

Genshin's Interpretation of the
Nembutsu as found in the *Ōjōyōshū*:

The Five Gates of Remembrance as a
Paradigm for Nembutsu Practice

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1. Introduction	105
2. Veneration	107
3. Praise.....	112
4. Vows	116
5. Contemplation	127
6. Merit Transference	150
7. Conclusion	153

1. Introduction

The *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 written by the Heian period Tendai monk Genshin 源信 (942-1017; also known as Eshin sōzu 恵心僧都) is a seminal work in the history of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. In this work, Genshin presents a comprehensive outline of Pure Land Buddhist cosmology and practice. As is well known, this form of Buddhism teaches the faithful to aspire to birth in the Land of Supreme Bliss (Sukhāvātī in Sanskrit, Gokuraki 極楽 in Japanese), the Pure Land of Amida Buddha, in the next life. In the authoritative texts of this tradition, Amida's Pure Land is depicted as a transcendental paradise, a delightful land where one enjoys innumerable pleasures and is free from all suffering and anxiety. Moreover, since the Pure Land constitutes the field of Amida Buddha's enlightened influence, it provides an ideal environment for practicing the Buddhist path. Hence, once born in that land, there is no turning back from enlightenment. People born there are all without fail guaranteed the attain of enlightenment.

How, then, can one be born in the Land of Supreme Bliss? In a key passage in the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin claims that, "Among the practices for birth (in the Pure Land), the nembutsu 念仏 is fundamental" (T 84, 67a). In his view, practices other than the nembutsu (including faith in the *Hua-yen Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra* and other Mahāyāna sūtras and recitation of certain esoteric Buddhist dhāraṇīs) can, in fact, lead to birth in the Pure Land.¹ But, according to Genshin, the nembutsu is the fundamental Pure Land practice for the following reason. He states,

In recommending the nembutsu, I do not intend to reject the various other sublime practices. However this (nembutsu practice) does not distinguish among males and females, nobles and commoners, or

(whether one is) walking, standing, sitting or lying down. It does not take into consideration time, place or conditions (for practicing it). It is not difficult to practice. And so on up to, when one vows and seeks birth when one faces one's death, there is nothing superior to the nembutsu in bringing it about. (T 84, 76c)

In other words, the nembutsu is to be encouraged because it is an easy practice that can be undertaken by all people at all times. It does matter when, where or how it is practiced. It can be done by both males and females, nobles and commoners, and in any posture — whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down. Indeed, it is the most effective practice available to people facing imminent death, for it can be conducted with ease even when confronted with the pain and anxiety which accompanies death.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate Genshin's view of the nembutsu practice as found in the *Ōjōyōshū's* fourth chapter, entitled “Proper Practice of the Nembutsu” (*shōshū nembutsu* 正修念仏). There he discusses the nembutsu practice using the scheme of the Five Gates of Remembrance (*gonenmon* 五念門), or the five entries (or pathways) from which to approach the nembutsu practice. The Five Gates are :

- (1) veneration (*raihai* 禮拜)
- (2) praise (*santan* 讚歎)
- (3) vows (*sagan* 作願)
- (4) contemplation (*kanzatsu* 觀察)
- (5) merit transference (*ekō* 廻向)

As this indicates, the nembutsu for Genshin was not the simple recitation of the phrase “Namu Amida Butsu” (which is how it is generally understood in Japan today), but a whole complex of practice consisting of these five elements.

The scheme of the Fives Gates derives from Vasubandhu's *Pure Land Treatise*.² The *Pure Land Treatise* is one of eighteen works Genshin

specifically mentions in the *Ōjōyōshū* as important texts for the Pure Land tradition (T 84, 88c–89a). Unfortunately, neither the Sanskrit text nor a Tibetan translation of the treatise are extant. It appears that this work made little impact on South Asian Buddhism. In contrast, after its translation into Chinese by Bodhiruci in 529, the *Pure Land Treatise* came to hold an important position within the East Asian Pure Land tradition. Soon after its translation, T'an-luan (476–542) composed a two chüan commentary popularly known as the *Ching t'u lun chu* 淨土論註 (*Commentary on the Pure Land Treatise*).³ The Five Gates of Remembrance are discussed in Shan-tao's 善導 (613–681) *Wang shang li tsan chieh* 往生禮讚偈 (*Verses in Praise of Birth in the Pure Land*; T 47, 438c) and Hui-kuan's 懷感 (dates unknown; died late seventh century) *Shih ching t'u ch'ün i lun* 釋淨土群疑論 (*Explication of Doubts Concerning the Pure Land*; T 47, 39c). After the *Pure Land Treatise* was transmitted to Japan, a commentary in five fascicles was written on it by the Nara period monk Chikō 智光 (?–c. 776).⁴

Although Genshin employs the Five Gates of Remembrance to structure the nembutsu practice, it is important to note here that his interpretation of the Five Gates is often substantially different from that found in the *Pure Land Treatise* itself. A comparison of the Five Gates as found in the *Ōjōyōshū* with that found in *Pure Land Treatise* will help clarify some of the distinctive features of Genshin's understanding of the nembutsu practice.⁵

2. Veneration

Genshin begins his discussion of veneration in the *Ōjōyōshū* with the following words.

Veneration is the physical action which involves all of the triple actions. It is to take single-minded refuge in Amida Buddha, throw the five limbs to the ground, and pay obeisance (*vai* 禮) to Amida Buddha far off in

the western direction. It does not matter whether it is done few times or many times ; only do it in sincerity. (T 84, 48a)

Here Genshin describes veneration as the act of throwing the five limbs to the ground in veneration of Amida Buddha, i. e., the act of prostrating oneself in such a way that the five limbs — arms, legs and forehead — touch the ground. However, the definition of veneration found in the *Pure Land Treatise* is less elaborate.

How should we venerate? We are to venerate Amida, the Tathāgata, Arhat and Samyaksambuddha,⁶ through physical actions. This is because we desire to be born in his land. (T 26, 231b)

As this shows, the explanation of veneration found in the *Ōjōyōshū* differs substantially from that found in the *Pure Land Treatise*. First, although the *Pure Land Treatise* specifies that Amida Buddha should be made the object of veneration in Pure Land practice, it does not state how one should venerate the Buddha. In contrast, the *Ōjōyōshū* describes veneration as the ritual act of prostrating oneself before Amida.

Second, in the *Pure Land Treatise*, veneration is treated as the physical act of venerating Amida Buddha. In contrast, Genshin defines veneration as a physical act which simultaneously involves all of one's threefold actions: physical, vocal and mental. In his view, although veneration refers primarily to the bodily act of prostrating oneself before the Buddha, it must also be accompanied by appropriate vocal and mental actions as well, presumably the chanting of praise and single-minded concentration on Amida Buddha.

For Genshin, the act of veneration must involve the entire person if it is to be truly effective. In particular, the mental attitude underlying the act of veneration is of utmost importance in determining its efficacy. This point is underscored in the final line from his quotation above: "It does not matter whether it is done few times or many times ; only do it in sincerity." In

other words, even if one offers ritual obeisance to the Buddha by throwing oneself on the ground, if it is done mechanically and without faith, it is not conducive to salvation. Genuine veneration must be accompanied by sincerity and conducted with single-minded concentration. In the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin repeatedly stresses that the efficacy of a practice lies in the mental attitude with which it is conducted. As we will see later, he makes the same point for praise and vow as well.

In the second half of his discussion, Genshin enumerates three ways of reflecting on Amida while venerating this Buddha. First, he recommends that the practitioner reflect on Amida in the way suggested by the following passage from the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* 觀仏三昧海經 (*Sūtra on the Ocean-like Samādhi for Contemplating the Buddha*):

Right now, when I pay obeisance to one Buddha, I pay obeisance to all Buddhas. When I ponder on one Buddha, I have a vision of all Buddhas. In front of each Buddha is one practitioner who pays obeisance to (the Buddha) by touching (the Buddha's) feet. (These practitioners) are all myself. (T 84, 48a)

In a footnote to this passage, Genshin explains that the words “all Buddhas” here can either indicate manifestations of Amida Buddha or the various individual Buddhas residing in the ten directions. In either case, while engaged in the ritual of venerating Amida Buddha, the practitioner is urged to reflect that, as she venerates Amida Buddha, she simultaneously venerates all Buddhas (who may be in fact be manifestations of Amida himself). In other words, she is enjoined to imagine Amida Buddha as containing all the Buddhas of the universe, a notion which ultimately derives from the *Hua-yen Sūtra* 華嚴經 and its doctrine of the mutual interpenetration of all dharmas (the notion that “one is all and all is one”).

Next, Genshin also enjoins the practitioner to reflect on Amida as prescribed in the following verse.

(Both) the person who pays obeisance, as well as the person who is the object of obeisance, are innately empty and quiescent.

The self and others are not, in substance, two.

I vow that, along with sentient beings, I will experience and understand the way,

And arouse the supreme aspiration, and return to the reality-limit. (T 84, 48a)

Genshin does not identify the source of this verse, but according to the *Ōjōyōshū giki* 往生要集義記, a commentary on the *Ōjōshū* by Ryōchū 良忠 (1199-1287), it derives from “Jikaku Daishi’s 慈覺大師 (Ennin’s 円仁)⁷ verses in homage to the Buddha recited during the Lotus and the Constantly Walking Samādhis” (ISHIDA 1970: 87, note on “*Ariiwa masani...* [或は応に...]”). Unfortunately, it is now impossible to verify Ryōchū’s statement, as this verse by Ennin is no longer extant. But in any case, while venerating Amida, the practitioner should contemplate that the venerator and the object of veneration (i. e. the Buddhist practitioners and the Buddha) are both empty and non-dual in substance; in other words, that the person venerating Amida is identical in essence with this Buddha since both she and Amida are empty and devoid of substantial self-natures.

Finally, Genshin counsels the practitioners to reflect on the following six virtuous qualities of Amida as they engage in acts of veneration. These six qualities, which appear in the *Hsin ti kuan ching* 心地觀經 (*Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Mind-ground*), are as follows:

- (1) The Buddha is the supreme merit-field.⁸
- (2) He is the supreme object of great gratitude.
- (3) He is the most venerable among legless, two-legged and multi-legged sentient beings.
- (4) He is most difficult to encounter, being as rare as an *udumbara* flower.⁹

- (5) He is unique within the three thousand world-systems.
 (6) He perfectly possesses all of the worldly and trans-worldly virtues.
 (T 84 48a The original is found at T 3, 299b)

After listing these qualities, Genshin continues, “These lines from the sūtra are extremely pithy. I will now augment some words to it and create a liturgy for obeisance” (T 84, 48a). Then follows Genshin's own verses for ritual veneration of Amida (each four-line stanza corresponds to one of the six qualities listed above) :

- (1) Once a person chants “Namu Butsu” (“I take refuge in the Buddha”)
 She has already attained the Buddha-way.
 Therefore I take refuge in and pay obeisance
 To (Amida Buddha who is) the supreme merit-field.
- (2) With compassionate eyes, (Amida) views sentient beings
 Impartially, as she would an only child.
 Therefore I take refuge in and pay obeisance
 To the extremely great mother of compassion.
- (3) The bodhisattvas of the ten directions
 Revere the Venerable Amida.
 Therefore I take refuge in and pay obeisance
 To the supreme two-legged being.
- (4) To be able to hear the name of the Buddha even once
 (Is rarer than seeing) an *udumbara* flower.
 Therefore I take refuge in and pay obeisance
 To the person extremely difficult to encounter.
- (5) Within the worlds numbering one hundred *koṭis*,
 Two Buddhas do not appear (simultaneously).
 Therefore I take refuge in and pay obeisance
 To the extremely rare Great Dharma-king.
- (6) The ocean of the Buddha Dharma of various virtues

Is of the same substance in (all of) the three periods of time.

Therefore I take refuge in and pay obeisance

To the venerable being in whom the myriad virtues are perfectly fused. The fact that Genshin composed the verses above reveal his interest in the ritual aspects of Amida worship.¹⁰ However he does not go into detail concerning Pure Land ritual here, except to recommend two other sets of verses for those who desire longer passages for daily recital: those found in Nāgārjuna's *Shih erh li* 十二礼 (*Twelve Venerations*) and verses for the six watches of the day found in Shan-tao's *Wang sheng li tsan chieh*.¹¹

Finally, in closing the section on veneration, Genshin makes the significant claim that birth in the Pure Land can be brought about solely by the act of venerating Amida Buddha. To support his position, Genshin cites the following line which he attributes to the *Kuan hsü kung tsang p'u sa fo ming ching* 觀虛空藏菩薩仏名經 (*Sūtra on the Buddha's Names of Ākāśagar-bha Bodhisattva*): "If one wholeheartedly (*shishin* 至心) respects and pays obeisance to Amida Buddha, one will be liberated from the Three Evil Paths and afterwards attain birth in his Land."¹² If one only performs ritual veneration of Amida wholeheartedly, claims Genshin, no other act is necessary to guarantee one's birth in the Pure Land.

3. Praise

The description of praise found in the *Pure Land Treatise* is extremely terse:

How should we praise? We praise (Amida Buddha) with vocal actions, and recite the name of that Tathāgata. (T 26, 231b)

Here the *Treatise* states that (1) praise is a vocal action, and (2) specifically equates it with the recitation of Amida's name.

Genshin's interpretation of praise again differs significantly from that

of the *Pure Land Treatise*. First, he argues that praise is not simply a vocal action, but is a vocal action that involves all of one's threefold actions (the same point was made with veneration above). Second, unlike the *Pure Land Treatise*, he does not limit praise to the recitation of Amida Buddha's name, but interprets it to include any number of verses in praise of Amida Buddha found in the Buddhist canon. As an example, he quotes the following lines from Nāgārjuna's *Shih chu p'i p'o sha lun* 十住毘婆沙論 (*Commentary on the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva Path*).¹³

Amida Buddha's Original Vow is like this: "If a person reflects on me, recites my name and personally takes refuge in me, (that person) will enter the state of non-retrogression and attain supreme enlightenment." Therefore, one should remember and reflect on (Amida) and praise him with (the following) verses.

Immeasurable is his wisdom of light,
 His body is like a mountain of pure gold.
 Now I, physically, vocally and mentally,
 Press my hands together in prayer, bow down my head and pay
 obeisance to him.

The Buddhas of the present of the ten directions
 For various reasons
 Extol the virtues of that Buddha.
 I now take refuge in him and pay obeisance to him.

There is the mark of the thousand spoked wheel on the Buddha's
 feet.
 They are pliant and are of the color of lotus blossoms.
 All who see them feel joy
 And pay obeisance to them by touching their face and head to the

Buddha's feet.

The exposition that Buddha (i. e., Amida)
Destroys and eliminates the various roots of transgressions.
His marvelous words are efficacious in many ways.
I bow down my head and pay obeisance (to the Buddha).

The multitude of all wise and holy beings
As well as the multitude of humans and heavenly beings
All take refuge in him together.
For this reason, I pay obeisance to him.

Riding on the boat of the Holy (Eightfold) Path
We ferry over the ocean hard to ferry over.
(Amida Buddha) has ferried over himself, and ferries over others.
I pay obeisance to the person who is unobstructed (in ferrying over
all beings).

Even though the Buddhas, over immeasurable kalpas,
Praise his merits,
It is impossible to express them completely.
I take refuge in the pure person.

In the same way I now
Praise his innumerable merits.
Through the causal connections of these virtues
I vow that the Buddha will always reflect on me.

Through the causal connections of these virtues,

The supremely marvelous virtues I have attained,
 I vow that all the types of sentient beings,
 Shall all attain.

Although Genshin provides only nine verses here, he notes that there are altogether 32 verses in praise of Amida Buddha in this passage in the *Shih chu p'i p'o sha lun*, and that he has written down only those verses he considers the most essential. Furthermore, besides the verses found in the *Shih chu p'i p'o sha lun*, Genshin mentions the verses contained in Vasubandhu's *Pure Land Treatise*, as well as such works as the esoteric "Verse in Praise of the Buddha" (*shingonkyō butsusan* 真言教仏讚; more popularly known as the Great Amida Dhāraṇī [*Amida daiju* 阿弥陀大呪]), and the "Separate Verses in Praise of Amida" (*Amida bessan* 阿弥陀別讚)¹⁴ as noteworthy examples of verses to be recited in praise of Amida Buddha.

In the concluding lines, Genshin states that the most important point in praising Amida is not the number of times one recites verses of praise directed towards this Buddha. Far more important is the mental attitude with which the recitation is conducted. Mere mechanical repetition will never lead to the Pure Land; to be effective it must be done with utmost sincerity. Indeed, if done with genuine sincerity, it is possible to attain birth solely through the recitation of verses in praise of Amida (the same claim for was made for the practice of veneration above). As the scriptural basis for this idea, Genshin cites the following verse from the *Lotus Sūtra*:

If people, with joyous minds,
 Praise the virtues of the Buddha with a song,
 Even if only one small sound is produced,

They have all have attained the Buddha way. (T 84, 48b)¹⁵

According to the *Lotus Sūtra*, even the most trivial act of worship performed towards the Buddha — even something as trifling as offering a single flower to a Buddha image — will ultimately result in the attainment of

Buddhahood. Indeed, it does not even have to be a conscious act of worship, for even children who draw a picture of a Buddha or make a sand stūpa while playing will attain Buddhahood in the end. The point is that any act which establishes a karmic bond with Buddhism can (and will) become the irrevocable cause for future Buddhahood. In Japanese Tendai, the *Lotus Sūtra's* doctrine was used to legitimize the incorporation of various different forms of Buddhist practice into the sect, for (according to this doctrine) all practices will invariably result in Buddhahood.

The verse above is to be understood within this context. It states that even one hymn sung to praise the Buddha is enough to guarantee one's Buddhahood in the future. If that is the case, continues Genshin, the constant recitation of verses in praise of Amida will surely ensure birth in the Pure Land, which is a preliminary goal on the path to Buddhahood. As Genshin states,

One sound has such efficacy ; how much more if one should recite it constantly. Even the attainment of Buddhahood is so. How much more should birth (in the Pure Land). (T 84, 48b)

4. Vows

The third of the Five Gates is the vows. The *Pure Land Treatise* explains the vows in the following way.

How should we arouse our vows? In our minds we should constantly arouse our vows. We should single-mindedly concentrate our thoughts on ultimately attaining birth in the Realm of Peace and Bliss. This is because we wish to practice *śamatha* (mental calming) in accordance with reality. (T 26, 231b)

According to the *Pure Land Treatise*, vows refers to our vows to attain birth in Amida's Pure Land. We should keep our vows in our minds at all

times, and single-mindedly concentrate our thought on attaining birth in the Pure Land. For this reason, the vow is identified with the practice of *samatha*, i. e., the practice of stilling the mind through meditation and clearing it of all distracting thoughts.

However, once again Genshin gives a markedly different interpretation of the vow in the *Ōjōyōshū*. Instead of identifying the vow with the simple desire to attain birth in the Pure Land, he equates them with the bodhisattva vows, or the vows made by all bodhisattvas at the beginning of their career in which they promise to attain Buddhahood and outline the practices they will undertake in order to achieve their goal. As this indicates, Genshin understands birth in the Pure Land as one (albeit extremely crucial) step in the bodhisattva practice leading to complete Buddhahood.

A bodhisattva's career begins at the point when she sets forth the aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhicitta* in Sanskrit, *bodaishin* 菩提心 in Japanese), in which she proclaims her intention to achieve supreme enlightenment and attain Buddhahood. Thus the aspiration for enlightenment is perhaps the most crucial point in the bodhisattva's career, for it signals the first step in the bodhisattva's quest for enlightenment. Needless to say, since Genshin considers birth in the Pure Land as step in the bodhisattva path, he also holds that this aspiration is a crucial requirement for attaining birth in the Pure Land. In Genshin's own words, "the aspiration for enlightenment is the essential practice for Pure Land enlightenment." For this reason, at the beginning of the section on the vow, he quotes the following passage from Tao-ch'o's 道綽 (562–645) *An lo chi* 安樂集 (*Collection of Passages on the Pure Land*) in order to clarify the nature of the aspiration for enlightenment.

Meditation Master (Tao-) ch'o, in his *An lo chi* states, "The *Larger Sūtra*¹⁶ states, "Those who wish to be born in the Pure Land should without fail begin by arousing of the aspiration for enlightenment."...

People who arouse this aspiration even once shall (begin to put an end) their transmigratory existence from beginningless time. The *Pure Land Treatise* states, "The arousing of the aspiration for enlightenment is truly the mind which vows to become a Buddha. The mind which vows to become a Buddha is none other than the mind that wishes to ferry over sentient beings. The mind that wishes to ferry over sentient beings is none other than the mind which embraces sentient beings and makes them attain birth in a land presided over by a Buddha." Because you have now already vowed to be born in the Pure Land, you should first arouse the aspiration for enlightenment." (T 84, 48b-c)

Through this quotation, Genshin firmly sets forth his position that the aspiration for enlightenment is an essential condition for birth in the Pure Land. To explain the relationship between the aspiration for enlightenment, birth in the Pure Land and the attainment of Buddhahood, he cites the (somewhat specious) argument attributed by Tao-ch'o to the *Pure Land Treatise* (but which actually derives from T'an-luan's *Ching t'u lun chu*).¹⁷ According to the text, the aspiration to attain enlightenment is none other than the vow to achieve Buddhahood. But in order to achieve Buddhahood, it is necessary to undertake bodhisattva practices of ferrying over all beings to enlightenment. And the most effective way of carrying out the bodhisattva practice is to first attain birth in the Pure Land where one can gain the unrestricted power to nurture the spiritual capacities of sentient beings and to lead them to salvation. Since birth in the Pure Land is understood here as a preliminary step in the practice of the bodhisattva path culminating in the attainment of Buddhahood, the aspiration for enlightenment is considered a vital requirement for birth in the Pure Land.

As in the preceding sections on veneration and praise, here too Genshin emphasizes the necessity of arousing the aspiration for enlightenment in complete sincerity. He states,

If the mind is impure, it is not the cause of the right path. If there is a limit to the mind, it is not (the aspiration for) great enlightenment. If it is not sincere, its power is not strong. Therefore, make sure that your aspiration is pure, all-embracing and sincere. Do not (arouse the vows) in order to feel superior to others or in order to gain fame. (T 84, 49a)

Moreover, as in the earlier sections, Genshin states that the aspiration for enlightenment, if genuine, can by itself ensure one's birth in the Pure Land. He insists,

If we arouse the aspiration for enlightenment as explained here, even if we engage in few other practices, we will definitely attain birth in the Pure Land in accordance with our vows. (T 84, 50c)

When the novice bodhisattva puts forth her aspiration for enlightenment, it is customary for her to announce her vows, in which she outlines the conditions which she promises to fulfill in order to attain Buddhahood. The vows, in other words, are the concrete expression of her aspiration for enlightenment. The most famous of such vows are the forty-eight vows of Amida Buddha, in which he delineated the characteristics of the Pure Land he promised to establish. Another well known sets of vows are the twelve vows of Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha, or the Medicine King Buddha.

In a very broad sense, Genshin states that the aspiration for enlightenment can refer to general desire (or vow) to attain Buddhahood. However, following the *Mo ho chih kuan* 摩訶止觀 (*Great Calming and Contemplation*), a fundamental meditation text of Tendai Buddhism, Genshin argues that the aspiration for enlightenment should be defined more specifically as the desire to “seek enlightenment above and teach sentient beings below.”¹⁸ This defines the aspiration for enlightenment as being composed of two elements: the determination to attain enlightenment for oneself (“seek enlightenment above”) and the resolve to ferry over all beings, along with

oneself, to enlightenment (“teach sentient beings below”). Needless to say, this is based on the fundamental premise of Mahāyānā bodhisattva practice: that to gain enlightenment for oneself, one must paradoxically work for the enlightenment of all beings.

Furthermore, following the *Mo ho chih kuan*, Genshin argues that the bodhisattva vows can be expanded and expressed as four extensive vows (*shiguzeigan* 四弘誓願). The four extensive vows were first formulated by Chih-i (538-597), the founder of the T'ien-t'ai sect, and subsequently came to be recognized as a representative set of the bodhisattva's vows. The four vow are as follows.

Sentient beings, limitless in number, I vow to ferry over.

Defilements (*kleśa*) which are numberless, I vow to extinguish.

Dharma-gates without end (in number), I vow to comprehend.

The supreme Buddha-way, I vow to actualize.¹⁹

The four extensive vows can be further distinguished into two types (or levels): (1) those that arise with concrete phenomena as their conditions (*enji shigu* 緣事四弘), and (2) those that arise through insight into the principle (*enri shigu* 緣理四弘). The former refer to the type of vows which the bodhisattva set forth with the aim to accomplish some specific goal or end. For example, although all beings possess the Buddha nature, they are bound to the cycle of birth-and-death and immersed in suffering from beginningless time because they do not realize this fact. For this reason, the bodhisattva resolves to lead all beings out of suffering and make them realize nirvāṇa. This is the essence of the first extensive vow: “Sentient beings, limitless in number, I vow to ferry over.” Similarly, in the other vows, the bodhisattva pledges to devote their career to (2) destroying all the defilements hindering his or her attainment of Buddhahood, (3) studying all the myriad Buddhist teachings, and (4) attaining supreme enlightenment and complete Buddhahood.

In his discussion of the first set of vows (those that arise with concrete phenomena as their conditions), Genshin correlates the four extensive vows with the four other sets of doctrines:

(1) The threefold pure precepts (*sanjujōkai* 三聚淨戒), which are precepts established specifically for bodhisattvas, are found in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*. These three precepts consist of: (a) precepts encompassing vinaya rules (*shōritsugikai* 攝律儀戒), referring to the bodhisattva's duty to uphold the precepts laid down by the Buddha, (b) precepts encompassing meritorious dharmas (*shōzenpōkai* 攝善法戒), referring to the bodhisattva's duty to undertake all good acts, and (c) precepts for benefiting sentient beings (*nyōyaku ujō kai* 饒益有情戒; also known as precepts encompassing sentient beings [*shōshujōkai* 攝衆生戒]), referring to the bodhisattva's duty to teach sentient being and lead them to enlightenment.²⁰

(2) The Buddha's threefold virtues (*sandoku* 三德): (a) virtue of favors (*ondoku* 恩德), or the benefits the Buddha bestows on sentient beings, (b) virtue of eradication (*dantoku* 斷德), or the fact that he has eradicated all defilements, and (c) virtue of knowledge (*chitoku* 智德), or his wisdom.

(3) The three aspects of the Buddha-nature (*sanin busshō* 三因仏性): (a) the direct cause of Buddhahood (*shōin busshō* 正因仏性), or the principle of Suchness found innately in all beings, (b) fulfilling cause of Buddhahood (*ryōin busshō* 了因仏性), or the wisdom which realizes this principle, and (c) conditional cause of Buddhahood (*en'in busshō* 緣因仏性), or the practices which give rise to wisdom.

(4) The three bodies of the Buddha (*sanshin* 三身): (a) the response body (*ōjin* 応身), or the body that the Buddha creates and manifests to sentient beings in order to lead them to enlightenment, (b) the recompense body (*ōjin* 報身), or the body which the Buddha receives as the result of his past practices, and (c) the dharma-body (*hosshin* 法身), or Suchness itself.

The relationship between these four doctrinal categories and the four

extensive vows is indicated in Chart 1. Unfortunately, Genshin does not clarify why these doctrinal categories can be correlated with the four vows in this way; he simply asserts that the “vow to save all beings” can be equated with the “precepts for benefiting sentient beings,” etc., and does not attempt to explain why. As Kodera Bun'ei has shown, a similar scheme is found in Ming-k'uang's 明曠 *T'ien-t'ai p'u sa chieh su* 天台菩薩戒疏 (*Commentary on the T'ien-t'ai Bodhisattva Precepts*), a commentary to the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*. In this commentary, Ming-k'uang takes up the word “precepts” and explains it in terms of the three pure precepts, threefold learnings (*sangaku* 三学 or precepts, samādhi and wisdom), the Three Truths (*santai* 三諦) of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism (emptiness [*kū* 空], provisional reality [*ke* 假] and the middle [*chū* 中]), the three merits of the Buddha found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (i. e., dharma-body, prajñā and liberation), the three bodies of the Buddha and the four extensive vows.²¹ Although only two of the doctrinal categories found in Ming-k'uang's commentary is found in the *Ōjōyōshū*, it is probable that Ming-k'uang provided Genshin with a useful hint for correlating the four extensive vows with other Buddhist doctrinal categories.

However, Genshin argues that the more profound aspiration for enlightenment is expressed in the second type of four extensive vows: the vows that arise through insight into the principle. The former vows — those that arise with concrete phenomena as their conditions — are still imperfect because they are based on a dualistic mode of thought which discriminates delusions from enlightenment, the world of delusions from the world of nirvāṇa. In contrast, the vows that arise through insight into the principle arise from genuine insight into reality. Here Genshin defines reality in terms of the central Tendai doctrine of the “perfect fusion of the Three Truths” (*enyū santai* 円融三諦): that all things are immediately empty, provisionally real and the middle way between these two extremes.²²

Genshin describes these vows as follows,

As to the vows that arise through insight into the principle : all dharmas are originally quiescent and still. They neither exist nor do not exist ; they are neither eternal nor annihilated ; they neither arise nor perish ; they are neither defiled nor pure. Each form, each fragrance — there is none among them which is not of the Middle Way. Birth-and-death is nirvāṇa, and defilements are enlightenment. When turned over, each of the gates of defilements is the eighty-four thousand perfections. Ignorance turns into insight, just as ice turns into water. It (i. e., enlightenment) is not something (which exists) far away ; neither does it come from some other place. It is all universally contained in the mind of the one instant of thought, just as a wish-fulfilling gem. It neither contains the treasure (that one desires) nor does not contain the treasure (that one desires). If you say that it (i. e., the treasure) does not exist (in the gem), it is a lie. If you say that it exists, it is a false view. It cannot be known by the mind ; it cannot be described in words. Sentient beings, within this inconceivable, unbounded dharma, conceive and are bound ; within this inescapable dharma, seek liberation. For this reason, (a bodhisattva) should universally arouse great compassion for all sentient beings in the dharma-realm, and give rise to the four (extensive) vows. This is called arousing the aspiration for enlightenment in accordance with the principle. It is the supreme aspiration for enlightenment.... As the *Viśeṣacintibrahmaṇaparipṛcchā* states, “(The bodhisattva) knows that all dharmas are not dharmas and knows that all sentient beings are not sentient beings. This is called the bodhisattva’s arousing the aspiration for supreme enlightenment.” (T 84, 48c-49a)

As Naitō Eryō has demonstrated, this entire paragraph has been created by stringing together key passages from the section on the four extensive vows found in the *Mo ho chih kuan*.²³ In this quotation, Genshin argues that the

highest type of bodhisattva vows are those that arise through non-discriminating insight into reality, where (to paraphrase the quotation above) birth-and-death is understood to be nirvāṇa itself, and defilements are realized to be none other than enlightenment. However, sentient beings do not realize this fact. Instead, they discriminate between birth-and-death and nirvāṇa and seek liberation even though there is, from the standpoint of true reality, no liberation to be attained. It is due to such deluded thoughts that they are caught up in the stream of birth-and-death. For this reason, bodhisattvas who have attained insight into reality feel compassion towards these deluded beings and set forth the four extensive vows in order to (paradoxically) lead them to salvation.

In the remaining section of the vows, Genshin takes up for consideration several objections concerning his presentation of the aspiration for enlightenment. First, he takes up the following question: if the realm of defiled existence is identical with the realm of enlightenment, there should be no need to practice the Buddhist path and seek enlightenment. Indeed, if enlightenment is to be found in the midst of defilements, then one should live as one pleases and not discriminate between evil and good acts. Why should the practitioner even seek birth in the Pure Land? This is the classic problem of Mahāyāna Buddhist soteriology, which must uphold the necessity of practicing the Buddhist path and achieving Buddhahood while emphasizing the identity of birth-and-death and nirvāṇa.

In his response, Genshin criticizes such a position as unwholesome attachment to emptiness which totally misunderstands the meaning of emptiness. People who hold this antinomian position cannot be called a disciple of the Buddha. Moreover, he continues, if it is said that one should live solely to gratify one's senses because defilements are in themselves enlightenment, then by the same token, one should actively seek to experience the many wretched sufferings inherent in transmigratory existence, for

birth-and-death is *nirvāṇa*. The fact that people do not do so reveals that, in practical terms, there is a profound difference between defilements and enlightenment. As Genshin explains,

Although defilements and enlightenment are one in substance, because there is a difference in time and function, there is a difference between defiled and pure (states). They are like water and ice, or seed and fruit. Although they are one in substance, their functions are different depending on the time. (T 84, 49b)

In conclusion, Genshin states, “For this reason, although the person who cultivates the way manifests her innate Buddha-nature, the person who does not cultivate the way ultimately cannot manifest the principle (of enlightenment).” (T 84, 49b-c)

Second, Genshin takes up the objection that ordinary beings are incapable of following the bodhisattva path. The bodhisattva practice consists of giving oneself up wholeheartedly for the material and spiritual well-being of others. At times, this may mean giving up one's possessions and even one's life to help others in need. How can ordinary beings engage in such heroic self-sacrifice? And even if an ordinary being arouses the bodhisattva vows, she would be arousing the vows in vain, for she would be incapable of carrying them out. Why should they be required to arouse the vows?

To this question Genshin replies :

Even if you can not bear to practice them, you should arouse the compassionate vows. As I have stated previously and will state again later, its merits (i. e., the merits of arousing the vows) is limitless. Devadatta recited sixty thousand treasuries of scriptures, but still was unable to escape from falling into hell. The child of the compassionate woman set forth one thought of compassionate vow, and was immediately born in Tuṣita Heaven. Thus it is known that the distinction of

one's rise and fall (in the sea of transmigration) depends on the mental attitude and not on the practice. Moreover, who, during his life, has not recited "Namu Amida Butsu" even once, or given alms just once to people? These small acts of kindness²⁴ can all be included among the four extensive vows and their practice. Thus the practice and vows correspond, and the vows are not in vain. (T 84, 49c)

Even though ordinary beings find the demands of bodhisattva practice impossible to follow, they should arouse the aspiration for enlightenment anyway. The reason is because the very act of arousing the aspiration for enlightenment and setting forth one's bodhisattva vows — provided it is done with a sincere mind — results in incalculable merit. The efficacy of the bodhisattva vow resides in the mental attitude with which the vow is expressed. Even though they may find it impossible to put their vows into practice completely, as long as people enunciate their vows in sincerity, this act generates innumerable merits. Even such seemingly insignificant action as calling out "Namu Butsu" ("I take refuge in the Buddha") or giving alms to a monk can result in great merit. How much more efficacious will be the act of arousing the aspiration for enlightenment? In this way, Genshin argues that the act of arousing the bodhisattva vows will not be in vain, even though we may fail to act as exemplary bodhisattvas. In a later passage, Genshin explains as follows.

In sincerity, orally recite (the following words) while reflecting on them mentally: "From this day on, I will not undertake even one act of kindness for the purpose (of gaining) a defiled fruit. It will all be done (to achieve birth in the Land of) Supreme Bliss (i. e., Amida Buddha's Pure Land), all for enlightenment." After one arouses this aspiration, all of one's act of good, whether conscious or not, will naturally be turned over to (the attainment of) supreme enlightenment. It is as if, once a channel is excavated, water will naturally spill forth and gradu-

ally reach streams and rivers and ultimately merge with the great ocean. A practitioner is also like this. Once she arouses the aspiration, the water of various good acts will naturally flow into the channel of the four extensive vows, and (she will) gradually be born in the Land of Supreme Bliss, and ultimately merge with the ocean of the omniscience (*sarvajñā*) of enlightenment. How much more (will this be in the case of a person who) remembers and reflects on her former vows from time to time. (T 84, 50a)

Even the most minor act of good will ultimately result in the attainment of Buddhahood. For this reason, we must arouse our vows and strive to do what good acts we can to assist and nurture all other living beings.

5. Contemplation

The gate of contemplation is described in Vasubandhu's *Pure Land Treatise* as follows :

How should we contemplate? Contemplate with wisdom and correctly reflect upon and contemplate him (i. e., Amida Buddha). This is because we wish to practice *vipaśyanā* in accordance with reality. There are three types of contemplation. What are the three types? The first is to contemplate the merits adorning that Buddha's realm. The second is to contemplate the merits adorning Amida Buddha. The third is to contemplate the merits adorning the bodhisattvas of that (land). (T 26, 231b)

In the passage above, contemplation is defined as the practice of contemplating Amida Buddha in a state of meditation. Moreover, this practice of contemplation is identified with the practice of *vipaśyanā* meditation. *Vipaśyanā* is a meditation practice often undertaken in conjunction with *śamatha*. To conduct the *śamatha-vipaśyanā* meditation, one first concen-

trates the mind on a particular object (this is the stage of *śamatha*, or stilling), and then reflects upon that object with wisdom in order to perceive its true nature (this is the stage of *vipaśyanā*, or contemplation)²⁵. Since the *Pure Land Treatise* identifies the vows, the third of the Five Gates, with *śamatha*, this shows that this treatise interprets the third and fourth gates of Pure Land practice in terms of the *śamatha-vipaśyanā* meditation. In other words, it identifies the Pure Land practice of arousing the vows to be born in Amida's Pure Land with the *śamatha* practice of concentrating one's mind on a specific object in a state of meditation, and interprets the practice of contemplating Amida Buddha in terms of *vipaśyanā* meditation.

In the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin interprets contemplation primarily as the practice of reflecting upon Amida Buddha in meditative absorption. But what specifically should one contemplate? The *Pure Land Treatise* enumerates three objects of Pure Land contemplation: the physical setting of the Pure Land, the figure of Amida Buddha who presides over that land, and the multitude of bodhisattvas residing in the Pure Land. While not contesting the efficacy of contemplating all of these three objects, Genshin argues that the first and third are too sweeping to be made the object of an ordinary practitioner's contemplation exercise. Who among us, he asks rhetorically, can fully contemplate the countless splendid adornment of the Pure Land in all of their detail, or each and every one of the innumerable bodhisattvas who reside in that land? Thus, citing the *Shih chu p'i p'o sha lun* as his proof text (this text states, "A bodhisattva who has newly aroused the aspiration for enlightenment should first reflect upon the physical characteristics [*lakṣana*] of the Buddha"²⁶), Genshin argues that the proper object of contemplation for an ordinary practitioner should be Amida Buddha, specifically the physical characteristics adorning the body of the Buddha.

Genshin divides the contemplation on the physical characteristics of the Buddha (*shikisōkan* 色相觀) into three:

- (a) contemplation of the individual characteristics of the Buddha (*bessōkan* 別相觀)
- (b) contemplation of the comprehensive characteristic of the Buddha (*sōsōkan* 惣相觀)
- (c) mixed and abbreviated contemplation (*zōryakukan* 雜略觀)

Genshin's description of these contemplations is closely associated with the *Contemplation Sūtra*. This sūtra is said to have been translated into Chinese during the Yüan-chia 元嘉 era (424-453) of the Liu Sung 劉宋 dynasty by Kālayaśas from Central Asia.²⁷ However, it is now generally believed that this sūtra was not composed in India but was created in either Central Asia or China (RYUKOKU UNIVERSITY TRANSLATION CENTER 1984: xvii). Chih-i, the founder of the T'ien-t'ai sect, did not place much importance on this sūtra. However, it came to hold an important place within the T'ien-t'ai sect after a commentary on this sūtra attributed to Chih-i was composed in China sometime between the latter half of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth century (SATŌ 1964: 597). This commentary, entitled *Kuan wu liang shou fo ching shu* 觀無量壽仏經疏 (*Commentary on the Sūtra of the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*), was an important text for the development of Pure Buddhism within the Japanese Tendai sect also. Thus it was only natural that Genshin turned to this sūtra to structure the contemplation of the characteristics of Amida Buddha.

The *Contemplation Sūtra* presents a method of contemplating Amida Buddha and his land in thirteen stages. In the first stage of contemplation, the practitioner concentrates his thought on the setting sun until he can visualize it clearly, even when his eyes open. In the second contemplation, one visualizes the western region as being filled with water, which then turns into ice and next into beryl. During the next several contemplations, one visualizes the various features of the Pure Land, including its ground, trees,

ponds, etc. Amida's dais is made the object of contemplation in the seventh contemplation, while in the eighth contemplation, one visualizes Amida Buddha with his two attendant bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. In the next three contemplations, one visualizes Amida's physical characteristics and light (ninth contemplation), Avalokiteśvara (tenth contemplation) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (eleventh contemplation). In the twelfth contemplation, one visualizes oneself being born in the Pure Land, and finally in the thirteenth contemplation, one visualizes Amida and his attendant bodhisattvas manifesting themselves in various forms in the lands of the ten directions to save all beings.²⁸ Among these thirteen contemplations, Genshin relies in particular on the seventh, eighth and ninth contemplations in discussing the contemplation of Amida.

(a) Contemplation of the Individual Characteristics of the Buddha

In the *Ōjōyōshū*, the contemplation of Amida Buddha's individual marks proceeds in two stages. First, the practitioner visualizes the lotus dais upon which Amida Buddha sits. This contemplation is based on the seventh contemplation depicted in the *Contemplation Sūtra* which specifically states that people who wish to see Amida must first contemplate the dais upon which he sits (INAGAKI 1994 : 329). In the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin quotes the entire description of this contemplation as found in the *Contemplation Sūtra* :

Those who wish to see that Buddha should form an image of the lotus-flower on the seven-jewelled ground. They visualize each petal of this flower as having the colours of a hundred jewels and eighty-four thousand veins like a celestial painting, with eighty-four thousand rays of light issuing forth from each vein. They should visualize all of these clearly and distinctly. Its smaller petals are two hundred and fifty *yojanas* in both length and breadth. Each of these lotus-flowers has

eighty-four thousand large petals. Between the petals there are a hundred *koṭis* of king-*maṇi*-gems as illuminating adornments. Each *maṇi*-gem emits a thousand rays of light which, like canopies of the seven jewels, cover the entire earth.

The dais is made of Śakra's pendent *maṇi*-gems and is decorated with eighty thousand diamonds, *kiṃśuka*-gems, *brahma-maṇi*-gems and also with exquisite pearl-nets. On the dais four columns with jewelled banners spontaneously arise, each appearing to be as large as a thousand million *koṭis* of Mt. Sumerus. On the columns rests a jewelled canopy similar to that in the palace of the Yāma Heaven. They are also adorned with five hundred *koṭis* of excellent gems, each emitting eighty-four thousand rays shining in eighty-four thousand different tints of golden colour. Each golden light suffuses this jewelled land and transforms itself everywhere into various forms, such as diamond platforms, nets of pearls and nebulous clusters of flowers. In all the ten directions it transforms itself into anything according to one's wishes, and performs the activities of the Buddha.

This majestic lotus-flower was originally produced by the power of Bhikṣu Dharmākara's Vow.²⁹ Those who wish to see the Buddha Amitāyus should first practise this contemplation of the flower-throne. In doing so, do not contemplate in a disorderly way. Visualize the objects one by one — each petal, each gem, each ray of light, each dais and each column. See all of these as clearly and distinctly as if you were looking at your own image in a mirror. When this contemplation is accomplished, the evil karma which you have committed during five hundred *koṭis* of kalpas of saṃsāra will be extinguished, and you will certainly be born in the Land of Supreme Bliss. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect. (INAGAKI 1994, 329-30, slightly amended)³⁰

Immediately after citing this passage, Genshin specifically notes that the practice of this contemplation helps eliminate the evil karma that one has committed during five hundred *koṭis* of kalpas in the past, and will ensure that one is born in the Pure Land upon death. The elimination of evil karma which ties us to the cycle of birth-and-death is conceived here as a necessary precondition to attaining birth in the Pure Land. As we shall see in the passages below, the notion that the contemplation exercise helps eliminate one's evil karma is repeatedly emphasized by Genshin.

After having completed the contemplation on the lotus dais, Genshin declares that the practitioner must next turn to the contemplation of the physical characteristics of Amida Buddha. According to Buddhist dogma, all Buddhas possess a number of special characteristics which distinguish them from ordinary mortals. Traditionally, the Buddhas are said to have thirty-two such characteristics.³¹ However, although most texts agree on this number, the characteristics that are to be included among the thirty-two often diverge considerably from one text to another. In fact, some texts (such as the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*), even while emphatically stating that the Buddha possesses thirty-two characteristics, actually lists and describes considerably more than that number of characteristics.³² Thus the total number of characteristics found in Buddhist texts is considerably more than thirty-two.

Perhaps for this reason, in the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin presents a list of forty-two physical characteristics of the Buddha which should be contemplated by the practitioner. However, it does not appear that he wished to reject the traditional doctrine that the Buddha possesses thirty-two characteristics. In fact, right after listing the forty-two characteristics in the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin states, "The abbreviated description of the *thirty-two characteristics* here relies to a great degree on the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*" (T 84, 55b). In other words, even while actually listing forty-two characteristics, Gen-

shin unequivocally states that the number of characteristics that the Buddha possess is thirty-two. It may be possible that the words “thirty-two characteristics” here is a copyist's error for forty-two characteristics, but this is unlikely for two reasons. First, no extant version of the *Ōjōyōshū* has “forty-two characteristics” as a variant reading. More importantly, although the *Ōjōyōshū* nowhere explicitly states that the Buddha possesses forty-two characteristics, there are ten places where he is described as having thirty-two characteristics.³³ Thus, even while listing forty-two Buddha characteristics as proper objects of contemplation here, Genshin did not contest the established Buddhist position that the number of characteristics the Buddha possesses is thirty-two (FUKUHARA 1984 : 132-3).

But why did Genshin decide to list forty-two characteristics as objects of contemplation? Fukuhara Ryūzen has suggested the following reason. According to Tendai Buddhism, the Buddhist path of practice is divided into fifty-two steps consisting of the ten levels of faith (*jushin* 十信), ten abodes (*jūjū* 十住), ten levels of practice (*jūgyō* 十行), ten levels of merit transference (*jūekō* 十廻向), ten stages (*jūji* 十地), the stage equal to enlightenment (*tōgaku* 等覺) and the stage of sublime enlightenment (*myōgaku* 妙覺). Within these fifty-two stages, the First Abode is of special importance, since at this stage, the bodhisattva completely destroys both the delusions of views and attitudes (*kenshi waku* 見思惑) and the innumerable delusions (*jinsha waku* 塵沙惑), the first two of the three types of delusions enumerated in Tendai Buddhism, and enters the rank of sages. From this point on, she can freely work for the salvation of all beings. The bodhisattva, however, is still not entirely free of delusions at this stage; over the next forty-two stages of the path, she must still work to eradicate the delusion of ignorance (*mumyō waku* 無明惑), the deepest level of delusions. For this reason, in the *Fa-hua wen chū* 法華文句 (*Phrases of the Lotus Sūtra*), Chih-i speaks of the Tendai path of the Perfect Teaching as consisting of forty-two stages (T 33,

735a). This alternative path of forty-two stages was championed by Chih-i's master Hui-ssu. Genshin's may have had this scheme of the forty-two stages in mind when he decided to list forty-two characteristics of the Buddha in the *Ōjōyōshū* (FUKUHARA 1984, 134-5).

Genshin himself states that his description of the Buddha's characteristics are mainly taken from two works, the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* (T 84, 55b). However, from time to time, Genshin also cites other texts, such as the *Mahāsaṃnīpāta Sūtra*, *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, *Anuttarāśraya Sūtra*, *Fa hua wen chü*, *Yōgacarabhūmi*, *Ta chih tu lun* 大智度論 (*The Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise*), *Pao en ching* 報恩經 (*Sūtra on Requiring Debts*), Shan-tao's *Kuan nien fa men* 觀念法門 (*Dharma Gates of Contemplation*) and *Uṇāsakaśīla*. It is also interesting to note that the order in which the marks appear in the *Ōjōyōshū* differ from that found in the writings of Chih-i. Chih-i provides a list of the thirty-two Buddha characteristics in two of his works, the *Fa chieh tz'u ti fa men* 法界次第初門 (*First Gate to the Succession of the Dharma-realm*; T 46, 696b) and the *Fa-hua wen chü* (T 34, 116b). In both of these works, the characteristics are enumerated from the bottom up, i. e., from those associated with the Buddha's feet up to the lump of flesh on the top of the Buddha's head. According to Fukuhara, this order is identical to that found in the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* which Chih-i most probably consulted in creating these lists (FUKUHARA 1992: 59-60). In contrast, the order of the characteristics is reversed in the *Ōjōyōshū*. Apparently, Genshin was following the order found in the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*, which lists the characteristics from the top down.³⁴

The forty-two characteristics are described in the *Ōjōyōshū* as follows:

1. There is a prominent round lump of flesh on the top of the Buddha's head. According to Genshin, this characteristic is to be contemplated as emitting a broad ray of light consisting of a thousand colors. Each color

divides into eighty-four thousand branches, in each of which abides eighty-four thousand transformed Buddhas. From the top of each transformed Buddha's head shines a light that illuminates innumerable universes above. Innumerable transformed bodhisattvas descend from these universes like a cloud and circumambulate the transformed Buddhas. According to the *Mahāsaṃnīpāta Sūtra*, people who experience joy upon seeing this characteristic will eliminate evil karma committed over 100 billion kalpas and will never be reborn in the Three Evil Ways (*sanzu* 三途)³⁵.

2. There are eighty-four thousand curls of hair on the head. They curl to the right and are deep blue in color. According to Genshin, people who wish to dwell on this characteristic at length can also contemplate a five-colored light emanating from each pore of each hair. The innumerable rays of light turn the entire world into the color of blue lapis lazuli. Innumerable transformed Buddhas are manifested within the light. After manifesting these Buddhas, the light returns to the top of the Buddha's head and forms a vortex which swirls to the right.

3. Five thousand rays of light shine forth from among the hair. When emitted, the light circles the Buddha's head five times. Within the rays of light appear transformed Buddhas surrounded by transformed bodhisattvas.

4. The ears are thick, wide, long, and are oval in shape. From each ear emanates five rays of light, each consisting of a thousand colors. Within each color appears a thousand Buddhas and each Buddha in turn emits a thousand rays of light, illuminating innumerable universes in the ten directions. According to the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*, people who contemplate this characteristic will eradicate evil karma committed over eighty kalpas of past lives.

5. The forehead is perfectly flat.

6. The face is perfectly oval, lustrous and clear as the autumn moon. People who contemplate this characteristic will eliminate evil karma com-

mitted over one hundred million kalpas and will meet the Buddha face to face in the next lifetime.

7. There is a white tuft of hair, curling to the right, between the brows. Innumerable rays of light, as bright as ten trillion suns, shine forth from it. In each ray appear numerous Buddhas seated on a lotus blossom and surrounded by his retinue. Each of these Buddhas in turn emits innumerable rays of light, each of which again contains innumerable Buddhas. Many of these Buddhas preach great compassion, while others preach the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment, the six perfections or the special merits of the Buddhas (*fuguhō* 不供法). According to the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*, people who contemplate this characteristic can eliminate evil karma committed over 9 billion 600 million *nayutas* of kalpas as numerous as the number of sand in the Ganges River.

8. The eyelash are like those of a bull king. They are deep blue in color. A crystal-colored ray of light shines forth from the tips of the five hundred hairs of the eyelash. Within each of the light appears the figure of the god Brahma, sitting on a blue lotus flower and holding a blue parasol.

9. The whites of the eyes are whiter than a white jewel, while the irises are as blue as a blue lotus blossom. A ray of light, which divides into four branches, issues forth from the eyes, illuminating innumerable universes in the ten directions. Within the blue light, there are blue transformed Buddhas, while in the white light, there are white transformed Buddhas. These Buddhas manifest supernatural powers. In a note to this mark, Genshin adds that anyone who beholds this characteristic will attain pure sight in the future and eliminates all of the evil karma accumulated over seven kalpas.

10. The nose is prominent. It is shaped like a parrot's beak and the nostrils are hidden from view. Two rays of light which issue forth from it illuminate the ten directions and do the work of the Buddhas (i. e., instruct

living beings in various ways to lead them to enlightenment). In a note to this characteristic, Genshin adds that people who contemplate this characteristic will eliminate the evil karma created over ten kalpas, be enabled to smell exquisite perfume in the future and ornament themselves with the perfume of the precepts.

11. The lips are crimson. The upper and lower lips are perfectly symmetrical. Those who wish to dwell on this mark may contemplate a series of spherically shaped crimson light, strung together like pearls, appearing from the Buddha's mouth, flowing along the nose, through the lump on the crown of the head and hair and merging with the Buddha's aureole.

12. The Buddha has forty uniform white teeth. There are no gaps between them. Red and white light constantly radiate from the teeth.

13. The Buddha has four white canine teeth. People who contemplate this characteristic will eliminate all of the evil karma they have accumulated over two thousand kalpas of past lives.

14. The copper-colored tongue is broad enough to cover his entire face and long enough to reach, not only his ears and hairline, but even the heaven of the god Brahmā. When the Buddha smiles and moves his tongue, a five-colored light gushes forth from the mouth, circles the Buddha seven times, and re-enters the Buddha's body from the crown of the head. People who behold this characteristic will eliminate all of the evil karma accumulated over eight hundred billion eighty-four thousand kalpas and will meet eight billion Buddhas residing in other universes.

15. There are two glands beneath the tongue, which secrete *amṛta* (the drink of the gods which bestows eternal life).

16. The throat is like a lapis lazuli pipe and resembles lotus blossoms piled up on each other. The Buddha's voice is harmonious and elegant. It resounds like a heavenly drum and resonates throughout the universe.

17. The neck emits light. At the top of the neck are clearly delineated spots, each of which emits a ray of light. These rays of light circle the Buddha's aureole seven times.

18. Two rays of light consisting of ten thousand colors shine forth from the Buddha's neck and illuminate all the universes in the ten directions. Anyone who is touched by that light attains pratyekabuddhahood.

19. The Buddha does not have an Adam's apple. The light which shines forth from this neck is amber in color. People who are illuminated by this light all arouse the aspiration to attain arhathood.

20. The shoulders are round and full.

21. There are no hollows in the armpits. The armpits emit reddish-purple light which act like the Buddha to benefit all beings.

22. The arms reach down to the knees and the elbows are straight. The figure of a thousand-spoked wheel are found on the palms. They each give forth a hundred thousand rays of light, which transform themselves into streams of golden water. Within each golden stream is a sublime stream of crystal water. Hungry ghosts who see this stream are freed from fever while animals who see them gain knowledge of their past lives. Crazed elephants perceive the stream as a lion king, while lions and dragons perceive it as *garuḍas*. In this way, each beast perceives the stream as something that it respects. For this reason, the beasts pay obeisance to the stream, and as a result, are reborn in a heavenly realm at death.

23. The fingers are long and thin. The nails are radiant and a swastika appears at the tip of each finger.

24. The hands are webbed.

25. The hands are soft and pliant.

26. The chin, chest and torso are broad and are like that of a lion king.

27. There is a swastika, known as the "seal of reality" (*jissōin* 実相印) on the chest. It emits a great light. Within the light are innumerable

hundreds of thousands of blossoms, and upon each blossom are innumerable transformed Buddhas. Each Buddha emits a thousand rays of light and benefit sentient being. These rays of light enter into the heads of the Buddhas residing in the ten directions. At that time, the Buddhas emit a hundred thousand rays of light from their breasts, and each of these rays of light preach the six perfections. Each of the Buddhas also dispatch an attractive and good-looking person to comfort the practitioner. People who behold this light will eliminate all of the evil karma accumulated over twelve billion kalpas of past lifetimes.

28. The heart is like a red lotus blossom. Ten trillion transformed Buddhas sport within the Buddha's heart. Moreover, innumerable transformed Buddhas sit on a diamond dais in the Buddha's heart and emits innumerable rays of light. Within each of these rays of light also reside innumerable transformed Buddhas, each of whom stick out their broad tongues and emit ten trillions rays of light, benefiting sentient beings. People who reflect on the Buddha's heart will eliminate all of the evil karma accumulated over twelve billion kalpas of past lifetimes and meet innumerable bodhisattvas in each of their future lives.

29. The Buddha's skin is gold in color.

30. The light which emanates from the Buddha's body naturally illuminates three thousand world-systems. However, if the Buddha wishes, it becomes infinite in scope. For the sake of sentient beings, the light is reduced to one fathom (*jin* 尋) in length. People who behold this light are freed from the effects of their innumerable past evil actions.

31. The Buddha is tall and splendid.

32. The body is as wide as it is tall, like a banyan tree.³⁶

33. In both appearance and deportment, the Buddha is magnificent and dignified.

34. The genital is completely concealed. It is flat like a full moon and

emits a golden light.

35. The soles of the feet, the palms, the nape and the elbows are flat and straight.

36. The legs are tapered, like those of a deer king. The ankles emit golden light.

37. The heels are broad, long and rounded.

38. The feet are long and tall like the back of a tortoise. They are pliant and well-shaped.

39. Eighty-four thousand soft and deep blue curls of hair, all swirling to the right, are found on the Buddha's front, back, sides and top of the head. Each curl of hair contains countless lotus blossoms, equal in number to a trillion times the number of sand particles in the Ganges River. Upon these blossoms sit innumerable transformed Buddhas, each of whom preaches the Dharma in verse.

40. An image of a thousand-spoked wheel adorns the sole of each foot.

41. The soles of the feet are completely flat. Wherever the Buddha walks, the ground turns perfectly flat. The Buddha's feet, however, never touch the ground.

42. A blossom appears below each foot and heel. On each of the blossom are five transformed Buddhas, each surrounded by fifty-five attendant bodhisattvas. A shining *maṇi* jewel appears on the head of each bodhisattva. When the jewel appears, eighty-four thousand fine rays of light shines forth from each pore on the Buddha's body.

Two points must be noted in regard to Genshin's description of these characteristics. First, it is important to note that contemplation of many of these characteristics are said to result in the destruction of past evil karma. The importance of destroying the residues of evil karma in attaining birth in the Pure Land has been noted above. It may also be mentioned that, in the *Contemplation Sūtra* too, the contemplation of the various characteris-

tics of the Pure Land and the beings there (including Amida himself) are said to free one from the effects of one's evil actions in the past. Secondly, as Fukuhara has noted, over half of the characteristics listed above are associated with light (FUKUHARA 1982-3 : 129-147). As will become clear in the next section, Genshin understands this light to be a salvific light, which is said to "embrace all nembutsu practitioner, never to abandon them." The Buddha is here depicted as a radiant being, whose light saves anyone it touches.

How, then, are these characteristics to be contemplated? To explain the proper method of contemplation, Genshin quotes the following lines from the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*.

When (you are able to contemplate the Buddha characteristics) with eyes closed, use the imaginative power of the mind and (contemplate the characteristics until you can perceive) the Buddha as distinctly and clearly as when he was in the world. Even though you contemplate these characteristics, do not (contemplate) many characteristics (all at once). Begin with one item and envision another. After envisioning one item, envision another. Repeat (the contemplation) in proper order and (then) backwards sixteen times. In this way, make the mental image (of the Buddha characteristics) extremely sharp and clear. Afterwards still your mind and focus your thought on one place (i.e., on one characteristic). Gradually raise the tongue and press it against the palate. Rest the tongue at the proper place, and continue this (contemplation) for two weeks. Afterwards both mind and body will be at peace. (T 84, 55b)³⁷

According to this passage, through the sustained practice of meditation, the practitioner must first reach a point where he can clearly perceive the Buddha's characteristics with the eyes closed. After having reached this level of attainment, the practitioner next begins to contemplate the

Buddha's characteristics one by one. First, he contemplates them one by one in descending order, that is to say, from the fleshy topknot on the top of Amida's head down to the flowers beneath the Buddha's feet. When this has been completed, the practitioner next contemplates them in ascending order. When this is repeated sixteen times, the entire cycle of contemplation comes to an end. As a result of this painstaking exercise, the mental image of the characteristics becomes exceedingly vivid. Then the practitioner should fix one's attention on one specific characteristic and continue the contemplation for two week. Although the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* does not specify which characteristic this should be, following Shan-tao's *Kuan nien fa men*, Genshin recommends concentrating one's thoughts on the white tuft of hair between the Buddha's brows, the principle source of Amida Buddha's salvific light.

(b) Contemplation of the Comprehensive Characteristic

This second type of contemplation is the contemplation of the comprehensive characteristic of Amida Buddha. Here, instead of contemplating the Buddha's characteristics one by one, the practitioner contemplates the figure of Amida Buddha in its entirety.

As in the case of the previous contemplation of individual characteristics, the practitioner first contemplates Amida's dais. After the practitioner has successfully completed this contemplation, he or she next contemplates Amida Buddha seated on the dais in the following way :

His body is of the color of a hundred trillion nuggets of gold taken from the river flowing through the Jambu (rose apple) forest. His height is six hundred thousand *koṭis* of *nayutas* of *yojanas* multiplied by the number of sand in the Ganges. The white tuft of hair curling to the right between his eyebrows is five times as large as Mt. Sumeru. His eyes are like the waters of the four great oceans, and their blue irises

and whites are distinct. The pores of his body emit light as extensive as Mt. Sumeru, and the aureole it creates is as broad as ten billion great world systems. Within the light are transformed Buddhas as numerous as the number of sand in the Ganges multiplied a countless numbers of times. Each transformed Buddha has innumerable attendant bodhisattvas. (The Buddha) possesses eighty-four thousand characteristics such as these, and each mark has eighty-four thousand secondary marks. Each secondary mark emits eighty-four thousand rays of light. Each ray of light illuminates all the lands in the ten directions, embracing sentient beings who reflect on the Buddha, never to abandon them.³⁸

You should know that within each characteristic is found seven hundred five million *koṭi* rays of light. They are brilliant and their spiritual merits are glorious like a golden mountain king towering in the midst of a great ocean. Innumerable transformed Buddhas and bodhisattvas fill the light, manifesting supernatural powers and surrounding Amida Buddha.

That Buddha possesses countless merits, (thirty-two) characteristics and (eighty) secondary marks like these. Surrounded by a host of bodhisattvas, he preaches the right Dharma.³⁹ At this time, the practitioner does not perceive any other form (besides the figure of Amida Buddha).⁴⁰ Mt. Sumeru, Encircling Adamantine Mountain and other large and small mountains disappear ; the great ocean, rivers, the earth and forests disappear. Only the characteristics and secondary marks fill the eyes. That which fills the world is the light of the color of nuggets of gold taken from the river flowing through the Jambu forest. For example, when the flood at the end of the period of cosmic change fills the world, the myriad things therein are submerged and disappear. As far as the eyes can see, there is nothing but the vast expanse of water. The light of that Buddha is also like this.⁴¹ (Amida Buddha)

towers high above the entire world, and there is nothing which his characteristics, secondary marks and his light do not illuminate. When the practitioner looks upon himself with his mental eye, he finds himself illuminated by that light. (T 84, 55b-c)

As Genshin himself states in a note which appears immediately after this quote, these lines are based on passages from the *Contemplation Sūtra*, *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*, *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sūtra* and the *Ta chih tu lun*. In these lines, Genshin emphasizes that the nembutsu practitioner should contemplate Amida Buddha as being adorned by innumerable splendid physical characteristics. A prominent theme of this passage is the light which emanates from the Buddha's characteristics. According to these lines, the practitioner is to contemplate himself as being illuminated by the light emanating from the characteristics of Amida Buddha. This light is a salvific light, which embraces all beings and abandons none. In other words, the object of contemplation here is to perceive oneself as the object of the salvific embrace of Amida Buddha.

Next, Genshin sets forth a second way of conducting the contemplation of the comprehensive characteristic of Amida Buddha : to contemplate him as embodying all the three bodies of the Buddha : the response body, the recompense body and Dharma-body. In China, there arose a vehement debate over whether Amida Buddha is to be categorized as a response Buddha or a recompense Buddha. Many, including Chih-i and T'ien-t'ai scholar-monks of later generations, understood Amida Buddha as a response Buddha and his Pure Land as a response realm.⁴² Others, among them Shan-tao, held that Amida was a recompense Buddha. In contrast to these Chinese monks, Genshin refuses to delimit Amida in terms of a particular Buddha-body, and instead argues that this Buddha is to be perceived as embodying all three Buddha-bodies. He states,

Or perhaps you should contemplate (thus) : physically, that Buddha

(i. e., Amida) is three bodies in one. His single body can be perceived differently. He can be seen as being sixteen feet tall, eight feet tall or exceedingly tall. The body he manifests is gold in color,⁴³ and benefits (beings) in innumerable ways. He is identical in phenomenon with all Buddhas. (Response body.)

Neither common beings nor sages can fathom each of his characteristics and secondary marks. The god Brahma cannot perceive the crown of his head; nor can Mahāmaudgalyāyana fully discern his voice.⁴⁴ His is the supreme formless body. It is adorned without being adorned.⁴⁵ He ultimately (obtains) and is completely endowed with the ten powers, four fearlessness, three stations of mindfulness, great compassion, eighty-four thousand gates of samādhi, eighty-four thousand perfections and dharma-gates as numerous as the number of sand in the Ganges River. He is identical in thought with all Buddhas. (Recompense body.)

The sublime pure Dharma-body completely possesses various characteristics and secondary marks. Each of these characteristics and secondary marks are reality itself. The Dharma-realm of reality is complete in itself and does not diminish.⁴⁶ It neither arises nor passes away; it neither comes nor goes; it is neither identical nor different; it is neither annihilated nor eternal. All virtues, both created (*samskṛta*) and uncreated (*asamskṛta*) are eternally pure since they are based on this dharma-body. He is identical in substance with all Buddhas. (Dharma-body.)

For this reason, the three bodies of (all) the Buddhas of the three periods of time and ten directions, the countless all-pervading Dharma-gates innumerable as particles of dust, the Dharma-ocean of the Buddha's assembly, the myriad perfectly fused virtues, as well as the inexhaustible Dharma-realm are fully present in the one body of Amida.

(T 84, 55c-6a)

Once again, quotations from the *Contemplation Sūtra* and the *Mo ho chih kuan* are woven into this passage. In these lines, Genshin argues that, like all Buddhas, Amida Buddha can be perceived differently by different beings in accordance with the depth of their insight. Some people perceive him as possessing a human form, as having golden-colored skin and as being sixteen feet tall, eight feet tall or exceedingly tall. This is the Amida Buddha in his aspect of the response body, i. e., a body which he manifests in order to work for the liberation of all beings from suffering. Other people perceive Amida in his aspect as recompense body, i. e., as the embodiment of innumerable virtues which he acquired as the result of his aeons-long practice. Finally, others perceive him in his aspect of dharma-body, i. e., as being identical with reality itself. Moreover, Genshin cites here the theory of the Buddha-body found in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, which holds that the response body of a particular Buddha is identical in phenomenon with the response body of all other Buddhas. Likewise the recompense body and the dharma-body of one Buddha is identical in thought and substance, respectively, with those of all other Buddhas. Applying this theory to Amida, Genshin argues that Amida is identical in phenomena, thought and substance with all other Buddhas. In this way, to perceive Amida as embodying all the three bodies of the Buddha and, moreover, as being identical with all Buddhas, is, according to Genshin, the second way of contemplating the comprehensive characteristic of Amida Buddha.

(c) The Mixed Abbreviated Contemplation

For those beings unable to conduct the previous types of contemplation, Genshin suggests the practice of what he calls “mixed abbreviated contemplation.” He describes this contemplation as follows :

There is a white tuft of hair between the Buddha's brows. It curls to

the right and is five times as large as Mt. Sumeru. Within this characteristic are eighty-four thousand secondary marks. Each secondary mark emits eighty-four thousand rays of light. This light is sublime, and is composed of the color of myriad jewels. In a word, there are seven hundred five million *koṭi* rays of light. They brilliantly illuminate the ten directions like one hundred billion suns and moons. Within this light are manifested all Buddhas, surrounded by an assembly of innumerable bodhisattvas. (Each Buddha) emits a sublime voice and preaches various oceans of Dharma. Each ray of light illuminates all the worlds in the ten directions, embracing practitioners who reflect on the Buddha, never to abandon them. (The practitioner who undertakes this contemplation should also reflect:) I, too, am embraced in this light. Even though defilements obstruct my vision, (Amida's) great compassion shines on me at all times without tiring. (T 84, 56a)

Here again, the white tuft of hair between the brows appears as the source of salvific light, which embraces practitioners who reflect on the Buddha, never to abandon them. This contemplation of this characteristic is again derived from the *Contemplation Sūtra*. In the section on the ninth contemplation which describes the method for visualizing Amida's physical characteristics and light, the sūtra states,

In contemplating him, begin with one of his physical characteristics. Visualize only the white tuft of hair between his eyebrows until you see it clearly and distinctly. When you visualize it, all the eighty-four thousand physical characteristics will spontaneously become manifest. (INAGAKI 1994, 333. The original passage is found at T 12, 343c.)

In this passage, the sūtra urges practitioner who wishes to undertake the contemplation of Amida's true body is first urged to visualize the white tuft of hair between the Buddha's eyebrows. Genshin's decision to place this contemplation at the center of the mixed abbreviated contemplation derives

in large part to the special place which it holds within the *Contemplation Sūtra's* system of visualization exercise.

Second, the practitioner may contemplate himself being born in the Pure Land. When a person is born in the Pure Land, she finds herself within a lotus blossom, seated in the lotus position. When the blossom opens, she beholds the noble face of Amida Buddha. From the Buddha's white tuft of hair radiates light of five hundred different colors, illuminating her. She also perceives various splendid features of the Pure Land, such as the countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas filling the sky, and hears the wonderful Dharma being preached, not only by the Buddhas, but also by the waterfowls and trees in the Pure Land. By contemplating thus, the practitioner should arouse joy in his heart, and vow to be born in the Pure Land together with all other beings. (T 84, 56a-b)

Next, for those people unable to practice even the simplified contemplations above, Genshin recommends what he terms the "extremely abbreviated" (*gokuryaku* 極略) contemplation.

If you wish (to practice) the extremely abbreviated (contemplation), you should reflect in the following way. The characteristic of the white tuft of hair between that Buddha's brow curls and is like crystal. Its light illuminates the entire world and embraces us. I vow that I will be born (in the Pure Land) together with (other) sentient beings. (T 84, 56b)

In this "extremely abbreviated" contemplation, the practitioner is made to contemplate only the white tuft of hair between the Buddha's brows and perceive herself as being embraced by the salvific light which emanates from it.

However, not all people capable of undertaking meditation and attaining a level of attainment at which it is possible to visualize the figure of Amida Buddha. Does this mean that such people are incapable of gaining

birth in the Pure Land? Genshin's emphatic answer is no. Even people incapable of achieving exalted states of meditation can achieve birth in Amida's Land by calling out and reflecting on Amida's Name single-mindedly.

If one cannot bear to contemplate and reflect upon the characteristics and secondary marks, one should single-mindedly call out and reflect upon (the Name of Amida Buddha) while imagining oneself taking refuge, while imagining oneself being led to the Pure Land at death or while imagining oneself attaining birth in the Pure Land. [End. Because different people have different desires, various types of contemplation are explicated.]

Whether one is walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, or remaining silent — no matter what one is doing — always keep this thought (*nen* 念) in your breast just as a starving person thinks of food and a thirsty person thinks of water. Some may lower their heads and raise their arms, or raise their voice and call out (the Name of Amida Buddha). Although your outward actions may differ, always keep the thought in mind. Keep it continuous from one thought-instant to the next, and do not forget it, no matter whether you are awake or asleep. (T 84, 56b)

It is clear from the amount of space devoted to the subject that Genshin considers contemplation of Amida Buddha to be of central importance in Pure Land practice. In emphasizing the contemplation of Amida Buddha in a state of meditative absorption, he is following the tradition of Tendai Buddhism, which, along with an complex doctrinal system, boasts an elaborate system of meditation. But while emphasizing the contemplation of Amida, he also stresses that one should concentrate in particular on the Buddha's light, and envision oneself being embraced in that salvific light. Since Amida Buddha is considered the source of salvation, Genshin's Pure

Land practice has a very strong devotional aspect. However, Genshin recognizes that people have different abilities and inclinations. While some people are capable of sublime meditation, others are unable to practice them. In view of the different spiritual capacities of the people, Genshin set forth different ways of contemplating Amida Buddha, and, moreover, for people who are unable to practice the contemplative exercises at all, Genshin recommends recitation on the Buddha's name while reflecting intently on such things as taking refuge, being taken to Pure Land at the moment of death and being born in that land. While not as exalted as visualizing Amida in a state of meditative absorption, Genshin views such practices as valid and effective in reaching the Pure Land.

6. Merit Transference

Vasubandhu's *Pure Land Treatise* defines the fifth gate of merit transference as follows.

How should we transfer merit? Without casting aside any sentient being mired in defilements, we should mentally make the vow at all times (to be born in the Pure Land). This is because merit transference is foremost in achieving the mind of great compassion. (T26, 231b)

Here the *Treatise* states that the act of transferring merit to all beings is central to the practice in the Pure Land path.

The doctrine of the transference of merits holds an important place in the Mahāyāna Buddhist conception of bodhisattva practice.⁴⁷ According to the Buddhist (and pan-Indian) theory of karmic retribution, every good or righteous action generates an appropriate amount of merit (*puṇya*). Throughout his life, a person "accumulates" merit, just as a person deposits money in a bank account. In conformity with the law of karma, the accumulated merit leads to material and spiritual blessings, both in this life

and in future rebirths. For example, rebirth in a heavenly realm is believed to result from merit accumulated during one's lifetime. Likewise, the attainment of Buddhahood is believed to be the result of the merit created through spiritual practices (although the amount of merit necessary for Buddhahood is so great that the spiritual practices must last for countless aeons before enough merit is accumulated). On the other hand, evil actions results in reduction of one's accumulated merits, and leads to rebirth in the various evil realms.⁴⁸

With the development of Mahāyāna Buddhist bodhisattva ideal, there arose the belief that a bodhisattva, as a part of his or her spiritual exercises, must transfer the merit he or she has accumulated to the goal of spiritual liberation of all beings. The bodhisattva must not use his or her merit for his or her own Buddhahood, but for the liberation of all beings from the cycle of birth-and-death. This is the natural consequence of the philosophy of emptiness: since merits are ultimately empty, bodhisattvas should not be attached to them, and should give them up for the sake of the liberation of all beings. The *Pure Land Treatise* applies this notion to Pure Land soteriology and argues that birth in the Pure Land can be attained only by transferring one's merit to the goal of the birth of all beings in the Pure Land. Underlying this argument is the notion, stressed in the gate of vows above, that birth in the Pure Land must be understood within the context of bodhisattva practice.

In his discussion of the transference of merit in the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin also begins from the position that birth in the Pure Land is one stage in the bodhisattva practice which has as its goal the attainment of complete Buddhahood. He argues that, paradoxically, birth in the Pure Land can only be achieved by giving up one's merits and transferring them to the goal of making all beings gain birth in the Pure Land. At the beginning of his analysis, Genshin paraphrases the *Ta chih tu lun*, and argues that genuine

transfer of merits must fulfill all the following five conditions :

(1) The merits to be transferred must encompass all the merits of the three periods of time (past, present and future). In other words, all of one's merits, and not just a specific portion of them, must be transferred to the goal in mind for the merit transference to be truly effective.

(2) The merit transference must be done in conformity with omniscience ; i. e., it must be done with insight into reality.

(3) The merits to be transferred must be shared with all beings.

(4) The merits must be transferred for the sake of supreme enlightenment, not for some lesser goal like longevity and material wealth.

(5) The donor, the person donated to and the donated goods must all be viewed as unobtainable (i. e., empty).

As this indicates, all of the merits generated from the spiritual practices and good works one has undertaken must be transferred to the spiritual welfare of all beings in order to realize one's birth in the Pure Land. After proposing the five conditions for effective transfer of merits above, Genshin presents his views on the role of the merit transference in Pure Land practice as follows.

On the basis of these conditions, you should take the merits (you have generated through) mental thoughts, spoken words and religious practices, as well as all of good roots (you have amassed during) the three phases (i. e., the three periods of time : past, present and future) [first condition], and transfer it to all sentient beings of both one's own and other beings' dharma-realms, benefit them equally [second condition] and destroy transgressions, arouse virtues, attain birth together in the Land of Supreme Bliss, quickly fulfill the practices and vows of Samantabhadra, realize the same supreme enlightenment for both oneself and others, and benefit sentient beings until the end of time [third condition], transfer your merits to the Dharma-realm [fourth

condition] and transfer your merits to Great Bodhi [fifth condition]. Only when it conforms to all of these conditions can it truly be said to be a genuine transfer of merits.

7. Conclusion

In the pages above, I have outlined Genshin's analysis of the nembutsu practice as found in his *Ōjōyōshū*. In this text, he discusses the nembutsu using the structure of the Five Gates of Remembrance found in Vasubandhu's *Pure Land Treatise*. In Genshin's view, the nembutsu is an entire complex of practice, embracing such activities as paying obeisance to Amida, praising Amida in verse, arousing the vow to attain Buddhahood, contemplating the characteristics of Amida and transferring all the merits one has accumulated to the spiritual welfare of all beings in the universe. The central practice, however, is the contemplation of Amida Buddha in a state of meditation. But recognizing the fact that various people have different spiritual abilities, Genshin finally recommends the recitation of Amida's Name for those people incapable of practicing Amida visualization. In this way, Genshin presents a complex system of nembutsu practice in the *Ōjōyōshū*. No one in Japan had previously set forth such a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the nembutsu, and partly for this reason, it came to exert a powerful influence on all subsequent development of Pure Land Buddhism in this country.

Chart 1

Four Extensive Vows	Sentient beings...	Defilements...	Dharma-gates...	Supreme Buddha-way...
Threefold Pure Precepts	Precepts for Benefitting Sentient Beings	Precepts Encompassing Vinaya Rules	Precepts Encompassing Meritorious Dharmas	
Threefold Virtues	Virtue of Favors	Virtue of Eradication	Virtue of Knowledge	
Three Aspects of Buddha-nature	Conditional Cause	Direct Cause	Fulfilling Cause	
Three Bodies	Response Body	Dharma Body	Recompense Body	

NOTES

¹Genshin sets forth this claim in the ninth chapter of the *Ōjōyōshū*, entitled “Various Practices for Birth” (T 84, 77b-78c). At the beginning of this chapter, he emphatically states, “Those who seek birth in the Land of Supreme Bliss need not necessarily (devote themselves) exclusively to the nembutsu” (T 84, 77b). Genshin’s position is very much in keeping with the eclectic tendency of Japanese Tendai soteriology, which recognizes many different paths, all equally valid, to Buddhahood.

²*Pure Land Treatise*, or the *Ching t’u lin* 淨土論, is the translation of the popular title of this work frequently encountered in the East Asian Pure Land tradition. The full title of the Chinese translation of this work as found in the Taishō Tripiṭaka is *Wu liang ching yu p’o t’i she yang sheng chieh* 無量壽經優波提舍願生偈 (*Verses on Birth in the Pure Land Commenting on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*). The Sanskrit title is usually reconstructed as *Sukhāvātīvyūhōpadeśa*. The major study on this treatise in Japanese is YAMAGUCHI 1966. The *Pure Land Treatise* has been translated into English translation in KIYOTA 1978 : 274-290.

³The full title of this work is *Wu liang shou ching yu p’o t’i she yang sheng chieh chu* 無量壽經優波提舍願生偈註 (*Commentary on the Verses on Birth in the Pure Land Commenting on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*). This work is also popularly called

Wang sheng lun chu 往生論註 (*Treatise on Birth in the Pure Land*).

⁴Along with the *Pure Land Treatise*, all of these works (with the exception of T'an-luan's *Ching t'u lun chu*) were important to Genshin. In the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin cites the *Shih ching t'u ch'in i lum* 33 times, the *Wang shang li tsan chieh* 13 times and Chikō's commentary twice (HANAYAMA 1976 : *chūki*[notes], 42-3).

⁵Tōdō Kyōshun has contrasted the different interpretations of the Five Gates presented by Vasubandhu, T'an-luan and Genshin. See TŌDŌ 1987 : 315-346.

⁶Tathāgata, Arhat and Samyaksambuddha are the first three of the ten epithets of the Buddha. They may be translated "Thus Come One," "Person Worthy of Offerings" and "Perfectly Awakened One," respectively.

⁷Jikaku Daishi was the posthumous title of Ennin (749-864), the third chief abbot of the Japanese Tendai sect.

⁸An object which, when one pays respect to, results in an increase in one's merits.

⁹A flower which is said to bloom only once in three thousand years.

¹⁰In this connection, we may remember that Genshin took active part in the Nijūgo sammaie 二十五三昧会 (Thee Association of the Twenty-five Samādhis), a nembutsu confraternity which was formed on Mt. Hiei in 986, the year after Genshin completed the *Ōjōyōshū*.

¹¹As a matter of fact, Nāgārjuna's *Shih erh li* is quoted in full in Shan-tao's *Wang sheng li tsan chieh* as verses to be recited at midnight (the third of the six watches of the day).

¹²This line is probably a paraphrase of a passage found in the *Hsü-kung tsang p'u sa ching* 虛空藏菩薩經 (*Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva Sūtra*; T 13, 679a). See ISHIDA 1970 : p. 9, note for "*Kokūzō bosatsu butsumyōkyō* (觀虛空藏菩薩仏名經)."

¹³This quotation is found at T 84, 48a-b in the *Ōjōyōshū*. The original passage is found at T 26, 43a-c.

¹⁴This verse is unidentified, but according to Ishida Mizumaro, it may refer to the so-called "Tsan fo chieh" 讚仏偈 (Verses in Praise of the Buddha) found in the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* (T 12, 267a-b) or to Nāgārjuna's *Shih erh li*. See ISHIDA 1970 : 90, note for "*Amida no bessan* (阿弥陀の別讚)."

¹⁵In the *Lotus Sūtra*, this passage is found at T 9, 9a. For an alternate English translation, see HURVITZ, 1976 : 40.

¹⁶The correct title of this scripture is the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*. It is one of the central texts of the Pure Land tradition. It describes the splendors of the Pure Land and recounts the story of how the Pure Land came into being.

¹⁷In the *Ching t'u lun chu*, this passage is found at T 40, 842a.

¹⁸This interpretation of the aspiration for enlightenment is found at several places in the first *chiian* of the *Mo ho chih kuan*. See, for example, T 46, 6a. For an English translation of the passage, see for example DONNER and STEVENSON 1993 : 166.

¹⁹Chih-i apparently formulated these vows on the basis of a similar set of vows found in the *Lotus Sūtra*:

Those who have not yet been ferried over, I will ferry over.

Those who have not yet understood, I will make them understand.

Those who have not settled themselves, I will settle.

Those who have not attained (nirvāṇa), I will cause them to attain nirvāṇa.

(T 9, 19b. For an alternate English translation, see HURVITZ, 102.)

On the place of four extensive vows in Chih-i's T'ien-t'ai system, see RHODES 1984.

²⁰A concise discussion of the threefold pure precepts is found in FUKUDA, 1954 : 635-6. A detailed study of the interpretation of these precepts in China and Japan is found in KODERA 1987 : 44-76.

²¹KODERA 1987 : 60. See also KODERA 1969 : 69. This is found at the beginning of the *T'ien-t'ai p'u sa chieh su*. See T 40, 580c.

²²The T'ien-t'ai doctrine of the "perfect fusion of the Three Truths" and its philosophical background is treated at length in SWANSON 1989.

²³NAITŌ, 1995 : 47-8, note 25. The corresponding passages in the *Mo ho chih kuan* itself is found at T 46, 9a-b. For an English translation of the *Mo ho chih kuan* passages, see DONNER and STEVENSON 1993 : 197-8.

²⁴The terms translated here as "acts of kindness" is *kuśala-mūla*. It refers to good acts which result in good results (here specifically meaning the attainment of Buddhahood).

²⁵On the *śamatha-viśāyanā* meditation, see the essays found in SEKIGUCHI 1975.

²⁶This passage is also quoted in the *Mo ho chih kuan*. See T 46, 13a.

²⁷English translations of this sūtra include RYUKOKU UNIVERSITY TRANSLATION CENTER 1984 and INAGAKI 1994 : 317-350. In my study I will refer to the

latter translation.

²⁸A synopsis of the thirteen contemplations is found in INAGAKI 1994 : 9.

²⁹In the *Contemplation Sūtra*, the phrase “The Buddha further said to Ānanda,” is found at the beginning of this sentence. See T 12, 343a. However, it is missing in the quotation in the *Ōjōyōshū*.

³⁰In the *Ōjōyōshū*, this quotation is found at T 84, 53a-b. The section of the *Contemplation Sūtra* upon which passage is based is found in T 12, 342c-3a.

³¹The thirty-two characteristics of the Buddha are discussed in DAYAL, 1932 : 300-304 and HURVITZ, 1960-62 : 353-361 (the latter work also discusses the eighty secondary marks of the Buddha).

³²Fukuhara has demonstrated that the list of the characteristics in the *Fa chieh tz'u ti fa men* corresponds closely with those found in the *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and its commentary, *Ta chih tu lun*. See FUKUHARA 1984 : 132.

³³Cited in FUKUHARA 1984 : 132. Most of these references are found in passages from Buddhist texts which are quoted in the *Ōjōyōshū*. However, the fact that Genshin felt no need to alter these passages to read forty-two characteristics suggests that he accepted the position articulated in these texts that the Buddha possesses only thirty-two characteristics.

³⁴On the relationship between the Buddha's characteristics in the *Ōjōyōshū* and the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*, see FUKUHARA 1986 : 47-63.

³⁵Also known as the Three Evil Paths (*sanakudō* 三惡道). Refers to the realms of hell dwellers, hungry ghosts and animals.

³⁶C. f. the following remark by E. J. Thomas, “The bodhisattva's height is equal to his outstretched arms.” Cited in DAYAL 1932 : 302. According to Dayal, “It was believed that banyan always measured the same in height and width.” DAYAL 1932 : 302.

³⁷In the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*, this passage is found in connection with the explanation on how to visualize the lump of flesh on the top of the Buddha's head. See T 15, 649a.

³⁸This paragraph is based on the ninth contemplation of the *Contemplation Sūtra* (T 12, 343b). My translation borrows heavily from the corresponding section of Prof. Inagaki's English translation of this sūtra (INAGAKI 1994 : 332-3). The same is true

for my translation of the final portion of this passage, which is based on the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* (see note 41 below).

³⁹These two sentences are based on the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sūtra*. See T 13, 905b.

⁴⁰This sentence is based upon the *Ta chih tu lun* (T 25, 276a).

⁴¹This passage, from “Mt. Sumeru, Encircling Adamantine Mountain...” to here, is based on the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* (T 12, 278a). Cf. Prof. Inagaki's English translation of the corresponding passage in this sūtra (INAGAKI 1994, 306).

⁴²On the Tendai theory of the Buddha-bodies and how they relate to the sect's theory of the four kinds of Buddha lands, see CHAPPELL 1977 : 32-5.

⁴³The passage from “He can be seen as...” to here derives from the *Contemplation Sūtra* (T 12, 344c ; INAGAKI 1994 : 339).

⁴⁴The passage from “Neither common beings nor sages...” to here derives from the *Mo ho chih kuan* (T 46, 6b ; DONNER and STEVENSON 1993 : 168).

⁴⁶The passage from “The sublime pure Dharma-body...” to here derives from the *Mo ho chih kuan* (T 46, 6c ; DONNER and STEVENSON 1993 : 169).

⁴⁷On the doctrine of the transference of merit, see DAYAL 1970 : 188-193. The historical development of this doctrine is treated in KAJIYAMA 1989 : 1-20. In Japanese, see SAKURABE 1974.

⁴⁸The evil realms refer to the realms of transmigratory existence. The realms of hell dwellers, hungry ghosts and animals are collectively known as the Three Evil Realms. These three realms plus the realm of *asuras* constitute the Four Evil Realms. Sometimes the realms of humans and heavenly beings are added to the Three Evil Realms and are referred to as the Five Evil Realms. See NAKAMURA 1975 : vol. 1, 19d-20a, entry for “*akushu* 惡越.”

⁴⁹Genshin states that his account of these five conditions is a paraphrase of the *Ta chih tu lun* (T 25, 395a). Indeed, although it does speak of the five marks of merit transference, the discussion found in the *Ta chih tu lun* does not specifically list these five factors. In fact, the entire presentation of the concept of merit transference in the *Ta chih tu lun* is digressive and had to follow. Genshin's systematic treatment of the topic in the Gate of Merit Transference is thus not simply a paraphrase, but a creative restatement of the *Ta chih tu lun*.

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