

Hungry Ghosts, Animals, Humans, Fighting Spirits and Heavenly Beings: Genshin's View of the Five Realms in the *Ōjōyōshū*

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In an earlier paper, I discussed at some length Genshin's 源信 (942-1017) conception of the Buddhist hells as found in his *Ōjōyōshū* (RHODES, forthcoming). There, I pointed out that Genshin treats the hells within the context of his discussion of the Six Realms (*rokudō* 六道; also known as the Six Destinies [*rokushu* 六趣]), or the realm of transmigration: (1) the realm of hell, (2) the realm of hungry ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼; Skt. *preta*), (3) the realm of animals, (4) the realm of fighting spirits (*ashura* 阿修羅; Skt. *asura*), (5) the realm of humans and (6) the realm of heavenly beings.¹ In this paper, I would like to examine Genshin's views concerning the final five paths appearing in his *Ōjōyōshū*.

In Buddhist cosmology, hell is not a region of eternal punishment to which sinners are consigned for all time. Instead, it is seen as one mode of existence (albeit an extremely painful one) within the realm of transmigration. Likewise, the other five realms are also seen as aspects of transmigratory existence into which one falls as a result of one's past actions (*karma*) and in which one stays as long as the karmic influence remains.

The notion that there are multiple modes of existence within the realm of transmigration appears early in Buddhist history. However, there was a question as to whether five or six such realms should be recognized. Texts of the Pāli Theravāda tradition, such as the *Samyukta Nikāya* (WOODWARD 1956: vol. 5, 396-399) and the *Mahāsīhanādasutta* (*The Greater Lion's Roar*) of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (HORNER, 1954: vol. 1, 98-9), hold that there are five realms: those of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, humans and heavenly beings.² In contrast, many Mahāyāna Buddhist treatises, such as the *Ta chih tu lun* 大智度論 (*The Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise*; T 25, 175c-176c) and the

Yogācārabhūmi 瑜伽師地論 (T 30, 295c-297a), uphold the theory of six realms. Since these latter treatises were extremely influential in the Sino-Japanese Buddhist tradition, monks in East Asia generally accepted that there are six modes of existence within the world. Genshin also follows this theory without question.

With these preliminary remarks, I will now turn to an examination of Genshin's view of the five realms (from the realm of hungry ghosts to that of heavenly beings).

I. The Realm of Hungry Ghosts

Genshin begins his discussion of the hungry ghosts by locating their abode within the Buddhist cosmology. The hungry ghosts are said to live in two places: (1) in an underground realm ruled by Yama located five hundred *yojanas* below the ground, and (b) within the realms of humans and heavenly beings. In other words, the hungry ghosts do not inhabit their own special realm, but share the realms of hell, humans and heavenly beings with the other beings there. Next, Genshin mentions that there are various theories concerning the height of the hungry ghosts. Following the *Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*, he states that they are sometimes said to be one foot tall, to be as tall as a human, to be a thousand *yojanas* tall, or to be as tall as the Himalayas.³⁾ As for their life spans, hungry ghosts live for five hundred years, but a day in their lives is as long as one month in the human realm.

The bulk of the section on hungry ghosts in the *Ōjyōshū* is devoted to enumerating the various kinds of hungry ghosts found in Buddhist texts. In his description, Genshin cites such works as the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, *Liu po lo mi ching* 六波羅蜜經 (*Six Perfections Sūtra*), *Ta chih tu lun* and the *Yogācārabhūmi*. Among them, the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* provides Genshin with the largest number of examples. In one sense, this is quite natural, as this text is quite lengthy (seventy fascicles altogether), and its section dealing with the hungry ghosts occupies two entire fascicles. Within its pages are found descriptions of thirty-six types of hungry ghosts. Among them, Genshin specifically chooses to discuss the following nine in the *Ōjyōshū* (T 84, 37a-b; in the *sūtra*, these hungry ghosts are described at T 17, 92c-93a, 93b-c, 94a, 94b, 94b-c, 94c-95b, 98a, 102a-b and 102b, respectively).⁴⁾

- (1) Cauldron body. These hungry ghosts are twice as tall as humans.

They have no face and no eyes, and their limbs are shaped like the legs of a cauldron. A fire rages inside them, burning their bodies from within. People who formerly committed murder because they coveted the victim's wealth are reborn as such hungry ghosts.

(2) Vomit-eater. These hungry ghosts make vomit their food, but since they rarely find it, they are constantly hungry. Men and women who, while feasting on good food themselves, denied them to their spouses and children are reborn as such hungry ghosts.

(3) Fragrance-eater. These hungry ghosts feed on the smell of offerings presented during religious ceremonies praying for the recovery of a sick person. People who feasted on good food in front of their wives and children while refusing to share it with them are reborn as such hungry ghosts.

(4) Dharma-eater. These hungry ghosts run about in the rugged wilderness seeking food. They are the color of black thunderclouds, and tears flow from their eyes like rain. They take sustenance from listening to monk's prayers and sermons. People who gave unwholesome sermons in order to gain fame are reborn as these ghosts.

(5) Water-drinker. These hungry ghosts are constantly tormented by thirst. When they run to a river and try to drink its water, they are beaten by the demons guarding it. These hungry ghosts can only satisfy their thirst by drinking water dripping from the legs of people who have waded across rivers, or by drinking whatever leaks from the cupped hands of people ritually offering water to the spirits of their ancestors. People who have sold wine after diluting it with water, or who have added to the volume of the wine by dropping earthworms or moths into it are reborn as this hungry ghost.

(6) Craver. These hungry ghosts live off food people give as offerings to the spirits of their ancestors. People who have duped others into giving them the meager fruits of their labors are reborn as this type of hungry ghosts.

(7) Those who live on the beach. Because there is no shade, the beach is extremely hot. They quench their thirst by licking morning dew, because the ocean appears dry to them. People who tricked merchants who fell ill during their journey into selling their wares cheaply are reborn as this type of hungry ghosts.

(8) Those who live in a cemetery. These hungry ghosts feed on the smoke which arises from the corpses being cremated. Prison wardens who

stole and ate the inmates' food are reborn as this type of hungry ghosts.

(9) Those who live in trees from birth. Their bodies are compressed into a ball, causing them great pain. People who cut down shade trees and forests belonging to a monastery are reborn as this type of hungry ghosts.

Besides these nine types of hungry ghosts depicted in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, Genshin describes several other types of hungry ghosts found in other Buddhist texts. For example, he takes up two from the *Liu po lo mi ching*. First, there are those whose hair is as sharp as razors. The hair hangs down from the head and covers their whole body. As a result, these hungry ghosts are mutilated all over their bodies by their own hair. Second, there are hungry ghosts who give birth to five children during every day and night, and eat them as soon as they are born (T 84, 37b; in the sūtra, they are found at T 8, 876c). From the *Ta chih tu lun*, Genshin mentions three types of hungry ghosts: (1) those who break open their own skulls and consume their own brains, (2) those that breathe fire and eat the moths that fly into it, and (3) those who feast on excrements, tears, puss and dishwater (T 84, 37b; in the treatise, they are found at T 25, 175c). Finally, he cites the following passage from the *Yogācārabhūmi*, which divides hungry ghosts into three types: those who suffer from external obstacles to nourishment, those who suffer from internal obstacles to nourishment, and those who cannot eat even though there are neither internal nor external obstacles.

Also, there are demons who cannot get food as a result of external obstacles. That is to say, they are always subject to pressing hunger and thirst and their bodies have become emaciated. When, by chance, they find a clear stream and run to it, a strong demon (appears and) beats them from foot to head with a staff. Or else (the water) turns to fire or dries up completely. Moreover, there are demons who cannot get food as a result of internal obstacles. That is to say, their mouth is like an eye of a needle but their stomach is as huge as a mountain. Even when they come across food and drink, there is no way they can consume it. Finally, there are those cannot get food even though there are neither internal nor external obstacles. That is to say, there are those who come across a little food and begin to eat. (But then, the ingested food) turns into fierce flames and bursts out (from the stomach), burning the body. (T 84, 37b. This passage is based on *Yogācārabhūmi*, T 30, 297b.)

In his portrayal of the path of the hungry ghosts, Genshin does not simply quote the description of these beings found in the sūtras. Instead he picks and chooses among the various descriptions concerning these creatures to creatively reconstruct the vision of the realm of hungry ghosts found scattered throughout the sūtras. A good example is the fact that, among the thirty-six varieties of hungry ghosts found in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, Genshin describes only nine and omits the rest. Perhaps he thought they were redundant, or he may simply have found some of the descriptions offensive. Likewise, he also omits a particularly graphic detail concerning one of the hungry ghosts found in the *Liu po lo mi ching*. In this sūtra, it is specifically stated that the hungry ghosts with the sharp razor-like hair have their genitals constantly sliced and mutilated (T 8, 876c). Perhaps Genshin thought this passage indecorous and felt compelled to delete it.

In any case, Genshin holds that people are reborn as hungry ghosts as retribution for evil acts in the past. Citing the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, he identifies stinginess and jealousy as the general cause for falling into the realm of hungry ghosts (T 84, 37b-c; in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, this is found at T 17, 92a). The notion that rebirth in the wretched realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animal and fighting spirits is the result of one's own evil actions in the past is one of the underlying themes of Genshin's treatment of these realms.

II. The Realm of Animals

Compared with the section on hungry ghosts, the section on animals is quite brief.⁵⁾ According to Genshin, animals can be divided into two: (1) those that live in the ocean, and (2) those that live among humans and heavenly beings. Although there are three billion four hundred million species of animals,⁶⁾ they can be distinguished into three groups: (1) birds, (2) beasts, and (3) worms. Genshin describes these animals thus:

These species of animals, whether they are strong or weak, harm each other. Sometimes they drink (other animals) and sometimes they eat (other animals). Not for an instant are they at peace. Both during the day and at night, they are constantly in fear. Moreover, aquatic animals are harmed by fishermen, while the species that walk on land are harmed by hunters. Animals such as elephants, horses, cows, donkeys, camels

and mules sometimes have their brains severed with iron hooks, sometimes have their noses pierced, and sometimes have harnesses placed on their necks. They must always carry heavy burdens on their bodies and are whipped. They only think about water and grass, and can think of nothing else. Furthermore, centipedes and weasels are born in the dark and die in the dark; lice and fleas are born on a human body and die on a human body. Dragons are subject to the sufferings of the three heats⁷⁾ and can rest neither during the day nor at night. Moreover, although serpents have long bodies, they are deaf, dull-witted and lack feet. Coiling their bodies, they crawl on their stomachs and are bitten by small worms. (T 84, 37c)

As these examples illustrate, concludes Genshin, animals are subject to numerous varieties of suffering. Again, rebirth as animals is the result of evil actions in the past. Specifically, it is stated that foolish people, people devoid of shame and clerics who receive offerings but fail to live up to the donor's expectations are reborn as animals.

III. The Realm of Fighting Spirits

Genshin's treatment of the *asuras* is extremely short, being only a few lines in length. According to Genshin, the *asuras* live in two places. The superior types live at the bottom of the great ocean located to the north of Mt. Sumeru, while the lesser types live among the crags in the mountains. They are constantly being attacked, mutilated and killed by heavenly beings. Furthermore, every day, in the morning, at noon and in the evening, the *asuras* are spontaneously assailed by instruments of torture and are subject to inexpressible suffering.

IV. The Realm of Humans

The section on humans is the longest of the five realms. Genshin analyzes the human realm in terms of (1) impurity, (2) suffering and (3) impermanence. These three items, along with non-self, constitute the four bases of mindfulness, or four ways of contemplation: (1) the body is impure, (2) sensations (*vedanā*) are suffering, (3) the mind is impermanent, and (4) dharmas are without self. Through the cultivation of these four bases of mindfulness, the practitioner become aware of the four perverted views: purity, bliss, permanence and self.

By examining the human realm from these three perspectives, Genshin highlights the wretched character of human existence.

(1) Impurity

Genshin develops his arguments concerning the impure nature of human existence through an analysis of the human body. The human body is the object of our most intense love and attachment. However, Genshin insists that a close examination of the human body reveals that it is impure in many ways, and quite unworthy as an object of our desire.

To make his point, Genshin first provides a description of the human anatomy, drawing both on Buddhist texts and traditional Chinese medical thought. He begins with the following passage from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*.

Within the human body are three hundred sixty bones, attached to each other at the joints. That is to say, the finger bone is attached to the foot bone; the foot bone is attached to the ankle bone; the ankle bone is attached to the leg bone; the leg bone is attached to the knee bone; the knee bone is attached to the thigh bone; the thigh bone is attached to the rump bone; the rump bone is attached to the hip bone; the hip bone is attached to the back bone; and the back bone is attached to the rib bone. Also the back bone is attached to the collar bone; the collar bone is attached to the chin bone; the chin bone is attached to the teeth; on top of that is the skull. Also the collar bone is attached to the shoulder bone; the shoulder bone is attached to the elbow bone; the elbow bone is attached to the arm bone; the arm bone is attached to the hand bone; and the hand bone is attached to the finger bone. They follow upon each other in this way, and are attached to each other like a chain one after another. (T 84, 37c-38c; in the sūtra it is found at T 12, 675b)

This concludes the description of the human skeleton. Genshin next explains the internal organs with quotations from other Buddhist texts. First he cites the following passage from the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*.⁸⁾

(This body), which is created through the accumulation of three hundred sixty bones, is like a rotten and decayed house. It is supported at many joints. Four fine veins run (through the body), reaching everywhere. Five hundred strips of muscle (found under the skin) are like plaster

(covering the house). Six veins, all connected to each other, cling to these five hundred strips (of muscle). Seven hundred fine veins course throughout (the body), while sixteen coarse veins, all connected with each other, twist (through the body). Two strips of muscle, each three and a half fathoms long, are attached within. The sixteen intestines and stomach wind through the digestive tract and the rectum. The twenty-five *chi* 氣 channels are like windows and holes, and the one hundred seven barriers⁹⁾ are just like broken instruments. The eighty thousand pores appear as if they are covered by unkempt grass, while the five sense-organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body) and the seven orifices (of the eyes, ears, nose and mouth) are filled with impure things. (Our bodies are) encased in seven layers of skin. We are nourished by (food having) the six tastes, (and constantly seek to satisfy our hunger) just as a fire swallower never tires of swallowing fire. In these ways, our bodies are constantly odious and polluted, and are by nature festering with sores. Who can cherish and harbor pride concerning (this body)? (T 84, 38a; in the *Ratnakūṭa*, the passage is found at T 11, 541a.)

In the final lines of this passage, Genshin introduces the main theme of this section: that because the human body is impure, it is unworthy as an object of longing and attachment. He elaborates on this point later, but before dwelling further on this theme, Genshin first cites an alternative description of the human physiology deriving from the Chinese medical tradition.

There are five organs within the abdomen. They wrap themselves around each other, and are arranged one after another from top to bottom. In appearance, they resemble a lotus blossom....

On the top are the lungs, which are white in color. The liver is green in color. The heart is in the center, and it is red in color. The spleen is yellow in color. The kidneys are at the bottom, and they are black in color.

There are also six receptacles (*fu* 府). The large intestines are the receptacle for evacuation. It is also the receptacle (associated with) the lungs. It is three and a half fathoms long, and is white in color. The gall bladder is the receptacle for purification. It is also the receptacle (associated with) the liver. It is green in color. The small intestines are the receptacle for receiving and storing. It is also the receptacle (associated

with) the heart. It is sixteen fathoms long, and red in color. The stomach is the receptacle of the five grains. It is also the receptacle (associated with) the spleen. In it are three pecks of excrement, and it is yellow in color. The bladder is the receptacle for (storing) urine. It is also the receptacle (associated with) the kidneys. It holds one *tou* 斗 (4.8 gallons) of urine, and is black in color. The Triple Burners (*san-chiao* 三焦; the three sections of the body cavity) are the receptacle for evacuation. These things are found throughout the body. The large and small intestines are alternately red and white in color. They are folded upon each other eighteen times and they resemble a coiled up poisonous snake. (T 84, 38a-b)

Chih-i, the founder of T'ien-t'ai (Japanese: Tendai) Buddhism, discusses the human physiology in his major works on meditation, including the *Fa chieh tz'u ti fa men* 法界次第初門 (*First Gate to the Succession of the Dharma-realm*; this work will be cited below as *Tz'u ti ch'an men*, the name by which this work is popularly known in the Sino-Japanese T'ien-t'ai/Tendai tradition), an early work written in his forties, and the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀 (*Great Cessation and Contemplation*), his mature synthesis of meditation theory.¹⁰ The first section of the quotation above (which likens the five organs to the petals of a lotus blossom wrapped around each other) derives from the *Tz'u ti ch'an men* (T 46, 530b).

But as Yamano Toshirō has noted, Chih-i's discussion of human physiology and illnesses derives mainly from the Chinese medical tradition (YAMANO 1985: 120). Following this tradition, in the latter section of the quotation, Genshin focuses on the five organs and six receptacles which constitute the major internal organs of the human body according to traditional Chinese medical thought. According to this theory, the five organs (which deal with the production and storage of *chi*) and the six receptacles (which constitute the digestive system) "work together in pairs, regulating each other," to nourish and sustain human life (LIU 1988: 10).

The quotation above, however, ends in an ominous note by likening the intestines to a coiled snake ready to strike. These words mark a point of transition, for Genshin next turns his attention to the various reasons why he believes our bodies should be characterized as filthy, impure and detestable. First, he focuses on the innumerable parasitic worms that are believed to dwell

in the body, feeding on the body and waiting for an opportunity to cause illness and even death. Genshin quotes the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*'s description of these worms.

Seven days after (a baby) first emerges from the womb, eighty thousand worms appear on her body and (they begin to) bite and eat (her) throughout the length and breadth (of her body). There are two worms called "hair-licker." They dwell at the root of the hair and constantly eat the hair. There are two worms called "eye-clinger." They dwell in the eye and constantly eat the eye. Four worms live in the brain and eat the brain. One worm is called "rice stalk leaf." It lives in the ear and eats the ear. There is a worm called "hidden in the mouth." It lives in the nose and eats the nose. There are two worms. The first is called "distant itch" and the second is called "itch all over." They live on the lips and eat the lips. One worm is called "needle-mouth." It lives on the tongue and eats the tongue. Five hundred worms live in the left side (of the body) and eat the left side. The same is true for the right side (of the body). Four worms eat the fresh organs and two worms eat the fermenting organs. Four worms dwell in the urine tract and drinks the urine. Four worms dwell in the excrement tract and eat the excrement. And so on up to, there is a worm called "black head." It dwells on the leg and eats the leg. In these ways, eighty thousand (worms) live on the (human) body. They bite and eat (the body) day and night, causing fever and anguish. When the mind is beset by worries, illnesses appear and not even skilled physicians can remove and cure (the illnesses). (T 84, 38b)

Here Genshin explains that the entire body is infested with innumerable parasitic worms which constantly feed on our bodies. Through their activities, they constantly afflict us with myriad infections and inflammations, defiling and disfiguring us. Furthermore, these worms cause us great pain during our final hours. Quoting the *Samghaṭa Sūtra*, Genshin explains.

When a person is on the verge of death, the worms become fearful and begin to bite and eat each other. (The dying person then) experiences suffering and pain and the men, women and servants (gathered by the dying person) are greatly distressed. After the worms have eaten each other, only two worms remain. They attack and fight each other for seven days, and after seven days, one worm dies, but the other remains

alive. (T 84, 38b; in the sūtra, this passage is found at T 13, 972c)
Thus throughout our lives, down to our final moments, the parasites on our bodies causes us tremendous anguish.

Genshin further points out that our bodies secrete various waste matters, chief among them being feces and urine. No matter how exquisite the delicacies we eat, he points out that they all turn into foul-smelling excrement after just one night. Our bodies, which is brimming with such filth, must be judged impure. Even if we wash ourselves using all the water in the ocean, we cannot clean and purify our bodies. Thus, although we may appear beautiful and distinguished from the outside, we are really nothing but bags of manure. From this perspective Genshin likens a human being to a beautifully painted urn filled with excrement. This situation is portrayed in the verse, attributed by Genshin to the *Ch'an ching* 禪經 (*Meditation Sūtra*), which states,

Even though they know the body is foul smelling and impure
Foolish people intentionally love and value it.

They see the desirable complexion of the face on the outside,
And do not view the impurity on the inside. (T 84, 38b)¹²⁾

Thus, Genshin concludes, our bodies are filthy and polluted from our infancy to our old age. But the impurity of the human body appear most graphically when it begins to rot after death. Based on the words of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*, Genshin describes this process of physical putrefaction as follows.

Moreover, after death, (the body) is discarded among the mounds (in a graveyard). After one day, two days and so on up to seven days, the body becomes bloated, turns blackish-green in color, and begins to stink and fester. The skin bursts and pus and blood pour out. Birds and beasts, such as hawks, eagles, kites, owls, foxes, wolves and so forth, grasp (the body), drag it around, bite it and eat it. After being eaten by the birds and beasts, the impure (body) is crushed and festered, and innumerable types of worms and maggots wriggle out of the stinking body. They are more hateful than a dead dog. And so on up to, after becoming white bones, the pieces become scattered; hands, feet and skull are in different places. The wind blows (the bones), the sun dries them, the rain falls on them and frost envelopes them. After the years have passed, they change their color and form, finally decay, are ground into powder and

become mixed with the dust and soil. [The above refers to the ultimate impurity. (These lines) can be seen in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā* (*Sūtra*) and the (*Mo-ho*) *chih-kuan*.] (T 84, 38b-c)

In these ways, Genshin repeatedly stresses the impurity of the body. In conclusion, he states,

You should know that our bodies are impure from beginning to end. The men and women we love are also the same. What knowledgeable person would arouse desire and attachment (to them)? Therefore, the (*Mo-ho*) *chih-kuan* states, “When you have not yet perceived these marks (of the impurity of the body), love and passion are strong, but once you have perceived it, desires you hold in the mind (towards the body) all come to an end. (Then, corporeal existence becomes) exceedingly difficult to endure. It is like this: although it is possible to eat food as long as one does not perceive the dung (that is lying next to you), you immediately regurgitate (what you have just ate) once you inhale its noxious smell.” (T 84, 38c; in the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*, this passage is found at T 46, 122a.)

Since the body is so impure, Genshin concludes, no sensible person should be attached to it.

(2) Suffering

The proposition that human existence is suffering is one of the hallmarks of the Buddhist religion. Perhaps because it is so taken for granted, Genshin does not treat this theme at great length. However, he does insist that humans are subject to suffering from the moment of their birth, and that their suffering continues throughout their lives. The central portion of his discussion is taken up with a long citation paraphrasing the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*, which states that humans are subject to two kinds of sufferings: (1) internal suffering, or illnesses, and (2) external suffering, or suffering caused by anguishes inflicted on oneself by human and non-human agencies. He quotes,

(As a result of our) having received our bodies, we (are subject to) two kinds of suffering. Illnesses arise in our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, throat, teeth, chest, stomach, hands and feet. In these ways, there are four hundred and four illnesses that assail our bodies. They are called internal suffering. There is also external suffering. (They include) such things as being (incarcerated) in jail and being beaten and whipped, having our ears

and nose sliced off and having our hands and legs cut off. Evil demons learn of it and mosquitoes, horseflies, wasps and other noxious insects sting and bite us. Cold, heat, hunger, thirst, wind and rain befall us and various torments assail our bodies. Among all of our deportments we assume with our bodies composed of the five aggregates, (i. e.,) standing, walking, sitting or lying down, there is none that is not (fraught with) suffering. If we walk for a long time without any rest, this is called external suffering. The same is true of standing, sitting and lying down. (T 84, 38c; this is a paraphrase of the sūtra's words found at T 11, 315c-316a.)

Such are the sufferings to which humans are subject. Of course, in one sense, these sufferings can be dismissed as extreme or special examples. However, historical records indicate that the age in which Genshin lived was subject to a succession of droughts, pestilences and other natural calamities. Death, illnesses and anguish was a fact of life for the people of this age. For this reason, Genshin could close this section with the following words, "Various other marks of sufferings are plainly apparent to us. There is no need to describe them (here)" (T 84, 38c). For Genshin, the proposition that human life is suffering must have seemed obvious from his everyday experiences.

(3) Impermanence

A major reason why Buddhist texts hold human existence to be suffering is because it is characterized by impermanence. However pleasant life may appear, all humans—the rich and the noble just as much as the ordinary folks—must eventually die. Once realized, this fact further leads to realization of the unsatisfactory nature of human existence and the folly of any attachment to it. The impermanence of human life and the folly of clinging blindly to what must eventually perish is reiterated in one Buddhist text after another. Genshin cites several such passages from the Buddhist scriptures. For example, from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, he cites the following verse:

Human life does not remain (forever);

(It passes by) more (rapidly) than water (rushing down) the side of a
mountain.

Although we may have it today,

Tomorrow it may be difficult to maintain.

Why do you act as your mind desires

And abide in evil dharmas? (T 84, 38c; in the sūtra, it is found at T 12, 742b.)

He also quotes the following verse from the *Udānavarga*:

Once this day has passed,

Your life diminishes (by that much).

(You are) like a fish in a small pool of water.

What happiness can you find in such circumstances? (T 84, 39a; this verse appears several times in the sūtra, for example at T 4, 616b and 621b and c.)

According to these verses, although we may be happily enjoying our lives today, there is no guarantee that we will be alive tomorrow. The allotted life span of every being is constantly diminishing, day by day, moment from moment. How can people who have realized this fact find pleasure in life? This point is repeated in the next quotation from the *Mahāmāyā Sūtra*, which likens humans to cattle being led to the slaughterhouse:

For example, it is like an outcaste

Driving cattle to a slaughterhouse.

Step by step, (the cattle) approach the place of their death.

Human life is also like this. (T 84, 39a; in the sūtra, this verse is found at T 12, 1007c.)

Every moment we come closer to our death. Even people blessed with longevity cannot escape it. Genshin provides a final description of the fate awaiting all humans by citing the next lines from a long verse in the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* (Genshin refers to this sūtra here by its popular nickname *Ta ching* 大經 [*Great Sūtra*]):

In all the various worlds,

All living beings return to death.

Although the length of life may be immeasurable,

It will surely come to an end.

(People who) flourish will surely decline.¹⁴⁾

Whenever there is a meeting, there is a parting.

Youthfulness does not remain for long.

Our robust complexions are attacked by illnesses.

Life is swallowed by death.

There is no dharma that is eternal. (T 84, 39a; in the sūtra, these lines are found at T 12, 612c)

No one is free from death, not even wizards (*hsien* 仙) who have attained paranormal powers through their austerities (T 84, 39a). In conclusion, Genshin states, “You should know that, even although there may be people who are spared other types of sufferings and sicknesses, ultimately there is no way to avert this one matter of impermanence (i. e., death). You should practice (the Buddhist path) as preached (by the Buddha) and seek the fruit of eternity and bliss” (T 84, 39a).

In the way outlined above, Genshin describes human existence as being characterized by impurity, suffering and impermanence. Throughout this section, he emphasizes that human life is ultimately unsatisfactory, and that our deeply rooted attachment to it is fundamentally mistaken. For these reasons, he concludes in the final line of the section on the human realm: “The path of humans is like this. We should truly regard it with loathing” (T 84, 39a).

VI. The Realm of Heavenly Beings

The last of the six realm of Buddhist cosmology is the realm of heavenly beings. Heavenly beings, states Genshin, are of three types: those that live in heavenly realms in the realm of desire, those that live in heavenly realms in the realm of form, and those that live in heavenly realms in the formless realm.¹⁵⁾ Buddhist cosmology recognizes the existence of a number of heavenly realms in each of these three realms. However, in the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin does not provide a detailed discussion of all these heavens, claiming that the features of the heavens are too varied to be fully reproduced. Instead, he takes up just one heaven, Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the second of the six heavens in the realm of desire (it is presided over by the god Indra), and treats the suffering experienced by the heavenly beings there as a representative example of the anguish encountered in the heavenly realms.

Although the heavenly realms are most often depicted as realms of blissful existence in Buddhist texts, Genshin does not emphasize this aspect in the *Ōjōyōshū*. Instead, he focuses on the dark side of existence in these realms: the fact that even heavenly beings must die, forsake these heavenly realms, and be reborn in another realm within the Six Realms. Following the *Liu po lo mi ching* (T 8, 878a), Genshin states that, when a heavenly being of Trāyastriṃśa

Heaven is about to die, she manifests the following five signs of decay:

- (1) The flowers in the garland adorning her hair begin to wither.
- (2) Her heavenly garment become soiled.
- (3) Perspiration appear in her armpits.
- (4) Her eyes begin to blink.
- (5) She does not feel pleasure in her present existence.

When these signs appear, other heavenly beings all shun her, and refuse to approach her. Alone, this dying heavenly being falls to the ground and wails in a plaintive voice, “Why do all the other heavenly beings cast me aside? I am now all alone, with no one to turn to. Won’t someone save me? Won’t someone have pity on me and help me to extend my life?” But despite her entreaties, no one comes to her aid and her life comes to an end.

Genshin’s point here is that even beings living in the blissful heavenly realms are subject to suffering. Indeed, Genshin claims that the suffering experienced by heavenly beings when they realize they must leave the blissful heavenly realm is greater than that experienced by beings of hell. Genshin cites the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* on this point:

When (heavenly beings) are about to leave the heavenly realms,

Great suffering and anguish arise in their hearts.

The sufferings of the hells

Do not even amount to one-sixteenth (of the suffering experienced by heavenly beings at this time). (T 84, 39b; these lines form a part of a long verse found in the sūtra at T 17, 131b.)

In this way, even in the heavenly realms, the most blissful region within the cycle of transmigration, it is impossible to escape suffering.

Conclusion

In these ways, Genshin insists that existence in all the realms of transmigration is characterized by suffering. But Genshin’s purpose in composing the *Ōjōyōshū* was not simply to point this out; it was to make its readers realize the folly of being attached to such existence and turn our thought to Amida Buddha’s Pure Land, the transcendental realm beyond all suffering. In the later sections of the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin argues that the way to the Pure Land lies in practicing the nembutsu. But he also states that reflection on the truth of human suffering and impermanence—the points that

were stressed in the section on the human realm above — is effective in lessening our attachment to this world, in directing our thoughts to the Pure Land, and in helping us concentrate our thoughts on obtaining birth in the Pure Land when the hour of death approaches. Thus, within the *Ōjōyōshū*, the description of the Six Realms has an important practical purpose: to make us turn our thoughts away from human existence mired in the cycle of rebirth and seek salvation by obtaining birth into Amida's Pure Land.

Notes

- 1) On the introduction of the notion of the Six Realms and the “paradigm shift” which resulted in the Japanese world view (especially as it is reflected in the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記), see LAFLEUR 1983: 26–59.
- 2) The *Kathāvatthu*, a Pāli doctrinal treatise, contains a section concerning the question of whether five or six realms should be recognized as the correct Buddhist position. See AUNG and RHYS DAVIDS 1915: 211.
- 3) In the *Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*, this passage is found at T 13, 226b.
- 4) The sources for Genshin's citations are given in Ishida Mizumaro's exhaustive annotation to the *Ōjōyōshū* (ISHIDA 1970). I gladly acknowledge that debt that I owe to Prof. Ishida's annotations in preparing my paper.
- 5) This is not for lack of source materials. We may note that the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, for example, devotes four fascicles (fascicles 18 to 21) to this topic (T 17, 103b–124c).
- 6) This number is taken from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, T 17, 103b.
- 7) The three sufferings to which dragons are subject: (1) their bodies are burned by hot wind and sand, (2) their clothings are blown off by fierce winds, and (3) they are caught and eaten by *garuḍas*. NAKAMURA 1975: vol. 1, 484d.
- 8) This passage has many unclear points and the translation which follows is tentative.
- 9) The meaning of the term “barrier” 関 is unclear. According to Ishida, it usually refers to a spot near the navel. It also can refer to the bodily orifices such as the ears, eyes and mouth. See ISHIDA 1970: 34–5, headnote on “*kan* 関”.
- 10) On Chih-i's medical theory, see ANDŌ 1975 and YAMANO 1985.
- 11) Ishida notes that there are two passages, similar in content, in the *Ratnakūta Sūtra* which describes the worms in the human body (T 11, 325a–b and T 11, 331a–c). This quotation is based on the former passage. See ISHIDA 1970: 35, headnote on “*hajimete...* 初めて” and 36, headnote on “*dai gojūgo to shichi...* 第五十五と七.”
- 12) As Ishida notes, this verse appears in the *Fa yüan chu lin* 法苑珠林 (*Forest of Jewels from the Garden of the Dharma*) by Tao-shih 道世 of the T'ang Dynasty,

where it is attributed to the *Ch'an pi yao fa ching* 禪秘要法經 (*Sūtra on the Dharma of the Hidden Essentials of Meditation*). See T 53, 847c-848a. Unfortunately this exact verse is not found in the *Ch'an pi yao fa ching*. However, it contains passages which resemble this verse closely, and it has been suggested that someone created this verse on the basis of these passages. See ISHIDA 1970: 36-7, headnote on “*Zenkyō* 禪經.”

- 13) This quotation is basically made up of selected passages taken from the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (T 5, 298c-9c). The reference to the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* is probably to the discussion of the contemplation of impurity (*aśubha-bhāvanā* 不淨觀), or the Buddhist meditation on the process of a corpse's decay, found in the ninth fascicle of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* (T 46, 121c-122b). However, except for the phrase “The wind blows (the bones), the sun dries them,” Genshin does not seem to quote directly from the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* here.
- 14) Incidentally, these lines are the source for the famous opening words of the medieval Japanese *The Tale of the Heike*, which runs as follows: “The sound of Gion Shōja bells echoes the impermanence of all things; the color of the *sāla* flowers reveals the truth that the prosperous must decline.” See MCCULLOUGH 1988: 23.
- 15) The realm of desire, the realm of form and the formless realm are collectively known as the Triple Realms (*sangai* 三界) and refer to the realm of transmigration. The first Realm of Desire include the abodes of the beings of the five realms, plus the heavenly realms of the Realm of Desire. The latter two Realms consist solely of heavenly realms (specifically the heavenly realms of the Realms of Form and the Formless Realm).

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