

# Seeking the Pure Land in Heian Japan: The Practices of the Monks of the Nijūgo Zammai-e

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IN the fifth month of 986, a nembutsu association, called the Nijūgo zammai-e 二十五三昧会 (Association of the Twenty-five Samādhis), was founded by a group of twenty-five monks at Enryaku-ji 延暦寺, the head temple of the Tendai sect located on Mt. Hiei. The association was formed as a mutual-help society to assist and encourage each other in the practice of the nembutsu as a means to achieve birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land. It is historically significant as one of the first nembutsu associations to have been formed in Japan.<sup>1</sup>

This paper focuses on an important but unjustly neglected document called the *Ryōgon-in nijūgo zammai kesshū kakochō* 楞嚴院廿五三昧結集過去帳 (*Register of the Members of the Assembly of Twenty-five Samādhis of Ryōgon-in*; cited hereafter as the *Kakochō*), which is a registry of deceased members of the Nijūgo zammai-e.<sup>2</sup> This document is now in the possession

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study of the Nijūgo zammai-e, see Bowring 1998.

<sup>2</sup> A photocopy edition of the *Kakochō* is found in *Heianchō Ōjōdenshū* (un-paginated). Bibliographical information on this text is found in Hayami 1987 and Rhodes 1995, pp.30–31. A transcription of the text is found in Hirabayashi 1985, pp.41–52. In the pages below, I will cite the latter work (giving page number followed by “a” or “b” indicating whether it is top or bottom part of the page) when referring to the *Kakochō*.

It may also be mentioned that there exists a separate document called *Shuryōgon-in Nijūgo zammai kechien kakochō* 首楞嚴院二十五三昧結緣過去帳 (Registry of Monks Who Established Karmic Ties with the Association of the Twenty-five Samādhis of Shuryōgon-in, cited hereafter as *Kechien kakochō*), which consists of five biographies found in the *Kakochō*, those of Genshin 源信, Jōkyū 貞久, Sōjo 相助, the tonsured ex-Emperor Kazan 花山法皇 and

of the Shoryō-bu (Department of Documents and Mausoleums) in the Imperial Household Agency. The *Kakochō* was copied in 1230 by Keisei 慶政 (1189–1268).<sup>3</sup> According to its preface, it was begun in 1013, twenty-seven years after the Nijūgo zammai-e was first organized. The name of its author appears nowhere in the *Kakochō*, but according to Keisei's postscript, it was started by Genshin 源信 (942–1017), and was continued by his disciple Kakuchō 覺超 (955–1037) after Genshin's death. A total of fifty-one monks are recorded in the register.<sup>4</sup> Most of them are listed only by name, date of death and age at the time of their death, but short biographies are given for seventeen of them. Although each of them is quite brief, these biographies provide us with a fascinating glimpse into the everyday religious life of the members of this association. It is clear from these biographies that these monks (for no nuns or laymen and laywomen were admitted) believed their most important task in life was to train themselves to achieve birth in Amida's Pure Land when they died. The *Kakochō* reveals in intriguing detail how monks of the Heian period sought to regulate their lives in anticipation for birth in the Pure Land.<sup>5</sup>

Curiously, the *Kakochō* never refers to the monthly nembutsu meetings,

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Ryōhan 良範. Nothing is known of its redactor or the circumstances surrounding its compilation, but it appears that it was created by extracting the biographies of these five monks from the *Kakochō*. For details about this work, see Hayami 1987, pp.146–8. The *Kechien kakochō* is contained in Hieizan senshūin and Eizan Gakuin eds. 1984, I, pp.677–686. A modern Japanese translation of this work is found in Kawasaki 1983, pp.373–387.

<sup>3</sup> Keisei, a monk of Onjōji 園城寺, is famous as the author of the *Kankyo no tomo* 閑居友, a collection of Buddhist tales. See Hayami 1987, p.142.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the *Kakochō*'s preface clearly states that it contains the names of 42 deceased members of the association, from Shōren 祥連 to Ryōchin 良陳. See Hirabayashi 1985, p.42b. Apparently, the *Kakochō* originally listed only 42 monks, and additions were made as members died. This conjecture is supported by the fact that there is a definite break in the *Kakochō* after Ryōchin, the forty-second monk. Immediately after the entry for this monk, the *Kakochō* states "Two people who are not members are added and recorded (here)" (Hirabayashi 1985, p. 47b) and proceeds to give brief biographies of Ryōhan 良範 and Ninki 仁儻, both of whom were not members of the Nijūgo zammai-e. Evidently they were included because the ways in which they died were considered exemplary for nembutsu practitioners. Moreover, since Ryōchin died in 1013, and Ryōhan and Ninki in 1001 and 1008, respectively, it is clear that the latter two monks were added out of order as an afterthought. These points reveal that the *Kakochō* originally contained only 42 monks, and was subsequently expanded as the need arose.

<sup>5</sup> The longest, and perhaps the most interesting, biography in the *Kakochō* is that of Genshin. I have however, translated and analyzed Genshin's *Kakochō* biography in an earlier paper. See Rhodes 1995. Hence, in the pages below, I have (with several exceptions) generally refrained from referring to Genshin.

generally considered one of the core activities of this association (on these meetings, see below). Instead, many of the biographies focus on one or both of the following two points: the death scene of the monk in question and dreams that purport to prove that the particular monk achieved birth in the Pure Land at death. As I have argued elsewhere, one of the major reasons for writing the *Kakochō* was to demonstrate that it is indeed possible to reach the Pure Land through faith in Amida Buddha.<sup>6</sup> Since correct nembutsu practice and right mental attitude at the instant of death were of crucial importance in determining whether one could gain access to the Pure Land, description of how a monk faced his end naturally came to hold a central place in the biographies. Moreover, the *Kakochō*'s preface states that, when the Nijūgo zammai-e was first organized, the members pledged to each other that, if they were able to attain birth in the Pure Land, they would appear to fellow living members when they were awake, or in their dreams while asleep, in order to report on their success at reaching that realm.<sup>7</sup> These biographies highlight the dreams because they were treated as evidence that the deceased monks had truly made it to the Pure Land.

As stated above, the *Kakochō* was started in 1013, twenty-seven years after the founding of the Nijūgo zammai-e, and twenty-six years after the death of its first member, Shōren. This leads us to the intriguing question as to why it was suddenly started nearly three decades after the organization was first founded. According to Hayami Tasuku, this had to do with the ageing of the monks of the Nijūgo zammai-e.<sup>8</sup> In 1013, Genshin, the presumed author of the *Kakochō*, was seventy-one years old, by which time many of the founding members had already passed away, and therefore, Genshin himself, the leading figure of the association, realized that he was gradually approaching the end of his life. Under such circumstances, he most probably feared that, once he died, the association would quickly disintegrate. To prepare for this contingency, Genshin began to compose the *Kakochō*. By providing the Nijūgo zammai-e with a record of its past members, Genshin hoped to instill in its surviving members a sense of tradition which would motivate them to continue the association even after he himself had passed away. At the same time, by recounting how past members had trained themselves to meet their death, and by recording dreams and visions to serve as evidence that they had actually made it to Amida's land as a result of their

<sup>6</sup> Rhodes 1995, pp.31–32.

<sup>7</sup> Hirabayashi 1985, p.42b.

<sup>8</sup> Hayami 1988, pp.239–40.

actions, he hoped to provide future Pure Land believers with models of correct behavior that would lead them to birth in the Pure Land.

*The Nijūgo zammai-e*

The Nijūgo zammai-e drew its inspiration from the account of the deathbed nembutsu found in Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (*Essentials of Birth [in Amida's Pure Land]*). This famous work had been completed in 985, just a year before the Nijūgo zammai-e was organized. In the sixth chapter of this text, Genshin describes several ritualized nembutsu practices which are to be undertaken on special occasions. Among them, the most important is the "deathbed nembutsu" (*rinjū nembutsu* 臨終念仏), or the method of practicing the nembutsu at the hour of death. The proper practice of nembutsu at this time was particularly significant, since the ability to practice the nembutsu with unswerving faith at the moment of death was considered decisive in determining whether or not one could attain birth in the Pure Land. The *Ōjōyōshū* quotes a passage from Tao-hsüan's 道宣 (596–667) *Ssu fen li shan fan pu ch'üeh hsing shih ch'ao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔 (*Extracts on the Practices of the Vinaya in Four Parts Deleting the Complicated and Supplementing Deficiencies*), to describe this form of nembutsu.

In the northwestern corner of Jetavanavihāra (Jeta Grove monastery), in the direction where the sun sets, an (infirmary called) the Cloister of Impermanence (Mujō-in 無常院) was built. People who became ill were placed there. . . . A standing statue (of the Buddha), facing west and covered with gold leaf, was placed within the hall. (The statue's) right hand was raised, and its left hand held a five-colored streamer which hung down until its end touched the ground. The patient was placed behind the statue. Grasping the end of the streamer in his left hand, he concentrated his mind on going to the Buddha's Pure Land in the company of the Buddha. The nursing attendants burned incense, scattered flowers and adorned the patient. And so on up to, if there was excrement, urine, vomit or spit, it was immediately removed.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, when the patient's end draws near, his friends and fellow practitioners are urged to gather at his deathbed to encourage the patient to recite the nembutsu.

<sup>9</sup> T 84, 69a17–26.



Friends and fellow practitioners . . . should visit (the patient) on his sickbed from the time he first falls ill and give him encouragement. However, these visits of encouragement should be undertaken on their own free will. . . . (They should say,) “Disciple of the Buddha! For years, you have ceased to pursue matters of this world, and have only cultivated actions (leading to birth) in the Western Direction (i.e., Amida’s Pure Land). The thing that you have awaited in anticipation above all are these ten reflections (on the Buddha on your deathbed). You are already on your sickbed. You should have no fear. You should close your eyes, put your hands together in prayer and single-mindedly await (your death). Apart from the Buddha’s major and minor marks, do not look at any other form. Apart from the Buddha’s voice preaching the Dharma, do not listen to any other voices. Apart from the Buddha’s correct teachings, do not discuss any other matter. Apart from the matter of your birth, do not think of anything else.”<sup>10</sup>

In this way, the sick person should be encouraged to concentrate on the nembutsu until the moment of death, for it is only through such single-minded nembutsu that it is possible to be led to the Pure Land.

The Nijūgo zammai-e was formed to put into practice this deathbed nembutsu described above, and its activities are set forth in two documents, the *Kishō hachi kajō* 起請八箇条 (*Eight Article Pledge*) of 986 consisting of eight articles, and the *Yokawa Shuryōgon-in nijūgo zammai kishō* 横川首楞嚴院二十五三昧起請 (*Pledge of the [Association of] the Twenty-five Samādhis of Shuryōgon-in of Yokawa*) of 988 consisting of twelve articles. The latter work is a more detailed version of the former. Both works cite the following two activities to be the central elements of the association.

First of all, it was stipulated that, when one of the members became mortally ill, the other members should visit him in groups of two, caring for him two days at a time. The duty of the first attendant was to preach the Buddhist teachings to the patient, while the second took care of the patient’s physical needs. Moreover, when the patient was about to die, all the members of the association were expected to gather at the patient’s bedside to aid and encourage him by reciting the nembutsu together.

Second, the members vowed to meet on the fifteenth of every month to

<sup>10</sup> T 84, 69b27–c6.

practice the nembutsu together. Besides increasing one's stock of merit, this communal nembutsu was also seen as an effective way to train oneself to concentrate on the nembutsu even when faced with the suffering and anxiety that accompany death. From this perspective, Yamaori Tetsuo has aptly characterized the Nijūgo zammai-e as "a congregation to prepare for death" (*shi no tame no kyōdan* 死のための教団).<sup>11</sup>

It is important to note that, besides the nembutsu, the Nijūgo zammai-e incorporated other practices into its ritual activities, the most important of which was the esoteric Shingon ritual of Kōmyō shingon dosha kaji 光明真言土砂加持 (Sand Prayer of the Light Mantra). The importance of the Sand Prayer is emphasized in both of the two liturgical texts of the association mentioned above. In this Sand Prayer, sand is ritually blessed by reciting the Kōmyō shingon (Light Mantra) over it. When this ritually-empowered sand is placed upon the remains of a dead person, it is said to destroy all the evil karma which he had created, including that arising from even the most serious transgressions. Thus, this mantra was considered an effective auxiliary practice for attaining birth in the Pure Land.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, during the monthly communal nembutsu practice, the prayer leader (*dōshi* 導師) conducted the Mantra of Light ritual to bless a certain amount of sand. This sand was then stored away. When one of the association members died, this sand was sprinkled on the deceased during his funeral.

Briefly these were the central ritual activities of the Nijūgo zammai-e. However, before turning to the biographies in the *Kakochō*, it is important to note the following point. Since the age of Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and his exclusive nembutsu (*senju nembutsu* 専修念仏) movement in the Kamakura period, the notion that the nembutsu is the only practice for attaining birth in the Pure Land has become widespread—so much so that practices other than the nembutsu are generally considered unnecessary (and in fact detrimental) in gaining entry into the Pure Land. Yet, this was not the situation during the Heian period, in which monks lived in a complex spiritual universe, populated by a variety of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and other spiritual beings, all of whom could be called upon to aid one's spiritual journey. Hence, many of the monks of the Nijūgo zammai-e combined the nembutsu with other practices in their quest for birth in the Pure Land. The typical attitude was expressed by Genshin when he argued in the *Ōjōyōshū* that a variety of non-

<sup>11</sup> Yamaori 1978.

<sup>12</sup> On this practice, especially as set forth by Myōe of the Kamakura period, see Unno 1998.

nembutsu practices had to be used to supplement the nembutsu if the latter practice was to prove truly effective.<sup>13</sup> Such an eclectic attitude is reflected in the incorporation of the esoteric Mantra of Light in the ritual practices of the Nijūgo zammai-e. It is also repeatedly seen in the biographies to be considered below.

*The Biography of Shōren*

With this brief account of the Nijūgo zammai-e's central ritual activities, let us now turn to the *Kakochō*. I would like to begin by considering a typical biography found in the *Kakochō*, that of Shōren 祥連, who died in 987 at the age of fifty-six, soon after the association was founded.<sup>14</sup> This account is actually the first of the seventeen biographies included in the register.

Shōren, the *Kakochō* begins, was not very intelligent, and, furthermore, was intemperate in speech. For this reason, the people around him did not realize how strong his desire was to achieve enlightenment. He had long been a believer in the Pure Land faith and undertook practices for attaining birth in the Pure Land. He performed the Rokkon senpō 六根懺法, or the repentance ritual of the six faculties three times a day.<sup>15</sup> He also “read by turning”<sup>16</sup> (*tendoku* 転読) the *Lotus* and *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*. He set aside the fifteenth of every month for fasting, and on that day, he also recited the nembutsu single-mindedly all day and night. During the last three years of his life, he withdrew from the company of people and practiced the nembutsu. During this time, he also undertook the practice of making mudrās to one billion Buddhas, each residing in his own land, while praying, “The Buddhas to whom I make the mudrās all reside in their respective lands. May they make sure no obstacle is placed in my way and (help me) attain birth without

<sup>13</sup> In the fifth chapter of the *Ōjōyōshū*, entitled “Methods for Aiding the Nembutsu” Genshin states, “It is impossible to catch a fowl using a net consisting of just one mesh. (Likewise, it is only by) employing a myriad of techniques to aid in the nembutsu contemplation, that the great matter of birth in the Pure Land is accomplished” (T 84, 57b26–27). Genshin's position here is that the nembutsu can be effective only when practiced in conjunction with a number of auxiliary practices which augment the potency of the nembutsu.

<sup>14</sup> This biography is found in Hirabayashi 1985, pp.42b–43a.

<sup>15</sup> The Rokkon senpō is another name for the Hokke senpō 法華懺法, or Lotus Repentance Ritual, which is carried out every morning as part of the Tendai daily ritual.

<sup>16</sup> Refers to a way of ritually “reading” a sūtra in which one actually reads just the title or a few lines from the text, and then opens the folded sūtra like an accordion.

fail in the Land of Utmost Bliss (Gokuraku 極樂, or Amida's Pure Land)."<sup>17</sup>

Although Shōren originally did not belong to the Nijūgo zammai-e, he pleaded to be admitted, saying, "Although I am a person of little virtue, I have a small wish (i. e., to gain birth in the Pure Land). I wish to be admitted into the association. I beg that you have compassion on me." Upon being admitted, he declared in joy, "Although I am foolish and dull-witted, I have long practiced the nembutsu. I was only afraid that I would not encounter a good friend at the time of my death. Fortunately there is this matter. I am deeply happy. This is none other than the result of good actions I have done in the past."<sup>18</sup>

This is an important passage, since it reveals the importance placed on the proper practice of the nembutsu at the hour of death. As mentioned above, birth in the Pure Land was generally believed to be contingent on the right attitude at the moment of death. Shōren's desire to join the association was motivated by his wish to obtain good friends who would help support and sustain his nembutsu at his death.

Soon afterwards, Shōren became seriously ill. As stipulated by the association's charter, the members of the Nijūgo zammai-e arranged to nurse him in turn and to encourage him to recite the nembutsu day and night. Concerning their activities, the *Kakochō* adds, "Since it was the first time the association had to encourage (a person on the deathbed to recite the nembutsu), the members were all diligent." As a result, Shōren joyfully declared, "For many years I have longed for the Pure Land and now I have encountered good friends of the Dharma. There is no doubt (that my birth in the Pure Land) is settled. Without fail, I shall achieve my original intention (of attaining birth in the Pure Land). This illness has the mark of certain death. I do not seek to remain alive any further."<sup>19</sup> Afterwards, he experienced slight pain, but died while reciting the nembutsu.

After Shōren's death, Kakuchō had a dream in which a certain unnamed person declared to him that, since Shōren was an intelligent and wise person, he would be born in one of the lower grades of birth in the Pure Land. However, Kakuchō was uncertain whether or not this dream was reliable, so he did not report it to anyone. Subsequently, Otsuki Akichika 小槻顕親, who later became the governor of Tsushima, spent the night at the cloister of Kaien 戒縁, and had a dream in which a man appeared to give him the fol-

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.42b.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp.42b-43a.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.43a.

lowing message, “Within the association, there was a monk, Shōren by name. He has already been born in the Pure Land. This matter has already been reported to Kakuchō. Do you know (of this) or don’t you?” After Shōren’s birth in the Pure Land was confirmed in this way, the reputation of the Nijūgo zammai-e was firmly established.

In many ways, Shōren’s biography is typical of biographies found in the *Kakochō*. First, it must be noted that it is unlike most East Asian biographies (including those of monks), which begin with birthplace and family background of the person in question. Instead, the *Kakochō* biographies frequently begin with a short passage describing the personal character of the subject. (An important exception is Genshin’s biography, which appears to have consciously imitated the standard format of East Asian biographies, and is thus markedly different from the other biographies.) Further, the *Kakochō* biographies virtually ignore the “public” aspects of a monk’s career. For example, while ordinary Buddhist biographies carefully record all the ecclesiastic ranks a monk had achieved in his lifetime, such material finds no place in the *Kakochō*. Instead, it is replaced by lists of practices undertaken by the monk. Here the emphasis is not on outward aspects of his monastic career, but on the practices he undertook and the diligence with which he pursued them. Finally, the primary foci of Shōren’s biography are on (1) the manner in which he met his death, and (2) dreams that show that he was born in the Pure Land. These points constitute the central message of the *Kakochō* biographies: that Shōren, due to his diligence in practicing the Pure Land Path, achieved birth in Amida’s land at death.

#### *How Nenshō Joined the Nijūgo zammai-e*

In several cases, however, the *Kakochō* diverges from the pattern described above. A striking example is found in its account of Nenshō 念昭, who died in 1011 at the age of fifty-five.<sup>20</sup> His biography is unique as about a third of it is devoted to an account of how he resolved to become a monk. This section of the biography is centered on dreams which Nenshō had while he was still a layman. Nenshō’s biography in the *Kakochō* atypically begins in the orthodox style of an official history with the words, “His lay surname was Ono 小野, and his name was Tamekuni 為国. He was the grandson of the late Michikaze Ason 道風朝臣.” Even while he was still a layman, he “exclusive-

<sup>20</sup> Nenshō’s biography is found in *ibid.*, p.46a–b.

ly practiced the nembutsu and exclusively cultivated actions for (attaining birth) in the Western Direction.” One night, a small freshwater fish appeared to him in a dream, lamenting, “When people of the world see me, they all say, ‘This is a fine appetizer. I will pickle it in vinegar and eat it.’” Moved by pity, Tamekuni promised the fish he would refrain from eating him. This story is given as an illustration of Tamekuni’s compassion, but it also serves to highlight his sensitive nature. This second point also figures prominently in the following story of how he resolved to forsake the world and enter the monkhood. One night, he dreamed that he slept with a beautiful woman. He was attracted by her handsome features and exquisite dress but fell even deeper in love upon beholding her naked. However, when he looked at her again, she had turned ugly and all of her bodily impurities were manifested. Immediately he was attacked by a profound sense of revulsion. Upon awakening from the dream, Tamekuni sought out Jakushō 寂照 and entered the monkhood under his guidance.

*Practices of the Members of the Nijūgo zammai-e*

Naturally, since the nembutsu is the central practice of Pure Land Buddhism, many of the *Kakochō* biographies stress how the subject was diligent in its practice. The importance of the nembutsu in achieving birth in the Pure Land is underlined in the following story of Myōkū’s dream. According to this story, Myōkū 妙空 (died in 989 at age forty-eight) dreamed that he was in a large group of people. One of them pointed to him and said, “That virtuous monk (who recites) the nembutsu in a disorderly way will quickly be ferried over (to the Pure Land).” After waking from the dream, he joyfully declared, “Even though (I recite) the nembutsu with an unfocused and disorderly mind, its merits are not in vain.”<sup>21</sup> This story underscores the point that the nembutsu, even when done without diligence and concentration, can lead to birth in the Pure Land.

However, it is important to note that the nembutsu was not the only practice taken up by the members of the association. For example, the *Kakochō* records that Myōku once confided to Genshin: “Although I have the wish to be born (in the Pure Land), I cannot carry out the practice (necessary for birth). How can I achieve my wish?” In reply, Genshin suggested that Myōku commission a Buddhist statue for the Nijūgo zammai-e. The

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43b.

*Kakochō* adds that, although the statue was not completed before Myōku died, it was later enshrined in the Kedai-in 華台院, the building that served as the association's hospice.<sup>22</sup> This shows that deeds such as commissioning Buddhist statues were considered virtuous acts that could lead to birth in the Pure Land.

Often the nembutsu was combined with esoteric Buddhist practices or those deriving from the *Lotus Sūtra*, or both. A good example of a monk who combined the nembutsu with *Lotus*-based practices is Ninjin 仁尋, who died in 990 at the age of sixty-three. Besides practicing the nembutsu and lecturing on the *Lotus Sūtra*, his daily (or rather, nightly) practice consisted of conducting the Amida keka 阿弥陀悔過 (Amida repentance) during the first watch of the night (*shoya* 初夜, dusk to midnight) followed by the Lotus Repentance (Hokke senbō 法華懺法) during the second watch (*goya* 後夜, midnight to dawn).<sup>23</sup> Reflecting the important position of esoteric Buddhism on Mt. Hiei, several monks combined esoteric Buddhist practices with Pure Land practice. For example, Myōkū recited the nembutsu ten thousand times every day but also practiced the Amida Veneration Ritual (Amida Kuyōhō 阿弥陀供養法).<sup>24</sup> Ryōun 良運 (died in 1011 at the age of seventy-two) practiced the rituals for venerating Fudō as well as the nembutsu.<sup>25</sup> Myōfu 明普, who died in 1006 at the venerable age of seventy, was said to have undertaken *goma* 護摩 (esoteric Buddhist fire ritual) for over a thousand days in order to pray for birth in the Pure Land.<sup>26</sup>

Still others committed themselves to both esoteric Buddhist practices and devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* along with the nembutsu. One such monk was Sōjo 相助, a disciple of Zōga, who died in 993. Sōjo recited the dhāraṇī of Kannon every day and reflected upon Amida, but on his deathbed, he requested to hear a lecture on the *Lotus Sūtra*, and died reciting nembutsu.<sup>27</sup> A similar eclecticism is found in the case of Shōnen 聖念, who died in 1015 when he was fifty-five. He was a member of the Nijūgo zammai-e on Mt.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.44a.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.43b. The Amida Kuyōhō, also known simply as the Amida-hō 阿弥陀法, is a popular esoteric Buddhist ritual based on a text entitled *Muryōju nyorai kangyō kuyō giki* 無量寿如来觀行供養儀軌 (Ritual of Contemplation and Veneration of the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Life, i. e., Amida Buddha). Practice of this ritual is said to result in birth in Amida's Pure Land.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.46a.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.45a.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.44b.



Hiei but left the mountain and secluded himself at the Sekisa-ji 石作寺 in Otokuni 乙訓 county in Yamashiro province (present-day Kyoto prefecture). Once at the Sekisa-ji, he established another Nijūgo zammai-e there, and for fifteen years, he performed the Amida Veneration Ritual twice a day, and recited the nembutsu ten thousand times during each of the six watches of the day. Shōnen is further said to have read the *Lotus Sūtra* 4,200 times in his lifetime.<sup>28</sup>

An interesting case is Kōshin 康審 (died 1021 at age seventy) who, when he was sixty-eight, noted down all the practices that he had undertaken by that time. According to this list, he had recited the *Lotus Sūtra* 1,150 times, the *Amida Sūtra* one hundred ten thousand times, Samatabhadra's ten vows<sup>29</sup> sixteen thousand times and Amida Buddha's forty-eight vows 48,000 times. He also recited the ten major precepts of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* and practiced the Lotus Repentance. He further claimed to have formed the *mudrā* of Amida Buddha two million six hundred thousand *koji*<sup>30</sup> thirty-six trillion times. Similarly, he stated that he had recited the nembutsu one million five hundred thousand *koji* times. To be more specific, by his account, he had recited the nembutsu thirty thousand times a day by the time he was thirty years old, sixty thousand times a day over the next five or six years, and finally, one hundred thousand times a day after he turned thirty-seven. Furthermore, he also noted that he had recited Amida's Great Dhāraṇī<sup>31</sup> (Amida daiju 阿弥陀大呪) one billion seven hundred million times, the Zuigu Dhāraṇī<sup>32</sup> 随求陀羅尼 11,700 times, the Komyō shingon seven hundred times, as well as Amida's Short Dhāraṇī<sup>33</sup> 阿弥陀小呪, Sonshō Dhāraṇī<sup>34</sup> 尊勝陀羅尼, as well as the dhāraṇīs of Arorikika<sup>35</sup> 阿嚕力迦, Fudō 不動,<sup>36</sup> and Butsugen 仏

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.48a.

<sup>29</sup> The ten vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva found in the *Hua-yen Sūtra*. For a translation of these vows, see Chang 1971, pp.187–196.

<sup>30</sup> One *koji* is said to equal ten million.

<sup>31</sup> The longer version of the dhāraṇī of Amida Buddha used in esoteric Buddhism.

<sup>32</sup> A *dhāraṇī* which is said to grant all of one's wishes.

<sup>33</sup> The shorter version of the dhāraṇī of Amida Buddha used in esoteric Buddhism.

<sup>34</sup> The *dhāraṇī* of the esoteric Buddhist deity Sonshō Butchō 尊勝仏頂, who is one of the five apparition Buddhas who manifest themselves from the head of Śākyamuni Buddha. This dhāraṇī is said to be effective in curing illnesses and bestowing longevity.

<sup>35</sup> The *dhāraṇī* of Tāra, a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara (Kannon 觀音).

<sup>36</sup> Acalā, a deity of esoteric Buddhism.



眼,<sup>37</sup> during his life.<sup>38</sup> The variety of practices which Kōshin undertook, to say nothing of the intensity with which he carried them out, is astonishing.

Genshin also is recorded as having compiled a similar list on New Year's Day of 1013, in which he listed all the Buddhist practices that he had undertaken up to that time. The *Kakochō* states:

In the vow written on the 1st day of the 1st month of Chōwa 長和 2 (1013), it says, "Here, I will briefly list the practices which I have cultivated while alive. Nembutsu: twenty *koji* times. Mahāyāna sūtras recited: 55,500 fascicles [*Lotus Sūtra*, eight thousand fascicles; *Amida Sūtra*, ten thousand fascicles; *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, three thousand-odd fascicles, etc.]. Great spells (*dhāraṇīs*) invoked: one million recitations [spell of the Thousand-armed (Kannon), seven hundred thousand times; spell of Sonshō, three hundred thousand times]. In addition, spells of Amida, Fudō, Light<sup>39</sup> and Butsugen, several times. . . .<sup>40</sup>

When Genshin composed this work, he was already seventy-two years old. He must have taken this opportunity to take stock of his religious career up to this time. This list reveals in concrete detail the range of Buddhist practices which he undertook during his life. Although the invocation of the nembutsu took up a large part of Genshin's practices, he also diligently recited Mahāyāna sūtras and chanted mantras associated with a variety of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Furthermore, after quoting the lines above from Genshin's vow, the *Kakochō* biography adds,

There is a separate record listing (Genshin's) later practices. Besides them, there is (still further) another work of one fascicle, consisting of ten-odd pages, which records all the good works he undertook throughout his life. Among them are the construction of Buddha statues, the copying of sūtra scrolls, practices of donations, and helping others do good.<sup>41</sup>

Evidently, Genshin made several other lists like the one above, though

<sup>37</sup> Also known as Butsugen butsumo 仏眼仏母 (Buddhalocanā), an esoteric Buddhist deity, who possesses the fivefold vision of the Buddha (fleshly vision, heavenly vision, wisdom vision, Dharma vision and Buddha vision) and gives birth to all Buddhas.

<sup>38</sup> Hirabayashi 1985, p.51b.

<sup>39</sup> Refers to the Light Mantra (*Kōmyō shingon*).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49a.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

unfortunately, they are now all lost. However, taken together, they reveal that not only that he pursued his practices with energy, but also that he was concerned with keeping an accurate record of his activities, especially in his final years.

As these examples show, the members of the Nijūgo zammai-e were not necessarily exclusive practitioners of the nembutsu. As Tendai monks deeply steeped in the eclectic attitude towards practice so characteristic of this sect, they availed themselves of a variety of practices, firmly believing that they would assist and augment one's efforts to attain birth in the Pure Land. As stated above, emphasis on the exclusive recitation of the nembutsu only comes later, when Hōnen set forth his radical teaching of salvation solely through the nembutsu.

### *Stories about Death*

A major theme of most of the biographies found in the *Kakochō* is how the members met their end. As stated above, one of Genshin's purposes in composing the *Kakochō* was to provide ideal models on how to face death. These narratives served to provide authoritative models of proper deathbed behavior which a person could turn to when faced with his or her own death.

One such story concerns Ryōhan 良範, who died in 1001 at the very young age of twenty. Although he was not formally a member of the Nijūgo zammai-e, he was listed in the *Kakochō* because he took part in its activities. In fact, his death was seen as an exemplary instance of a Pure Land believer's final hours.<sup>42</sup> His biography in the *Kakochō* begins like this.

(Ryōhan) was young, and his features were handsome. By nature, his mind was gentle and did not go against his master and friends. Thus, he was naturally loved and respected by other people. At that time, there was an epidemic and many people became ill and died. Seeing such (examples of) impermanence, he all the more aroused his aspiration for enlightenment and practiced the nembutsu in a quiet place. Using blood taken from his body as ink, he drew (images) of the Buddha and wrote out the sūtra. . . .

After he became ill, he no longer valued his self and his life in

<sup>42</sup> This is shown by the fact that it was one of five stories excerpted in the *Kechien Kakochō*, the abridged version of the *Kakochō*.

the least. (Although) people wished to cure him of his illness, he himself only sought to die quickly. He said,<sup>43</sup> “(I wish to) gain birth quickly in the Pure Land, and ferry over sentient beings. Why should I value my self and my life? (It only means to) remain in the sea of suffering” (and so forth). He exclusively practiced the nembutsu and thought of nothing else. Messengers employed by his parents came every day to report on (Ryōhan’s) condition (to his parents) as needed. On the day of his (i. e., Ryōhan’s) death, a messenger came early in the morning. (Ryōhan) told him (to relay this message to his parents): “Although I have the wish to be filial to you, my life is already tenuous. I will gain birth in the Pure Land and repay my debt to you” (and so forth). Afterwards, he recited the nembutsu in a loud voice. If someone at his side prayed for his recovery, (Ryōhan) pushed him away, but if someone at his side recited the nembutsu, (Ryōhan) took his hand and pulled that person close to himself. . . .

He asked the person nursing him, “Ring the gong!” (and so forth). When it was rung, the sound was not loud. The patient (i. e., Ryōhan) said, “The sound should be loud!” (and so forth). (The chime) was hit harder. Then the patient laid down on his right side, facing west with his head to the north. Looking towards the (statue of the) Buddha, he pressed his hands together in prayer and intoned “Namu Amida Butsu” in a loud voice. The people nursing him all joined in together and (recited the nembutsu) about ten times. (Then Ryōhan asked,) “Stop the nembutsu” (and so forth). When they stopped the nembutsu, he silently pressed his hands together in prayer,<sup>44</sup> looked up at the Buddha statue, and died quietly. . . .<sup>45</sup>

The *Kakochō* praises the courageous way in which the young Ryōhan met his death, so unlike that of ordinary people. In the final line of his biography, the author of the *Kakochō* comments, “Alas, the way in which the young (Ryōhan) conducted himself (on his deathbed) is like this. How can we,

<sup>43</sup> The passage here appears corrupt. On the basis of Ryōhan’s biography in the *Kechien kakochō*, in my translation I have amended 畢 to read 云.

<sup>44</sup> In the *Kakochō*, this passage reads 合掌無解, which may be translated, “(Ryōhan) pressed his hands together in prayer and kept them in this position.” Ryōhan’s biography in the *Kechien kakochō* here reads 合掌無聲. I have followed this reading in my translation.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47b.

whose hair have turned white as frost, strongly seek after glories before our eyes!”<sup>46</sup> If even a person as young as Ryōhan can meet his death with faith and dignity, how much more should the older members who formally belong to the Nijūgo zammai-e—this is the message which the author of the *Kakochō* wished to relay to his readers.

Another instance of an exemplary death is found in the *Kakochō*'s description of the final hours of Shōnen 聖念. As we saw above, he belonged to the Nijūgo zammai-e while he was on Mt. Hiei, but left the mountain to live at Sekisa-ji. After the description of the practices he undertook there discussed above, the *Kakochō* continues with a detailed account of his final hours.

In the second month of 1015, Shōnen had premonitions of death and announced to his disciples that his life would not last through the year. As he foretold, he became ill in the seventh month but continued all of his practices (with the exception of veneration) as before. However, in the tenth month, he discontinued all non-Pure Land practices (*zōgyō* 雜行) and devoted himself exclusively to the recitation of the nembutsu. Two months later, realizing his end was approaching, he commanded his disciples to henceforth refrain from discussing worldly matters in his presence. At the same time, he had the section on deathbed practices from the *Ōjōyōshū* read to him to prepare for his final hours.

On the twenty-seventh, sensing his death was imminent, Shōnen had his room swept clean and on the next day, declared to his disciples that he would pass away on the day of the *uposatha* (*fusatsu* 布薩).<sup>47</sup> Holding a copy of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* in his hands, he rang a gong, pronounced his vows and read the sūtra. At night, he had his disciples first chant the nembutsu, then recite the “Life of the Tathāgata Chapter” of the *Lotus Sūtra* and finally read the *Ōjōyōshū*'s chapter on deathbed practices. Afterwards, he declared to his disciples, “The ten thoughts at the hour of death are superior to a hundred years of practice.” The monks surrounding Shōnen recited the nembutsu together until dawn. The next night, Shōnen died. In one hand, he held a copy of his vows, and in the other he held one end of a string attached to the hands of a statue of a Buddha. Folding his hands in the meditation mudrā, he faced west and passed away just as if he was entering a state of meditation.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.48a.

<sup>47</sup> A ceremony, held twice a month, in which monks gather to confess their transgressions. It is held on the fifteenth and thirtieth of every month.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.48a-b.

The faith and serenity with which Shōnen met death reveals his inner conviction that he would achieve birth in the Pure Land without fail, and as such was held up as a mirror by the author of the *Kakochō*.

Another moving deathbed scene is found in the biography of Sōjo, the disciple of Zōga mentioned above. It states,

As his final hours approached, his aspiration to seek the way was firm. He practiced the nembutsu single-mindedly . . . Finally he had the *Lotus Sūtra* lectured. After the end of the lecture, in order to accomplish his final ten thoughts, he arose (from his bed), and venerated (the Buddha) ten times. However, his illness was exceedingly serious, and he arose by leaning on another person. Though physically weak, he was strong in spirit. The people watching were also moved. Before long, he died.<sup>49</sup>

The piety and resolve that Sōjo displayed is, in the view of the *Kakochō*'s author, a model for all Pure Land practitioners.

However, not all members of the Nijūgo zammai-e achieved exemplary deaths like Sōjo, Shōnen or young Ryōhan. Several monks had difficulty facing death with single-minded faith and poise. One such monk was Jōkyū 貞久, who died in 987 at the age of twenty-five. His biography is the second one to be listed in the *Kakochō*, immediately after that of Shōren cited above. However, Jōkyū's final days were somewhat different from that of the robust Shōnen.

According to the *Kakochō*, Jōkyū was a diligent student, with his heart set firmly on attaining enlightenment. However, after becoming ill, he neglected the practice of the nembutsu. The people around him sought to encourage him to recite the nembutsu, pointing out to him the crucial importance of reciting it with diligence at the hour of death. To this, Jōkyū answered, "The pain of my illness has been oppressing me for a long time. What I do and what I wish are different." However, during his final hours, he summoned up the courage to recite the nembutsu in a loud voice. Asked why he was now able to recite the nembutsu so powerfully, Jōkyū explained, "In ordinary times, the nembutsu (is done to gain) physical peace. (The reason why I found it) unbearable (to recite the nembutsu) while ill was due to my physical pain. Also I did not recite it in my illness because my suffering was slight. I am dauntless in my final hours because my pain is great. My life has

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.44b.

already passed and great pain has come to oppress me. Aside from the Buddha, there is no one to rely on concerning my afterlife. That's why I recite the nembutsu in a loud (voice) and pray for my salvation in tears."<sup>50</sup>

The *Kakochō* relates another event concerning his last days. At one point, Jōkyū asked the other monks around him to rise and stand on the ground. The people around him did not understand the reason for his request until he spoke to them as follows: "The ground on which I lie is filled with violent flames burning my body. Is it the same with you?" When the people answered no, Jōkyū continued, "If so, I shall be reborn in another life; I have already fallen into hell." In tears, the assembled people recited the nembutsu several times. Soon Jōkyū ceased reciting, but after a while, he spoke again and related, "(I had a vision in which) someone chased me until I finally fell into a flaming hole. Thanks to the nembutsu, the flames have abated. However, I am nearing my end and I have no time to talk about my vision. Let me just recite the nembutsu and speak no further." With these words, Jōkyū recited the nembutsu while shedding grateful tears, and finally passed away.<sup>51</sup>

To its credit, the *Kakochō* makes no attempt to hide the difficulty which Jōkyū had in practicing the nembutsu at death. However, the point is that it is possible to be born in the Pure Land even if one is somewhat negligent in the nembutsu, as long as one practices it with resolve in one's final moments.

The importance of the right mental attitude in the final moments is also stressed in the following story found in the *Kakochō* about Zenchin 禅珍, who died in 1021 at the age of 65. Zenchin was not a member of the Nijūgo zammai-e, but the following interesting story is given as a reminder to the readers of the importance of the right state of mind at death. He was the grandson of Fujiwara Naotsura 藤原直連, the governor of Kaga Province. After Zenchin left the world to become a monk, he practiced the nembutsu with diligence. However, he had one fault: he was extremely fond of a small white porcelain vase. Unfortunately, he was swindled out of it when he was ill. Henceforth, he grew despondent and, even on his deathbed, continued to lament the loss of his vase. After he died, Zenchin appeared in a dream to the person who had taken the vase and declared to him as follows. "I should have been freed from (the cycle of) birth and death during this lifetime, but now, because of the vase, I have again returned to the realm of suffering. If you

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.43a.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.43b.

will construct a *sotoba* 率都婆 (grave marker) for me, I will realize my original wish (of achieving birth in the Pure Land).” As a result of the dream, a *sotoba* was built for Zenchin.<sup>52</sup>

According to the *Kakochō*, the moral of the story is that one’s future existence is determined by one’s mental attitude. Even Zenchin, who had practiced the nembutsu diligently, was not able to achieve birth in the Pure Land as a result of his attachment. Thus, one must be exceedingly careful of even the smallest things, for even seemingly inconsequential action may have consequences of enormous magnitude.

### *Dreams of Birth in the Pure Land*

Along with events surrounding a monk’s death, the *Kakochō* biographies frequently focus on auspicious dreams which showed that a deceased monk had gone to the Pure Land after passing away. As mentioned above, the preface of the *Kakochō* states that, when the Nijūgo zammai-e was first organized, its members vowed to each other that, if they were able to attain birth in the Pure Land after they died, they would appear to fellow living members when they were awake or in their dreams while asleep, to report on their success at attaining rebirth in that realm.<sup>53</sup> The *Kakochō* biographies highlight the dreams because they were the signs by which the deceased monks were recognized as having been born in the Pure Land. By recording these events for posterity, it was hoped that the future members of the Nijūgo zammai-e would be encouraged to persevere in their practice of the nembutsu.

The *Kakochō* relates an interesting dream after describing the death of Sōjo. (The demeanor of this monk during his final hours has been described above). Although this dream is not related specifically to Sōjo’s entry into the Pure Land, it is cited in the *Kakochō* as an important authority for the efficacy of the practices undertaken by the Nijūgo zammai-e.

A certain person said, “There are many paths to birth in the Land of Utmost Bliss. One is the path of establishing karmic ties with the Nijūgo zammai-e. The others are paths for other people. Those who gain birth by establishing karmic ties with the Nijūgo zammai are numerous. Recently one (such) person has gained birth (in the Pure Land). (People who gain birth through) the other paths are

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.51a.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.42b

exceedingly few. (And so forth.) Then the following scene appeared. Atop a cliff were two paths, one located to the west and the other to the east. On one path were five or six people. This path was the path of the association of the Nijūgo zammai. On the eastern path, there was only one set of footprints. This was the other path.”<sup>54</sup>

Concerning this dream, the *Kakochō* comments, “Although this dream does not speak of Sōjo’s birth, it was dreamt after his death, and thus it is recorded here.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, although this dream is not specifically associated with Sōjo, it was cited by the author of the *Kakochō* as proof that Sōjo had reached the Pure Land.

Many dreams recounted in the *Kakochō* leave no room for doubt that the person in question had unqualified success at gaining birth in the Pure Land. At the time of Myōkū’s death, for example, the nun Myōen 妙縁 had a dream in which she heard music coming from the Pure Land. Someone told her this was a sign that Myōkū was being taken to the Pure Land. The nun retorted, “The Land of Supreme Bliss is not a place into which people with little merit can be born. Myōkū is the administrator (*bettō* 别当) of the temple. How can he be immediately born (in the Pure Land)?” The person answered, “Although he is the director (*tsukasa* 司) of the temple, he is not guilty of any crimes.” Hearing these words, the nun was convinced. Somewhat later, another person had a dream in which he saw Myōkū being carried on a palanquin. After it arrived at the Hokkaibō 法界房, a cloister on Mt. Hiei, about seven or eight monks came out, took Myōkū by the hand and led him in.<sup>56</sup> Apparently temple administrators were considered evil and hence incapable of birth in the Pure Land. But here, because Myōkū had not committed any crimes while serving as temple administrator, he successfully entered the Pure Land after he died.

Even more emphatic is a dream concerning Ryōchin 良陳, who died in 1013 at the age of seventy-two. After his death, a number of monks had dreams attesting to his birth in the Pure Land, including Nōmo 能茂, whose dream was as follows. In this dream, Nōmo encountered Ryōchin, who was riding a carriage, in the city of Kyoto. Seeing Nōmo, Ryōchin greeted him warmly and spoke to him thus: “I’m glad we have been able to meet. Let me

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.44b.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp.43b–44a.



tell you my feelings now. I have been able to gain birth in the Land of Supreme Bliss, for which I have longed for the past few years. I am extremely happy. If one has the desire (to gain birth in the Pure Land) and practices (in accord with the wish), who can fail (to be born there). Deliver this message to the people.”<sup>57</sup> This dream has Ryōchin himself declare unequivocally that he was born in the Pure Land; it, moreover, delivers the hopeful message that anyone who firmly desires to be born in the Pure Land, and practices in accordance with the wish, will be able to fulfill that wish without fail.

However, some dreams proved equivocal about a person’s birth into the Pure Land. An example of such unflattering dream is found in the biography of Myōzen 明善, who died in 1006 when he was fifty-six years old. According to the biography, he was straightforward and compassionate by nature, but was always in the habit of scolding and slighting his disciples. Before he died, he had to endure a long and painful illness and was consequently negligent in reciting the nembutsu. Thus, after his death, several different dreams were reported about his fate. One person dreamed that although Myōzen suffered greatly on his deathbed, he would go to the Pure Land before long. However, Gonku 嚴功 received the following message in a dream. Myōzen suffered on his deathbed because he was always scolding his disciples, though he would be born in the Pure Land after three months. Finally, a third person dreamed that although Myōzen would not be born immediately into the Pure Land, he would do so after three lifetimes. After listing these three versions, the *Kakochō* concludes, “Although the three dreams are different, they resemble each other in the main. Although (Myōzen) will not be born (in the Pure Land) in the next life, he will eventually achieve his wish (to be born in the Pure Land).” But, the *Kakochō* adds, even if it should take a hundred or thousand lifetimes, it is joyous to be able to escape from the cycle of birth-and-death. Myōzen should rejoice that he will reach the Pure Land in two or three lifetimes.<sup>58</sup>

#### *Birth in Maitreya’s Tuṣita Heaven*

Interestingly, two monks whose biographies are contained in the *Kakochō* are recorded to have achieved birth in Tusita Heaven, the celestial realm of

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.47a.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.45b. It may also be mentioned that Genshin’s biography in the *Kakochō* also relates two dreams which depict him as going to the Pure Land at death. See Rhodes 1995, pp.63–66.

the future Buddha Maitreya, who is depicted in Buddhist literature as the next Buddha to appear in the world.<sup>59</sup> According to Buddhist texts, Maitreya will descend to this world 5670 million years in the future, attain Buddhahood and lead innumerable people to enlightenment. In the meantime, he now resides in Tuṣita Heaven, one of the many heavenly realms in the Buddhist cosmology, waiting for the proper time to return to earth. Texts like the *Sūtra of Maitreya's Ascent* (*Miroku jōshōkyō* 弥勒上生經) claims that the faithful can be born in that land by undertaking various acts of merit, including hearing and reciting Maitreya's name.

Since both Maitreya and Amida were considered to preside over other-worldly paradise-like realms into which one could be born at death, there was considerable rivalry between their cults, especially in the early years of Japanese Buddhism. Although Amida eventually eclipsed Maitreya, the latter still held the allegiance of a number of people during the Heian period. Polemics against the Maitreya faith, found for example in Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*, reveal the depth of the popularity of this bodhisattva among the clerics and lay people during this age. But even while Genshin attempted to demonstrate the superiority of worshipping Amida, it is significant that some members of the Nijūgo zammai-e actively sought birth in Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven. Even in that late age, the similarity between the other-worldly realms of Amida's Pure Land and Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven allowed some nembutsu practitioners to conflate the cults of these two Buddhist figures.

Ryōun 良運 is one such example. When Ryōun fell ill, a certain person dreamed that Ryōun would next be born in Amida's land. However, after he had passed away, another person dreamed that Ryōun had been born in Tuṣita Heaven.<sup>60</sup> The second example is the case of Ninki 仁儂, who was said to have gained a vision of Tuṣita Heaven on his deathbed. According to the *Kakochō*,

(Ninki) had long aroused the great aspiration (to attain Buddhahood) and reflected on Amida. Meanwhile, for several years after he became old, his voice saying the nembutsu continued without interruption, which was loud and practically filled the cloister. Those who heard it experienced joy and thought it extraordinary.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> On the place of Maitreya in Japanese Buddhism, see Rhodes 1998.

<sup>60</sup> Hirabayashi 1985, p.46a.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48a.

No one doubted that he would go straight to the Pure Land. However, on his deathbed, Ninki confided that he had seen in the distance light emanating from the forty-nine halls of Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven. Surprised, his disciple Rien 利円 asked, "My great master has long reflected on Amida and wholeheartedly longed for (birth in the Land of) Utmost Bliss. Why do you now, at the time of death, have a vision of Tuṣita?" To this, Ninki cryptically answered, "There is a reason for it. I can only revere and entrust myself to the Buddha."<sup>62</sup>

In both cases, monks who practiced the nembutsu were said to have achieved birth in Tuṣita Heaven. These examples reveal that devotion to Amida and Maitreya were still closely related to one another in the popular imagination of this age.

### *Conclusion*

As I have tried to show in the pages above, the *Kakochō* biographies are a valuable source of information of the everyday practices of Heian-period Pure Land practitioners. They show us in intimate and vivid detail how monks lived their lives in their search for birth in the Pure Land. At the same time, it is also important to remember that the *Kakochō* was composed to articulate a certain vision of how one should live in order to achieve birth in the Pure Land. These narratives tell us that one must cast aside all worldly concerns and devote one's life wholeheartedly to the quest for the Pure Land. Failure to focus on this goal, especially at the hour of death, certified that one's quest would remain unfulfilled. The biographies repeatedly emphasize that the proper practice of the nembutsu at the moment of death is of utmost importance in achieving birth in the Pure Land. To ensure that one could concentrate on the nembutsu at this crucial moment, one was enjoined to practice the nembutsu with diligence throughout one's life. Moreover, to increase the nembutsu's effectiveness, the practitioners were depicted as engaging in a variety of non-nembutsu practices through their lives. In taking up his brush to compose the *Kakochō*, Genshin sought to provide future generations with guidelines or normative patterns for living the life of Pure Land faith. He has been singularly successful in his effort, for these narratives still vividly convey to us the deep faith and resolve with which the practitioners of the Nijūgo zammai strove to achieve salvation in the Pure Land way.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

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