the struggles of Pure Land thinkers to reconcile the two positions, see Chap. 10 of the *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 292–296). Although he cites a range of interpretations, Genshin himself declined to make a categorical pronouncement as to whether or not those guilty of the ten evils and five perverse offenses can achieve *ōjō*. However, the more lenient position would eventually prevail in the Japanese Pure Land tradition.

69. *Sange ōjōki* 40, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 679.

70. Obara Hitoshi, "Heian makki ni okeru akunin ōjō shisō ni tsuite," *Nihon bukkyō* 49 (1979), esp. 8–12.

71. See, for example, Kikuchi Ryōichi, "Inseiki ōjōden setsuwa," *Bungaku* (March 1954): 53–60. This issue is linked to the broader and much disputed question of social factors contributing to the spread of Pure Land practices in the latter Heian. For a summary of some of the major arguments, see Hayami Tasuku, *Jōdokyō shinkōron* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1978), 89–104.

72. *Shūi ōjōden* III:5, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 363–364.

73. Because *ōjōden* tend to identify evil with outward behaviors often specific to particular professions or classes, the *akunin ōjō* thought implicit in these collections has sometimes been compared unfavorably with the doctrine that the evil person is the chief object of Amida's compassion (*akunin shōki*), associated with the exclusive Pure Land movements of Hōnen and Shinran, which sees evil as a universal existential condition. See Obara Hitoshi, "Heian makki ni okeru akunin ōjō shisō ni tsuite," and Kunisaki Fumimaro, "Akunin ōjōbanashi," in *Ōjōden no kenkyū*, 30–48. Although such differences in the definition of "evil" between Heian-period *ōjōden* and later Kamakura-period thinkers must certainly be acknowledged, this evaluation readily lends itself to an evolutionary model of Japanese Pure Land thought that privileges the Kamakura founders as normative. Both *ōjōden* accounts of the salvation of evil men and the later *akunin shōki* doctrine are linked to an increasingly widespread trend in medieval Japanese Buddhism that regarded salvation or liberation as transcending a strict moral calculus of ordinary good and evil deeds—a development by no means limited to the Pure Land tradition.

74. *Shichikajō no kishōmon*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 814.

75. *Amakasu Tarō Tadatsuna ni shimesu onkotoba*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 717.

76. For an account of Tadatsuna's *ōjō*, see *Hōnen Shōnin denki*, *Jōdoshū zensho* 17:172b–175a. This account was later incorporated into the forty-eight fascicle biography, *Hōnen Shōnin gyōjō ezu*, and is translated in Harper Havelock Coates and Ishizuka Ryūgaku, *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint* (Kyoto: Chion-in, 1925), 475–477.

77. *Ta-a Shōnin Hōgo*, ed. Ōhashi Shunnō (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1975), 237. Translation from Brown, "Warrior Patronage, Institutional Change, and Doctrinal Innovation in the Early Jishū," 327, slightly modified.

78. *Goshūi ōjōden* III:8, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 664–665; *Honchō shinshū ōjōden* 8, *ibid.*, 684–685.

79. For Shinkyō's insistence on the final nenbutsu, see Brown, "Warrior Patronage, Institutional Change, and Doctrinal Innovation in the Early Jishū," 330–340.

80. See n. 38 above. One also wonders whether the demand for a ritually correct death affected women of childbearing years. Mortality in childbirth was high, and a woman went to her delivery not knowing if she would survive. Difficulties in labor

were attributed to malevolent possessing spirits, and childbirth sometimes was ritualized as a scene of exorcism. A symbolic tonsure—a slight shaving of the head—was sometimes administered to imperial women undergoing difficult delivery, presumably with the idea that, should they die in labor, it would be advantageous to their salvation to die as nuns. (See, for example, *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*, in *Makura no sōshi*, *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*, *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 19, ed. Ikeda Kikan, Kishigami Shinji, and Akiyama Ken [Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958], 449–450; Richard Bowring, trans., *The Diary of Lady Murasaki* [London and New York: Penguin, 1996], 55. I am indebted to Hitomi Tonomura for calling this passage to my attention.) This seems to have been part of a broader practice among Heian aristocrats of “deathbed tonsure,” or *rinjū shukke* (see Mitsunashi Tadashi, *Heian jidai no shinkō to shūkyō girei* [Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 2000], 597–668). In cases of childbirth, however, ritual attention appears to have been directed primarily to the child’s safe delivery. Although some *ōjōden* describe the ideal deaths of young women occurring some days or weeks after delivery (e.g., the wife of Minamoto no Tadaomi, *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 42, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 252–253), thus far, I have yet to find any early medieval discussion of death in childbirth in direct connection with ritualized deathbed practice; my suspicion, to be tested against further research, is that the aims of safe childbirth and of death with right mindfulness belonged to separate fields of ritual concern.

At the same time, one finds very few explicit references from the period under discussion suggesting that death in childbirth was thought in itself to hinder a woman’s salvation. The early Heian text *Nihon ryōiki*, tale III:9, mentions a woman who died in connection with pregnancy and fell into hell, but does not make clear whether the two events were causally related (*Nihon ryōiki*, *Nihon koten zensho* 96, ed. Takeda Yūichi [Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1954], 205; Kyoko Motomochi Nakamura, trans., *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon Ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973], 234). Hōnen, when asked whether death in childbirth constitutes a sin, is said to have replied only that such a woman would achieve the Pure Land if she chanted the nenbutsu (*Ippyaku shijūgokajō mondō*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 664). Hank Glassman sees such scattered references as constituting a “pre-history” to the notion that death in childbirth is sinful, which would become established around the fifteenth century and develop during the early modern period in connection with the cult of the *Blood Pool Sūtra* (*Ketsubonkyō*) (“The Religious Construction of Motherhood in Medieval Japan” [Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2001], 141; see also Glassman’s essay in this volume).

81. *Anluoji*, T 47.11b (a near identical statement occurs earlier in Tanluan’s [c. 476–542] *Lüelun anluo jingtuoyi*, T 47.3c). Both texts represent this as a statement made by the Buddha. Cited in *Ōjō yōshū*, *Genshin*, 208; translation from Dobbins, “Genshin’s Deathbed Nembutsu Ritual,” 170, slightly modified.

82. Willa J. Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus Sutra* (New York: Weatherhill, 1988), 24–28.

83. *Ryōgon-in nijūgozanmai kesshū kakochō*, *Zoku Tendaishū zensho*, *Shiden* 2:285a–b.

84. *Honchō shinshū ōjōden* 22, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 687. Frederic Kotas suggests that Tameyasu’s compilation of two *ōjōden* collections was also motivated in part by

personal anxieties about achieving birth in the Pure Land and a desire to establish proof that *ōjō* was indeed possible (“*Ōjōden*,” 149–150).

85. *Honchō shinshū ōjōden* 25, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 688; Kotas, “*Ōjōden*,” 185.

86. *Tsune ni ōserarekeru onkotoba*, *Shōwa Shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 493. See also the very similar statement attributed to Hōnen in *Ichigon hōdan*, *Gunsho ruijū* no. 840, 28 (1): 290a.

87. “*Jōdo ganshōsha no kunō*,” 156–157.

88. *Hosshinshū* III:7, *Hōjōki*, *Hosshinshū*, *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei* 25, ed. Miki Sumito (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1976), 143.

89. See Yoshida Yasuo, “Shashingyō no tenkai to sono shisō,” *Nihon kodai no bosatsu to minshū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1988), 187–222. The appropriateness of the word “suicide” in this context is much disputed, given its modern pathological overtones. Here it is used in the minimalist sense of a death whose proximate cause is the individual’s own action; no assumptions about agency, intent, or inner states are implied.

90. According to Chingen, compiler of the eleventh-century *Hokke genki*, the first case of auto-cremation in Japan was that of the monk Ōshō, an ascetic of Mt. Nachi, who burned himself as an offering to the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Hokke genki* I:9, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 64–65; Yoshiko Kurata Dykstra, trans., *Miraculous Tales of the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Dainihonkoku Hokekyō kenki of Priest Chingen* [Osaka: Kansai University of Foreign Studies, 1983], 38–39). However, since Ōshō’s dates are unknown, this claim is difficult to verify. For several cases attested prior to the compilation of *Hokke genki*, see Yoshida, *Nihon kodai no bosatsu to minshū*, 209; these are mentioned in court diary entries that give no indication as to motive. In the account of Ōshō’s auto-cremation, the only suggestion of a connection to Pure Land devotion is that he seats himself on the pyre facing west. Subsequent accounts, however, almost invariably present burning the body as a practice directed toward *ōjō*. For auto-cremation in the Chinese Buddhist context, see Jacques Gernet, “Les suicides par le feu chez les bouddhistes chinois du V^e au X^e siècle,” *Mélanges publiés par l’Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises*, no. 2 (Paris, 1960), 527–558; Jun Yün-hua, “Buddhist Self-immolation in Medieval China,” *History of Religions* 4, no. 2 (1965): 243–268; and James A. Benn, “Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an Apocryphal Practice in Chinese Buddhism,” *History of Religions* 37, no. 4 (1998): 295–322; and “Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001).

91. *Hokke genki* I:15, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 72.

92. Kubota Jun, “Tennōji to ōjōtachi,” in *Ronsan setsuwa to setsuwa bungaku*, ed. Nishio Kōichi Kyōju Teinen Kinen Ronshū Kankōkai (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 1979), 215–229.

93. *Hosshinshū* III:6, *Hōjōki*, *Hosshinshū*, 139–142.

94. *Hosshinshū* III:8, *ibid.*, 149.

95. *Kirei mondō*, *Gunsho ruijū* no. 139, 9:450a–b.

96. *Hyakuren shō* 8, entry for Shōan 4 (1174), 7/15, *Shintei zōho kokushi taikai*, ed. Kuroita Katsumi and Kokushi Taikai Henshūkai (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1929–1966), 12:90. Ishida Mizumaro has suggested that the timing of this incident corresponds to Tadachika’s criticism (*Ōjō no shisō*, 299, n. 44).

97. *Shasekishū* 4:7, 4:8, *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 85, ed. Watanabe Tsunaya

(1966; reprint, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 190–193; Robert E. Morrell, trans., *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 148–150.

98. Hōnen's teachings on this point are not entirely consistent; in some cases he is on record as approving both the presence of a *chishiki* and the traditional accoutrements of deathbed ritual, such as the five-colored cords. However, especially in the period of his life following the writing of the *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū*, Hōnen's declaration of the invocational nenbutsu as the only valid path of salvation in the Final Dharma age, he seems to have denied the need for such outward formalities. For Hōnen's understanding of deathbed nenbutsu, see, for example, Suzuki Jōgen, "Rinjū gyōgi ni tsuite," *Jōdogaku* 27 (1960): 393–419; Itō Shintetsu, "Jōdokyō girei to Hōnen Shōnen," in his *Nihon Jōdokyō bunkashi kenkyū*, 46–65; and Nabe-shima Naoki, "Hōnen ni okeru shi to kanbyō no mondai," parts 1 and 2, *Ryūkoku Daigaku ronshū* 434–435 (1989): 137–155; 436 (1990): 272–299. These studies, however, stress Hōnen's rejection of deathbed formalities but do not address his emphasis on the need to continue chanting up until the last moment, as suggested in the passages cited in nn. 74 and 86 above.

99. *Shōnyo-bō e tsukawasu onfumi*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 545. See also *Ippiyaku shijūgokajō mondō*, *ibid.*, 657, which denies the need for a *zenchishiki* at one's deathbed.

100. See, for example, *Gyakushu seppō*, *Ōgo no Tarō Sanehide e tsukawasu gohenji*, *Ōjō jōdo yōjin*, *Jōdoshū ryakushō*, and *Seizanha Gyōkan Gyōe shoden no onkotoba*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 276, 520–522, 562–564, 596–597, and 778, respectively.

101. *Nenbutsu ōjō yōgi shō*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 686. See also *Sanjin ryōkan oyobi gohōgo*, *ibid.*, 453.

102. See, for example, *Gorinjū no toki montei tō ni shimesarekeru onkotoba*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 724–725. However, the nine-fascicle biography says that Hōnen held the cords only for the sake of others (*Hōnen Shōnin denki*, *Jōdoshu zensho*, 17:210b). Another staple feature of accounts of Hōnen's last hours is his awareness of the presence of Amitābha, invisible to his disciples, on whom he focused, rather than on the Buddha image enshrined by his bedside. For variant accounts, see *Hōnen Shōnin den no seiritsushiteki kenkyū*, vol. 2 (*Taishōhen*), ed. Hōnen Shōnin Den Kenkyūkai (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1991), 271.

103. *Gukanshō*, *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 86, ed. Okami Masao and Akamatsu Toshihide (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 295. The reason for the specific reference to Zōga is not clear. Zōga's ideal death is described in *Hokke genki* III:82, *Ōjōden*, *Hokke genki*, 158–159; *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 12, *ibid.*, 238; and *Konjaku monogatari shū* XII:3, *Shin Nihon bungaku taikei* 35, ed. Ikegami Jun'ichi (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), 3:183–185.

104. *Mattō shō* 1 and 18, *Shinran chosaku zenshū*, ed. Kaneko Daie (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1964), 580, 608.

105. *Ta'a Shōnin hōgo*, ed. Ōhashi Shunno (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1975), 184. Translation from Brown, "Warrior Patronage, Institutional Change, and Doctrinal Innovation in the Early Jishū," 328, slightly modified.

106. "At the time of death, *ikkō* practitioners should make use of a *zenchishiki*.

That is what Hōnen Shōnin instructed" (*Shōkō-bō ni shimesarekeru onkotoba*, *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū*, 747).

107. *Nenbutsu myōgishū* 3, *Jōdoshū zensho* 10:380a–b.

108. *Ōjōden* collections were again compiled in the Edo period. However, my cursory impression—to be tested by further research—is that these early modern collections reflect a very different ethos from those of the Heian period, stressing conformity to moral and social norms as characteristic of *ōjōnin*. For early modern *ōjōden*, see for example Kasahara Kazuo, *Kinsei ōjōden shūsei*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1978–1980).

109. For a survey of these developments, see Janet Goodwin, "Shooing the Dead to Paradise," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989): 63–80.

110. On the development of *gyakushu*, see for example Kawakatsu Shōtarō, "Gyakushu shinkō no reikishiteki kenkyū," *Ōtemae Joshi Daigaku ronshū* 6 (1972): 147–165. Kawakatsu argues that, with increased patronage by well-to-do warriors and local landholders, the form of *gyakushu* shifted in the Kamakura period from the elaborate ceremonies sponsored by nobles to the erection of small commemorative stone tablets or Buddha images. "Preemptive funeral" is Willa Tanabe's translation (*Paintings of the Lotus Sutra*, 40).

111. On the development of late medieval and early modern funerals, beginning with the Zen sect, see, for example, Tamamuro Taijō, *Sōshiki Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1963); William M. Bodiford, "Zen Funerals," in *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 185–208; and Duncan Ryūkan Williams, "Representations of Zen: An Institutional and Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Edo Japan" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000), esp. Chap. 5, "Funerary Zen," 162–207.