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The Beginning of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan: From its Introduction through the Nara Period

The seventh and eighth centuries were a time of unprecedented change in Japanese history. During this time, the Japanese court actively embraced Chinese civilization in an attempt to recreate their nation along continental lines. The wholesale adoption of Chinese culture reached its zenith in the Nara period (710-794), which takes its name from the new capital city built in imitation of the Chinese seat of government. One of the most important, and most enduring, aspects of the continental culture imported to Japan at this time was Buddhism. Buddhism, though born in India, had become a major presence in the Chinese religious scene by this time, and the Japanese quickly adopted it as the most advanced spiritual system then available. While the so-called “Six Nara Schools”¹ are usually cited as the representative schools of Buddhism during the Nara period, it is important to note that the Pure Land teachings also was transplanted to Japan during this time. Even though the Pure Land schools (specifically the Jōdo 浄土 and Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 schools) constitute some of the largest Buddhist institutions in contemporary Japan, there has so far been no study in English describing how it was transmitted to Japan and how it developed in the pre-Nara and Nara periods. It is hoped that this study will help redress this deficiency.

The Introduction of Buddhism to Japan

The thirteenth year of the reign of Emperor Kimmei 欽明 (reigned 539-571), corresponding to 552 of the western calendar, was long considered to mark the “official” introduction of Buddhism to Japan.² According to the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan), in this year a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha, along with banners, parasols and several Buddhist texts, were presented to the Japanese court by King Syōngmyōng of Paekche.³ However, the authenticity of this account has been called into question, since several phrases in this account are direct quotations from the *Chin-kuang-ming tsui-sheng-wang ching* 金光明最勝王經 (Sūtra of the

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1. Kusha 俱舍, Jōjitsu 成実, Sanron 三論, Hossō 法相, Kegon 華嚴 and Ritsu 律 schools. On these schools, see Alicia and Daigan Matsunaga 1973: 26-109.
2. The following discussion is based upon Hayami 1986: 16-27.
3. For an account of this event, see Aston 1972: part 2, 656.

Supreme King of Golden Light), I-tsing's translation of the *Suvarṇa-prabhāsa Sūtra*, which was rendered into Chinese only in 703.⁴ As a result, the *Nihon shoki*'s account is now generally believed to be a later fabrication, created in the process of compiling this historical work by someone well-versed in Buddhist sūtras, perhaps the monk Dōji 道慈 (?-744) of the Sanron 三論 sect.⁵ As to the reason why 552 was chosen by the compilers as the year of the transmission of Buddhism, Tamura Enchō (1959: 305) has argued that, in the reckoning of the Sanron monks of this age, this year marks the first year of the Latter Dharma (*mappō* 末法). By locating the introduction of Buddhism in this year, Dōji tried to demonstrate the superiority of Japan over China by depicting their land as the place where Buddhism can thrive even in the age of the Latter Dharma. (Tamura 1963: 6)

4. The *Nihon shoki* quotes a memorial praising the Buddhist teachings which King Syōng-myōng is said to have sent along with the statue. This memorial reads in part,

Among the teachings, this teaching is supreme. It is difficult to comprehend and difficult to enter. Neither the Lord of Chao nor Confucius have attained understanding of it. This Dharma produces an innumerable and limitless amount of auspicious merits and good results, and culminates in the attainment of unsurpassed enlightenment (bodhi). It is, for example, like a person holding a wish-fulfilling gem in his buson. Whenever he uses it, it grants all of his wishes. This treasure of the sublime Dharma is also like this. All that one wishes is granted without exception, in accordance with one's thoughts. From far-away India to here, (i. e., the land of the) Three Han (i. e., Korea), (everyone) relies on this teaching and worships it; there is no one who fails to revere it...

After quoting the memorial, the *Nihon shoki* adds, "On this day, the Emperor, hearing this, danced in joy and assembled his ministers together and declared, 'Never have I heard such wonderful Dharma.'..."

As Fujii Akitaka (1925: 653-5) has shown, this entry incorporates many phrases and passages from the *Chin-kuang-ming tsui-sheng-wang ching*. The underlined sections in the *Nihon shoki* above corresponds exactly to the underlined sections of the following two passages from the sūtra.

(1) "Among the sūtras, this Sūtra of the Supreme King of Golden Light is supreme. It is difficult to comprehend and difficult to enter. Neither śrāvakas nor pratyekabuddhas have attained understanding of it. This Dharma produces an innumerable and limitless amount of auspicious merits and good results, and culminates in the attainment of unsurpassed enlightenment (bodhi)." ("Tathāgata's Life Span Chapter," T 16, 406a)

(2) At that time, the Four Heavenly Kings, having heard these verses, danced in joy and, addressing the Buddha, said, "World Honored One! "Never have I heard such profound wonderful Dharma." ("Protection of the Country by the Four Heavenly Kings Chapter," T 16, 432b)

Moreover, the following verse from the sūtra (found just before the second of the two sūtra passages given above) closely resembles the italicized section in the *Nihon shoki* above.

"Suppose there is a person who has a sublime treasure box in his room.

Whenever he receives and uses it, it fulfills all (of his wishes).

This supreme sūtra king is also like this.

All merit without exception is fulfilled."

("Protection of the Country by the Four Heavenly Kings Chapter," T 16, 432b).

5. Hayami 1986: 18-19. The *Nihon shoki* was completed in 720.

With the account in the *Nihon shoki* proved untenable, it is now generally accepted that Buddhism was transmitted to Japan in 538, or the seventh year of Kimmei. This date is based on several texts written prior to the *Nihon shoki*. For example, the *Jōgū shōtoku hōō teisetsu* 上宮聖德法王帝説 (Exposition of Dharma King Shōtoku of the Upper Palace), an early biography of Prince Shōtoku (Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子, 574-622), gives the twelfth day of the tenth month of this year as the date on which King Syōng-myōng's gift of the Buddhist statue, sūtras and monks arrived in Japan. (Ienaga et. al. 1975: 373) The *Gangō-ji garan engi* 元興寺伽藍緣起 (Origins of the Gangō-ji Temple) also dates the introduction of Buddhism to the tenth month of 538. (Sakurai et al. 1975: 8) However, as Fukuyama Toshio has noted, two earlier inscriptions now incorporated into the *Gangōji garan engi*, i.e., those taken from the steeple of the Hōkō-ji 法興寺 pagoda and the aureole of the statue of Śākyamuni Buddha of Gangō-ji,⁶ state only that Buddhism was brought to Japan during Kimmei's reign, and do not specify the year of its transmission.⁷ Hence, it is difficult to say with certainty that Buddhism was brought to Japan in 538. Moreover, as Tamura Enchō and others have argued, it is quite possible that Buddhism had been brought to Japan by continental immigrants and that it was already being worshipped privately among them even before it was formally introduced to the Japanese court.⁸

Prince Shōtoku and Pure Land Buddhism

For a number of years, Japanese scholars have debated whether Prince Shōtoku, regent for Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (592-628) and one of the most prominent lay Buddhists of early Japan, was a Pure Land devotee.⁹ Several texts have been cited to support the claim that the prince sought birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land. First there is the inscription on the aureole of the statue of Śākyamuni Buddha at Hōryū-ji, a temple which was constructed on the site of Prince Shōtoku's palace. This statue was made to pray for the recovery of Prince Shōtoku and Kashiwade no Ōiratsume 膳大郎女, one of the prince's three consorts, when they both fell ill early in the year of 622. Unfortunately, the statue was created in vain, for they both passed away within a few months, the prince on

6. In the *Gangō-ji garan engi*, these documents are called the *Tōroban mei* 塔露盤銘 (Inscription on the Base of the Steeple of the [Gangō-ji] Pagoda) and the *Jōroku kōmei* (Inscription on the Aureole of the Sixteen [Feet Tall Statue of Śākyamuni Buddha of Gangō-ji]). They are found in Sakurai et al. 1975: 19-20.

7. Fukuyama 1935. This article was later reprinted, under the title "Toyoura-dera no sōritsu 豊浦寺の創立 (Establishment of the Toyoura-dera)" in Fukuyama 1968: 191-211.

8. Tamura 1972: 53 and Kitagawa 1966: 24. J. Kamstra (1967: 246—253) also emphasizes the important role played by continental immigrants in the transmission of Buddhism to Japan, and argues that Shiba Totto 司馬達等, the leader of a clan of saddlers who arrived in Japan in 522, was a key figure in the introduction of this religion to Japan.

9. The scholarly arguments concerning Shōtoku Taishi and Pure Land Buddhism is conveniently summarized in Hayami 1978: 51-59.

the twenty-fourth day of the second month. Be that as it may, the inscription, which is quoted in the *Jōgū shōtoku hō teisetsu*, reads in part,

Paying reverence to the three treasures, we will create a statue of Śākyamuni whose height is the same as that of the king (i.e., Prince Shōtoku). Through the power of this vow, may they recover from their illnesses, extend the length of their lives and remain safely in the world. If it is their karmic destiny to depart from the world, may they go and climb to the Pure Land and quickly ascend to (attain) the sublime fruit (*myōka* 妙果, i.e., Buddhahood). (Ienaga et. al. 1975: 363)

But as Ienaga Saburō has rightly pointed out, although this passage may reflect the belief of the people who sponsored the construction of the statue, it does not prove that Prince Shōtoku himself sought birth there. (Ienaga 1966: 15)

The same argument can be made for another passage cited from the *Jōgū shōtoku hō teisetsu* to show that Prince Shotoku was a Pure Land believer. There it is stated that Hyeja 慧慈, a monk from Koguryo who came to Japan in 595 and served as Prince Shotoku's advisor on religious matters until returning in 615, declared as follows when he received news of Prince Shotoku's death:

If I should die on the twenty-fourth day of the second month next year (i.e., on the first anniversary of the prince's death), I will definitely encounter the Sage King (Prince Shōtoku) and meet him face to face in the Pure Land. (Ienaga et. al. 1975: 361-2)

The account continues that Hyeja actually became ill and died on the specified date the following year. The fact that Hyeja believed he could meet Prince Shōtoku again in the Pure Land, it has been argued, shows that the prince must have been a follower of Pure Land Buddhism. However, this story is clearly hagiographic in nature and is difficult to accept as historically true. Moreover, although it reveals that the person who created this story was familiar with the notion of the Pure Land, it does not prove that Prince Shotoku himself was a Pure Land believer. (Ienaga 1966: 12)

The third piece of evidence frequently cited is the Tenjukoku shūchō 天寿国繡帳 (Tapestry of the Realm of Heavenly Life). The Tenjukoku shūchō, also known as the Tenjukoku Mandala (Mandala of the Realm of Heavenly Life), is a tapestry which Tachibana no Ōiratsume 橘大女郎, another of Prince Shōtoku's consorts, ordered woven in her husband's memory after he died.¹⁰ Only small fragments of the tapestry remain, but the inscription on the tapestry is quoted in the *Jōgū shōtoku hō teisetsu*. In this inscription, Tachibana no Ōiratsume declares, "I believe that my great lord shall be born into the Realm of Heavenly Life (Tenjukoku 天寿国)." (Ienaga et. al. 1975: 371) Although here is no mention of a Pure Land by this name in Buddhist texts, it has often been argued that it refers to Amida's land. One exponent of this view is Tokiwa Daijō. He based his opinion on a vow dated 583 appended to a copy of the

10. For an account of a recent attempt to reconstruct the Tenjukoku shūchō using computer imagery, see Ōhashi and Taniguchi 2002.

Hua-yen sūtra (according to the colophon, the sūtra itself was copied in 513) allegedly from Tun-huang in the possession of the Mitsui Bunko 三井文庫. The vow reads in part, “(I pray that) my late parents will be born in the Realm of Heavenly Life in the Western Direction and constantly hear the right Dharma.” Since Amida’s Pure Land exists in the west, the fact that the passage above locates the Realm of Heavenly Life in that direction suggests that it was an alternate name for Amida’s realm.¹¹ However, recent research has shown that this sūtra is a later forgery. (Akao 2003: 31; see also Tonami 2005: 8-11) As a result, this vow can no longer be taken as proof that the Realm of Heavenly Life refers to Amida’s Pure Land.

As a matter of fact, it is not certain whether the Realm of Heavenly Life really refers to Amida’s Pure Land at all. The earliest document which identifies the Realm of Heavenly Life with Amida Buddha’s Pure Land is the *Taishi mandara kōsbiki* 太子曼荼羅講式 (Liturgy for the Worship of the Maṇḍala of Prince Shōtoku), composed by the Tendai monk Jōen 定円 in 1275.¹² With the increasing popularity of the Prince Shōtoku cult in the Kamakura period (1185-1333), the prince became identified with Kannon, Amida Buddha’s attendant bodhisattva. It was probably in response to such historical circumstances that led Jōen to equate the Realm of Heavenly Life with Amida’s Pure Land. (Ōno 1972: 64)

Besides Amida’s Pure Land, a number of other possibilities for the Realm of Heavenly Life have been suggested,¹³ including Maitreya’s Tuṣita Heaven, Akṣobhya’s Pure Land of Abhirati,¹⁴ and the Pure Land of Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa, where, according to the *Lotus Sūtra*, Śākyamuni eternally resides.¹⁵ Among them, the

11. Tokiwa 1979. This paper was originally published in 1938. Subsequently, Ōya Tokujō proposed a new reading of this vow. He contended that the character Tokiwa read as *ten* 天 in *tenjukoku* is actually *mu* 无, which is often used as an alternate character for 無. According to this reading, the word *tenjukoku* in the vow is actually *mujukoku*. This, Ōya contended, is none other than a reference to Muryōju 無量寿, Amida Buddha’s Pure Land, even though the character *ryō* 量 has been omitted. Hence he concluded that the realm that is being referred to in the vow is actually Amida’s Pure Land, not the Realm of Heavenly Life. See Ōya 1987: 66-7.

12. The *Taishi mandara kōsbiki* is found in Shōtoku Taishi hōsankei 1943: vol. 5: 131-138.

13. These theories are conveniently summarized in Ōno 1972: 63-77.

14. This theory was suggested by Ōya Shū 大矢透 in his *Kana genryū kō* 仮名源流考 (Study on the Origin of the Kana Syllabary). See Ōno 1972: 70. According to the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, the lay bodhisattva Vimalakīrti came to this world from Abhirati. See Lamotte 1976: 243. Since Prince Shōtoku is credited with writing a commentary on this sūtra, Ōya claimed that the Realm of Heavenly Life must refer to this Pure Land.

15. This theory was proposed by Ōya Tokujō. According to the “Tathāgata’s Life Span Chapter” (chapter 16) of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Śākyamuni resides eternally on Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa, ceaselessly preaching the Dharma. This Pure Land is said to remain tranquil even during the great conflagration that engulfs the world at the end of the aeon. Ōya (1987: 99) argued that, since (1) Prince Shotoku held the *Lotus Sūtra* in high esteem (he is credited with writing a commentary on this sūtra; on this point, see below) and (2) the statue of Śākyamuni at the Hōryū-ji is based on the *Lotus Sūtra*, he must have sought birth in Śākyamuni’s Pure Land depicted in the sūtra.

position that the Realm of Heavenly Life refers to Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven, first suggested by Matsumoto Bunzaburō (1911: 12) in his pioneering study, *Miroku Jōdo-ron* (Treatise on Maitreya's Pure Land, has been gaining growing support in recent years. Maitreya refers to the next Buddha to appear in this world (called *sāha* world in Buddhist texts).¹⁶ When the time comes, 5670 million years in the future, he will descend to this world, attain Buddhahood under the Dragon Flower Tree and preach three sermons, each of which will result in the awakening of innumerable beings.¹⁷ In the meantime, he is residing in Tuṣita Heaven, one of the many heavenly realms in Buddhist cosmology, as a bodhisattva, awaiting to return to earth. Based on this narrative, Tuṣita Heaven came to be seen as a type of Pure Land; devotees of Maitreya came to pray for entry into Tuṣita Heaven at death, where (they hoped) they could speedily achieve Buddhahood by receiving instructions directly from this bodhisattva.

Concerning this theory, Tsuji Zennosuke pointed out that a note found in the *Jōgū shōtoku hōō teisetsu* states, "(The Realm of Heavenly Life) is just a heavenly realm."¹⁸ Since Buddhist cosmology clearly distinguishes between a heavenly realm (which is counted as one of the six realms of transmigration [*rokudō* 六道]), and pure lands (the realms of fully awakened Buddhas), Tsuji argued that the Realm of Heavenly Life must refer to one of the heavenly realms, Tuṣita Heaven to be exact.¹⁹ More recently, Tsuji's view has been supported by Shigematsu Akihisa. (1964: 72-90) After detailed comparison with murals from Tun-huang caves and Korean tombs, Shigematsu concluded that the Tenjukoku shūchō originally consisted of two tapestries, one depicted scenes from the *Miroku jōshōkyō* (Sūtra on Maitreya's Ascent to Tuṣita Heaven) and another from the *Miroku gesshōkyō* (Sūtra of Maitreya's Future Descent to this World).²⁰

As the discussion above suggests, there is a great deal of controversy concerning the identity of the Realm of Heavenly Life. But whatever its identity, it must be said that, strictly speaking, the inscription on the tapestry only conveys the pious hopes of Tachibana no Ōiratsume. Although Prince Shōtoku may have communicated the desire to go to this realm to his consort before he died, this passage cannot be taken

16. Important studies on Maitreya include Matsumoto 1911 and the essays collected together in Sponberg and Hardacre 1988. An excellent survey of Maitreya in Japan focusing on pre-modern times is Hayami 1980. I have also written on the Maitreya faith in Japan. See Rhodes 1988.

17. To be more specific, Maitreya is said to lead 9,600,000,000 people, 9,400,000,000 people, and 9,200,000,000 people to enlightenment during the three respective sermons.

18. Tsuji 1921: 82. The passage in question from the *Jōgū shōtoku hōō teisetsu* is found at Ienaga et. al. eds. 1975: 371.

19. According to Buddhist cosmology, Amida Buddha's Pure Land is a Buddha realm, a realm beyond the triple realms of transmigration, and is strictly distinguished from a heavenly realm, which exists within the realms of transmigration.

20. Along with the *Miroku Jōbutsukyō* 弥勒大成仏経 (Sūtra on the Attainment of Buddhahood by Maitreya), these two sūtras are counted among the so-called "Three Maitreya Sūtras (*Miroku sanbukyō* 弥勒三部経).

as uncontrovertible proof that it really expresses the prince's wish concerning his afterlife. (Ienaga 1966: 11)

The fourth and final piece of evidence which allegedly indicates that Prince Shōtoku was a Pure Land believer comes from the *Yuimagyō gisho* 維摩經義疏 (Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra). Along with the *Hokke gisho* 法華義疏 (Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra) and *Shomangyō gisho* 勝鬘經義疏 (Commentary on the Śrīmālā Sūtra), the *Yuimagyō gisho* is one of three commentaries on Buddhist texts attributed to the prince, collectively known as the *Sangyō gisho* (Commentary on the Three Sutras). The *Yuimagyō gisho* contains a passage which reads, "The *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* states, 'Only those who commit the five grave evils and slander the true dharma are excluded (from attaining birth in Amida's Pure Land).'" This passage is an allusion to the famous Eighteenth Vow found in the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, the Chinese translation of the *Larger Sukhāvātīyā Sūtra* by Saṃghavarman which is arguably the central text of east Asian Pure Land Buddhism. The vow reads,

If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the land of the ten directions who sincerely and joyfully entrust in me, and remain mindful of me for ten instants of thought, should not be born there, may I not attain perfect awakening. Excluded, however, are those who commit the five gravest offences and abuse the right Dharma. (Inagaki 1994: 243, slightly amended)

The existence of this quotation has been used to argue that Prince Shōtoku was a Pure Land devotee.

However, a number of scholars, beginning with Tsuda Sōkichi, have questioned whether the three commentaries comprising the *Sangyō gisho* were actually written by Prince Shotoku himself. Tsuda argued that since only a monk deeply immersed in Buddhist scholarship could have composed these erudite commentaries, the prince, with only a layman's knowledge of this religion, could not possibly have written them. Tsuda also pointed out that, although the *Nihon shoki* states that the prince lectured on the *Śrīmālā* and *Lotus Sutras* (Aston 1972: part 2, 155), there is no mention of him writing commentaries on them. (Tsuda 1963: vol. 2: 134-137) Subsequently, Ogura Toyofumi argued that the earliest document attributing the three commentaries to Prince Shotoku is the *Hōryū-ji garan engi* (The Origin of the Hōryū-ji Temple) compiled in 747. Ogura concluded that, with the growing popularity of Prince Shotoku in the mid-700's, these commentaries, which had remained anonymous until then, were attributed to the prince by monks of the Hōryū-ji such as Gyōshin 行信²¹ who was eager to use the prince's popularity to increase the influence of the temple.²²

21. Dates unknown. A monk of the Hossō 法相 sect. He first resided at the Gangō-ji and was appointed *rishshi* 律師 (precept master) in 738. Later, lamenting the fact that the Hōryū-ji had fallen into ruin, Gyōshin worked to restore the temple to its former glory. As part of his activities, he sought out items which had supposedly belonged to Prince Shōtoku and donated them to Hōryū-ji. On this monk, see Ogura 1985: 150-151.

22. Ogura 1985. Ogura's article originally appeared in 1953.

In 1956, Fukui Kōjun created a sensation when he argued that the *Yuimakyō gisho* could not have been written by Prince Shōtoku. The *Yuimakyō gisho* quotes a Chinese text called the *Pai hsing* 百行, which, according to Fukui, refers to the *Pai-hsing chang* 百行章 by Tu Cheng-lun 杜正倫 of the T'ang dynasty. Since Tu died in 658, 36 years after Prince Shotoku's death, Fukui concluded that the *Yuimakyō gisho* could not have been written by the prince. Although the version of the *Pai-hsing chang* which Fukui consulted was incomplete, he believed that the passage quoted in the *Yuimakyō gisho* was to be found in the missing sections. (Fukui, 1956: 312-313) Subsequently, Naitō Tatsuo discovered a complete version of the *Pai-hsing chang* among the Tun-huang manuscripts, and found that the passage in question did not exist within the text at all. As a result, Naito concluded that the *Pai hsing* quoted in the *Yuimagyō gisho* was not the *Pai-hsing chang*, but the *Pai-hsing chen* 百行箴 by Tao-heng 道恒. (345-417; Naitō 1957: 16-18) Furthermore, Fujieda Akira discovered among the Tun-huang manuscripts a text upon which the *Shōmangyō gisho* was apparently based, making it highly unlikely that the latter commentary was an original creation by Prince Shōtoku. (Fujieda 1975: 487-9)

Through such arguments, scholars became increasingly convinced that none of the three commentaries can be attributed directly to Prince Shotoku. Inoue Mitsusada has been the foremost proponent of this view in recent years. Expanding on Ogura's study, Inoue argued that the commentaries were not written by Prince Shotoku himself but became identified with the prince sometime between 720 (when the *Nihon shoki* was composed) and 747. Noting that annual lectures on the *Lotus*, *Vimalakirti* and *Srimala Sutras* formed an integral part of the calendar of events at the Horyū-ji by the end of the Tempyō era (729-749), Inoue also proposed that the commentaries originally developed out of these lectures. (Inoue 1971: 15-18) In a later article, Inoue focused on lists of Buddhist texts from the Sūtra Copying Office (*shakyōsho* 写経所) located at the Tōdai-ji. Through his analysis, Inoue found that although both the *Hokke gisho* and the *Shomangyō gisho* are found in these lists, the earliest entries that specifically name Prince Shōtoku as their author dates only from 747, the same year that the *Hōryū-ji garan engi ruki shizaicho* was compiled. However, Inoue argues that this entry from 747 comes from a list of texts borrowed from other temples, and concludes that the commentaries must have been circulating under Prince Shōtoku's name even before 747. (Inoue 1982a: 182) Furthermore, Inoue suggests that although these texts were not actually written by the prince himself, they were compiled under the leadership of Prince Shōtoku by Korean monks in the prince's entourage. (Inoue 1982a: 191-192)

The Introduction and Growth of the Amida Cult

As the brief survey above indicates, it is difficult to accept that Prince Shōtoku was a believer in Amida Buddha's Pure Land. Hence, it must be said that the first historically reliable reference to Pure Land Buddhism in Japan dates to 640. According to the *Nihon shoki*, in the fifth month of this year, the monk Eon 惠隱, who had returned one year earlier after a stay in China lasting over thirty years,

lectured on the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* (*Muryōjūkyō*) at court.²³ About two decades later, in 659, a statue of Amida Buddha was dedicated at the Kanjin-ji 観心寺 in the province of Kawachi 河内 (present-day Osaka prefecture). In the following year, statues of Amida Buddha and two attendant bodhisattvas were donated to the Sairin-ji 西琳寺, also located in Kawachi. (Ōno 1972: 88-9) Significantly, these temples were associated with the Kawachi no fumi clan 西文氏 which had immigrated to Japan from Korea, suggesting the important role that continental immigrant families played in the introduction of Pure Land Buddhism to Japan. (Inoue 1982b) The mural of Amida Buddha and his Pure Land found in the main hall of Hōryū-ji is believed to date from the end of the seventh century.²⁴

However, it was only during the latter half of the Nara period that Amida Buddha became a major object of devotion in Japan. The rapid growth of the Amida cult during this period has been demonstrated by Inoue Mitsusada in a survey of Buddhist statues dedicated at Kōfuku-ji, a major temple in Nara, between 707 and 806. According to the study, two statues of Maitreya, as well as one statue each of Śākyamuni, Yakushi and Kannon, were dedicated at this temple during the first half of the Nara period. During the same period, no statue of Amida was constructed. In contrast, during the second half of the Nara period, ten statues of Amida were installed at Kōfuku-ji, along with 5 statues of Kannon, and 2 each of Maitreya and Yakushi. (Inoue 1956: 8-9) Inoue found the same trend among Nara period inscriptions and sūtra postscripts mentioning birth into another realm. Before 743, four such passages made reference to birth in Maitreya's Tusita Heaven while only two referred to birth in Amida's land (interestingly, there were also two passages that prayed for birth into both). In contrast, after 743, there were five references to birth in Amida's realm and only one reference to birth into Maitreya's land. (Inoue 1956: 10-11)

Inoue's study reveals that while birth in Maitreya's land was popular up to the middle of the Nara period, this bodhisattva was surpassed by Amida Buddha during the latter half of this period. Inoue points out that a similar trend is also found in China. Citing a study by Tsukamoto Zenryū, Inoue notes that 35 statues of Maitreya and 8 statues of Amida were constructed in the Lung-men grottos in China during the Northern Wei period (386-534). In contrast, during the reigns of Emperor Kao-tsung (649-683) and Empress Wu (684-705) in the T'ang 唐 period, only 11 statues of Maitreya was constructed as opposed to 110 statues of Amida. (Inoue 1956: 7-8)

23. Aston 1972: part 2: 169-170. Eon's dates are unknown. He left for China in 608 as a member of an embassy led by Ono no Imoko 小野妹子, and returned in 609. The *Nihon shoki* further states that Eon again lectured on the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* at court in 652. See Washio 1903: 31.

24. Murals of four Pure Lands were painted on the inner walls of Kondō (Golden Hall) of the Hōryū-ji: that of Amida's Pure Land on the western wall, that of Śākyamuni on the eastern wall and those of Maitreya and Bhaiṣajyarāja on the north wall. Tragically these paintings were destroyed in a fire during the course of repairing the hall in 1949. (Okazaki 1977: 34)

A similar trend is also found in Tokiwa Daijō's study of inscriptions describing the wish to gain birth in a post-mortem realm manifesting a similar trend. According to this study, which Inoue also cites, during the Northern Wei period (386-534), there were nine inscriptions that expressed the desire for birth in Maitreya Tuṣita Heaven as opposed to eight expressing the desire for birth in Amida's Pure Land. During the next period when north China was divided into the Eastern Wei (534-550) and Western Wei (535-556), there were five inscriptions each expressing the desire for birth in the worlds of Maitreya and Amida, while during the Northern Ch'i 北齊 (550-577) and Northern Chou 北周 (556-581), there was only one such example concerning Maitreya's realm in contrast to nine concerning Amida's realm. Although two inscriptions noted the desire for birth in Maitreya's heaven and none concerning Amida's land is found from the brief Sui dynasty (581-618), thirteen inscriptions mentioning birth in Amida's world, but only one of birth in Maitreya's land, is found during the T'ang period (618-907). (Inoue 1956: 12) These studies show that Amida gradually replaced Maitreya as the major object of devotion among Chinese Buddhists.

Pure Land Buddhism and the Quest for a Blissful Afterlife

Significantly, during its initial period in Japan, Pure Land Buddhism was not perceived as a religion of personal salvation but was closely associated with the indigenous ancestor cult. Documents and inscriptions from this period show that the Pure Land was understood as a magnificent other world to which one's parents and ancestors can be delivered after they died. Thus Pure Land practice during this period consisted primarily of rituals for ensuring that one's ancestors went safely to the Pure Land after death. (Inoue 1956: 25) Since ancient times, spirits of the dead were deeply feared, for they were believed capable of bringing harm and misfortune on the living. Pure Land rituals were seen as way to pacify these spirits and prevent them from engaging in any mischief in this world. This characteristic feature of early Pure Land Buddhism accords well with the character of Buddhism in general during this age, for at this time the new continental religion was generally seen as a potent set of spiritual techniques for gaining various forms of worldly benefits, such as curing illnesses, preventing natural disasters like droughts and ensuring the prosperity of the state.

There was apparently a variety of views concerning the afterlife in pre-Buddhist Japan. Drawing on their studies of Okinawan burial customs, folklorists such as Yanagida Kunio²⁵ and Tanikawa Kenichi (1988: 242-246) proposed that the earliest Japanese believed the soul crossed the sea and went to an eternal realm beyond the ocean after death. The fact that such a belief was held by at least some Japanese is confirmed by the discovery of coffins in the shape of boats, frequently interred in caves overlooking the ocean, in various parts of Japan, including Chiba and

25. Yanagida 1963: 85-109. Yanagida's view is conveniently summarized in Itō 1980: 103-107.

Wakayama prefectures. (Tatsumi 1966: 8-30) In contrast, the famous story of Izanagi's visit to the nether world found in Japan's oldest history, the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of Ancient Matters) written in 712, describes the world of the dead as a gloomy subterranean land. In this story, Izanami visits this underground realm, called Yomi no kuni 黄泉国, in search for his deceased wife Izanagi, and barely escapes back to earth after looking upon her putrefying body. (Philippi 1969: 61-67) Ueda Masaaki (1970: 115) has suggested that this view, which locates the land of the dead under the ground, arose with the dissemination of the custom of burying the dead in large mounds called *kofun* 古墳 which became widespread from the third century onwards. Finally, Hori Ichirō (1953: 38-41) has found that a majority of death-related poems in the *Manyōshū* 万葉集 (Collection of Myriad Leaves; compiled ca. 759), the Nara period poetry collection, portrays the souls of the dead as ascending upward, either to a mountain top or to a heavenly realm. This suggests yet a third locus for the land of the dead among the early Japanese.

With the introduction of Buddhism, the notion that the dead go to the Pure Land became increasingly popular in Japan. Although Buddhist scholastic discourse held that the Pure Land was a realm existing beyond the world of transmigration, at this early stage the Pure Land was simply understood as a pleasant abode of the dead. This indicates that the notion of the Pure Land was adopted by the Japanese, not because it preached a spiritual path for transcending the cycle of birth and death and achieving Buddhahood, but primarily because it provided them with a discourse and a set of ritual practices which, while carrying with it the weight of authority of a new continental religion, allowed them to retain their hoary notion that the ancestors depart to another world at death. The fact that this other world was depicted as a gorgeous and blissful realm, hence making it very unlikely that the dead would wish to return to this world to cause mischief, only added to the attractiveness of the Buddhist Pure Land.

This close connection between ancestor worship and worship of Amida Buddha is reflected in numerous documents and inscription from the pre-Nara and Nara periods. For example, a section of the inscription found on the statue of Amida Buddha dedicated at Kanjin-ji in 659 cited earlier states,

Tsuchinoe-uma year (658), twelfth month. For him, named Ishisako 伊之沙古, who passed away, his wife, named Umaoko 汗麻尾古, respectfully cast a statue of Amida Buddha. By means of this merit, I (Umaoko) pray that my deceased husband, as well as my parents back through seven generations, will always be born in the Pure Land, life after life, generation after generation. (Ōno1972: 89)

This inscription states that a Buddhist lay woman named Umaoko had a statue of Amida Buddha cast in order to pray for the birth of her deceased husband Ishisako, as well as her parents back through seven generations,²⁶ into Amida Buddha's Pure

26. On the significance of "seven generations of ancestors" for Japanese ancestor worship, see Takeda 1950.

Land. Similarly, the inscription from the auroral of the statue of Amida installed at the Sairin-ji in 659 indicates that this statue was cast both to pray for the birth of the donors' deceased parents and ancestors into the Pure Land and to solicit the prosperity of the donors' families. (Ōno1972: 89) In fact, according to Inoue Mitsusada (1956: 19-21), of the 19 inscriptions found on statues of Amida and paintings of the Pure Land (*jōdo bensō* 浄土変相) made between 658 and the early years of the Kōnin era (810-824), all but one state that they were created to pray for the spiritual welfare of the deceased, whether it be a member of the imperial family or one's spouse, parents or ancestors. Interestingly, Inoue (1956: 23-24) found that statues of Maitreya were almost invariably also created for the same reason: to pray for the welfare of the dead. Moreover, he also notes that, in China too, statues of Amida were created to ensure the welfare of the dead. (Inoue 1956: 25)

A major event in the spread of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan was the death in 760 of Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后, the wife of Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (r. 724-749). According to the *Shōku Nihongi*, forty-nine days after she died, the court ordered temples in each province to make a painting of Amida's Pure Land, copy the *Ch'eng tsan ching t'u fo she shou ching* 称讚浄土仏撰受經 (Hsüan-tsang's translation of the *Smaller Sukhavatīvyūha Sūtra*, a short but influential Pure Land text), and use them to hold a ceremony in the empress's memory. (Aoki et. al. 1992: vol. 3: 359-361) Moreover, on the first anniversary of her death, the court constructed a hall called Amida Jōdo-in 阿弥陀浄土院 (Cloister of Amida's Pure Land) within the precinct of the Hokke-ji 法華寺, the head nunnery in the nation-wide system of state-supported nunneries (*kokubunni-ji* 国分尼寺), and held a ceremony there to pray for her spiritual welfare. At the same time, the court ordered the construction of Amida triads to be installed in all provincial *kokubunni-ji* nunneries. (Aoki et. al. 1992: vol. 3: 381) These examples all reveal that the growth of the Amida faith during the pre-Nara and Nara periods owed much of its success to the close connection it had developed with the indigenous ancestor cult.

Even during this early period, there were undoubtedly some people, especially among the monks well versed in Buddhist dogma, who prayed for their own birth in the Pure Land with the hope of achieving liberation from the cycle of birth and death. There is, however, only one extant example of such prayer – that of Ganshun 願俊 of Yakushi-ji 薬師寺. In 748, he copied the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, and at the end of its second fascicle, he added a short vow, stating his wish to gain liberation from the cycle of transmigration and achieve Buddhahood by gaining birth in the Pure Land. (Ōno 1972: 110) This reveals that a discourse more in keeping with the orthodox interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism had been accepted by at least a portion of the clerical elite. During the subsequent Heian period, such interpretation of birth in the Pure Land gradually gained widespread acceptance and many people came to pray, not only for their relatives' and ancestors' birth, but for their own birth into Amida's realm with the aim of transcending the cycle of transmigration and attaining Buddhahood. An early example is Emperor Seiwa 清和 (reign 858-876) of the Heian period, who took the tonsure on his deathbed in the hope that this action would lead to birth in the Pure Land. (Katada 1991: 294)

Chikō and the Study of Pure Land Texts

The increasing interest in Pure Land Buddhism during the Nara period is also reflected in the number and variety of Pure Land scriptures copied at this time. Records from the Shōsō-in Imperial Archives show that 332 copies of 30 Pure Land sūtras and treatises were made between 731 and 771. (Inoue 1956: 43-46) This means that, by the latter date, virtually all of the major Pure Land sūtras and treatises had been transmitted to Japan.

With the increasing availability of Pure Land texts, Nara monks began to study the Pure Land teachings in earnest. Chief among them were Chikō 智光 (709-ca. 770-781) of the Sanron 三論 school, Zenju 善珠 (723-797) of the Hossō 法相 school and Chikyō 智憬 (dates unknown) of the Kegon 華嚴 school.²⁷ Zenju, famous as the author of numerous Hossō scholastic treatises, wrote the *Murojukyō-san sbō* 無量壽經贊鈔 (Commentary in Praise of the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life) in one fascicle. Probably this was a sub-commentary on Kyōnghūng's *Muryangusygyōng yōsnūi sulmun ch'an* 無量壽經連義述文贊.²⁸ Similarly, Chikyō composed the *Muryōjukyō sbūyō sbiji* 無量壽經宗要指事 (Indication of the Essentials of the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life) and *Muryōjukyō sbiji sbiki* 無量壽經指事私記 (Personal Notes on the Indication of the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life).²⁹ The former is a sub-commentary on Wonhyo's (617-686) *Muryangusygyōng chongyo* 無量壽經宗要 (Essentials of the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life), while the latter is Chikyō's own comments on the former work. (Inoue 1956: 70) Unfortunately, none of these works are extant. As their titles indicate, these works were all sub-commentaries on works by monks from Silla. Pure Land thinkers of the Nara and Heian periods were heavily influenced by Silla Pure Land exegesis, and Zenju and Chikyō were no exception.

Much more is known about Chikō's Pure Land thought, since a number of fragments from the *Muryōjukyō-ron sbaku* 無量壽經論釈, his major work on Pure Land Buddhism, is extant. Little is known about Chikō's life.³⁰ According to the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 (Miraculous Tales from Japan), which includes an unflattering tale about him,³¹ Chikō was born in the Asukabe district 安宿郡 of Kawachi province 河内国. He belonged to the Sukita no muraji 鋤田連 clan (the clan name was later altered to Kami no suguri 上村主). His mother belonged to the

27. On these monks and their involvement in Pure Land Buddhism, see Inoue 1956: 49-79.

28. This is found in *Tōiki dentō mokuroku* 東域伝灯目録 (Catalogue of [Works] Transmitting the Light [of the Dharma] to the Eastern Region [i. e., Japan]) by Eichō 永超 (1014-1095) of the Kōfuku-ji. See T 55, 1150c.

29. They are also listed in the *Tōiki dentō mokuroku*. See T 55, 1150c.

30. On Chikō's life and work, see Tomatsu 1937-38, and Sueki 1982a.

31. According to this story, Chikō became jealous when Gyōgi 行基 (668-749) of the Hossō sect was appointed archbishop. As a result of his jealousy, Chikō was born in hell. Subsequently Chikō revived and apologized to Gyōgi. Tomatsu has argued that this story suggests the existence of a serious rivalry between the Sanron and Hossō sects at this time. See Tomatsu 1937-38 part 1: 132-133.

Asukabe no miyatsuko 飛鳥部造 clan. (Nakamura 1985: 168) The *Nihon ryōiki* further states that Chikō wrote commentaries on the *Ulambana Sūtra*, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and *Heart Sūtra* (Nakamura 1985: 168), but only the last remains.³² He also wrote several works on texts by Chi-tsang 吉藏 (549-623), the founder of the San-lun (Japanese: Sanron) school in China. They include the *Jōmyō genron ryakujutsu* 淨名玄論略述 (Short Comments on the Profound Treatise on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra) in five fascicles, a sub-commentary on Chi-tsang's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* entitled *Ching-ming hsüan-lun* 淨名玄論, and *Hokkegen ryakujutsu* 法華玄論略述 (Short Comments on the Profound Treatise on the Lotus Sūtra) in five fascicles, a sub-commentary on Chi-tsang's commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra* called *Fa-hua hsüan-lun* 法華玄論. Of these two works, only the former remains.³³ It may also be mentioned here that Chikō is the reputed creator of the celebrated Chikō Mandala depicting the Pure Land. According to a famous legend, after his lifelong friend Raikō 賴光 died, Chikō had a dream in which he visited Raikō in Amida's Pure Land. After waking, Chikō made a painting of the Pure Land that he saw in his dream.³⁴

More importantly from our perspective, Chikō as noted above is the author of the *Muryōjukyō-ron shaku* 無量壽經論釈, a five fascicle commentary on the *Treatise on the Sūtra of (the Buddha) of Immeasurable Life* (Muryōjukyō ron 無量壽經論, also known as the Jōdo-ron [*Ching-t'u lun* 淨土論 in Chinese]) attributed to Vasubandhu. Although Chikō's commentary is now lost, a major portion of it has been reconstructed by Tomatsu Norichio (1937-38 part 3: 81-105) and Etani Ryūkai (1976: 455-482) on the basis of passages quoted from it in later Pure Land texts. The *Muryōjukyō-ron shaku* is of major significance, since it is the only scholastic treatise on Pure Land Buddhism available to us from the Nara period.

Like Zenju and Chikyō, Chikō was heavily influenced by the Pure Land exegetical tradition of Silla. A notable example is Chikō's treatment of Amida's forty-eight vows. As Etani Ryūkai (1976: 121) has argued, a major characteristic of Silla commentaries on the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life* is that they provide detailed expositions of each of the 48 vows enumerated in the sūtra. Following the example of the Silla masters, Chikō provides an eight character long name and brief comment on every one of these vows. Moreover, Chikō distinguished the forty-eight vows into six groups: (1) the vows concerning the people and heavenly beings of the Pure Land, (2) those concerning Amida Buddha, (3) those concerning the śrāvakas of the Pure Land, (4) those concerning the bodhisattvas of the Pure Land, (5) those concerning all beings of the Pure Land, and (6) those concerning the

32. Chikō's *Heart Sūtra* commentary is entitled *Hannya shingyō jutsugi* 般若心經述義 (Observations on the Meaning of the Heart Sūtra). For a detailed study of this work, see Sueki 1982b.

33. However, it is missing the fourth fascicle and a part of the fifth fascicle. It is interesting to note that it quotes 27 times from the *Yuimakyō gisho* attributed to Prince Shōtoku. See Inoue 1982a: 206. Both Tomatsu and Sueki list a total of fourteen works attributed to Chikō. Some of them, however, are of dubious authenticity. See Tomatsu 1937-38 part 1: 135-136 and Sueki 1982a: 47.

34. On the Chikō Mandala, see Okazaki 1977: 37-42.

physical features of the Pure Land. On this point, he breaks with the traditional threefold division of Amida's forty-eight vows first proposed by Ching-yüan 淨影慧遠 (523-592): (1) those concerning the dharma-body (i.e., Amida Buddha), (2) those concerning the physical features of the Pure Land and (3) those concerning the beings in the Pure Land.³⁵ Interestingly, Chikō also comments upon each of the twenty-four vows enumerated in the *Dai Amida-kyō* 大阿彌陀經, Chih-chien's 支謙 translation of the *Sukhāvativyūha*, comparing them with the forty-eight vows of the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Life*.³⁶

A particularly noteworthy passage in the *Muryōjukyō-ron shaku* is the following, in which Chikō explains his understanding of the nembutsu practice, the central practice for birth in the Pure Land.

There are two types of nembutsu. The first is the mental nembutsu, and the second is the vocal nembutsu. The mental nembutsu is also of two types. (The first is to) reflect on the Buddha's physical body. This refers to his eighty-four thousand marks, etc. (The second is to) reflect on the Buddha's wisdom body. This refers to the power of his great compassion. As for the vocal nembutsu, if you lack the power (to undertake the mental nembutsu), use your mouth to reflect on the Buddha (i.e., recite the nembutsu) and prevent the mind from becoming distracted. In this way, you can achieve mental concentration.

There are three types of benefits (to be obtained) by constantly remaining mindful of the name of Amida Buddha. First, by constantly remaining mindful of it, various evils and defilements will ultimately be prevented from arising. Moreover, obstructions (arising from) past karma will vanish. Second, by constantly remaining mindful of it, good roots (leading to enlightenment) will increase. Moreover, you will be able to plant the seeds leading to the karmic nexus enabling you to see the Buddha. Third, by constantly remaining mindful of it, its karmic influence (*kunjū* 薰習) will come to maturity, and you will be able to remain mindful (of Amida) at the hour of your death.

As it is stated in the (*Drum Sound King*) *Sūtra*,³⁷ "Suppose you accept and uphold the name of Amida Buddha, keep your mind resolute and recollect (the name) without forgetting it, and, with vigor, practice and cultivate the nembutsu *samādhi*. Realizing that the Tathāgata constantly abides in the World of Peace and Bliss, you should continue to remain mindful of him without interruption. Read and recite this *Sūtra of the Drum Sound King*, for ten days and ten nights at the six watches, exclusively reflect on (念 *nen*) and pay obeisance ceaselessly to that Buddha from one thought-instant to another, in ten days you will see that Buddha without fail. Only those with serious obstacles are excepted. (Etani 1976: 464)

35. This classification is found in Hui-yüan's *Wu liang shou ching i-shu* 無量壽經義疏 (Commentary on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life). (T 37. 103b)

36. Etani 1976: 121-125. Chikō's comments on the forty-eight vows and twenty-four vows are found in Etani 1976: 475-479.

37. The full title of this sūtra is *Sūtra of Amida's Royal Drum Sound Dhāraṇī* (A-mi-t'o ku-yin-sheng-wang t'o-lo-ni ching 阿彌陀鼓音聲王陀羅尼經).

These lines are based on three separate passages taken from the *Ching-t'u lun* 淨土論 (*Pure Land Treatise*) by the Chinese monk Chia-ts'ai 迦才 (ca. 620-680).³⁸ In the quotation above, Chikō distinguishes the nembutsu into two types: the mental nembutsu (*shinnen* 心念) and the vocal nembutsu (*kunen* 口念). The former, which refers to the meditative form of nembutsu, is further divided into two, depending on the object on which the Pure Land practitioner concentrates his or her mind while in meditation: (1) the nembutsu in which the practitioner meditates on the figure of Amida Buddha adorned with the eighty-four thousand marks (*sō* 相 [Sanskrit: *lakṣaṇa*], or the special features of the Buddha), and (2) the nembutsu in which the practitioner meditates on the compassion of Amida Buddha, which compels this Buddha to work ceaselessly for the salvation of all beings. For those who feel themselves incapable of undertaking the mental nembutsu, Chiko recommends the vocal nembutsu, the recitation of Amida's name using the formula "Namu Amida Butsu." In his view, the vocal nembutsu is an auxiliary practice and is inferior to the meditative form of nembutsu. However, by reciting this phrase, one can gradually focus one's mind on Amida and eventually reach a level of concentration in which one can embark on the practice of meditative nembutsu.

Notwithstanding his position that the vocal nembutsu is inferior to the meditative nembutsu, Chikō states that both types of nembutsu, meditative and vocal, result in three kinds of benefits: (1) the eradication of evil karma created over the course of countless past lifetimes which keeps one bound to the cycle of transmigration, (2) the attainment of good karmic roots (*zenkon* 善根) leading to awakening, and (3) the ability to remain mindful of Amida Buddha at the moment of death, which is the crucial condition for gaining birth in the Pure Land. The final section of the quotation is taken up with a citation from the *Royal Drum Sound Sūtra*, describing the method for visualizing Amida Buddha.³⁹

Although, or perhaps just because, the meditative form of nembutsu was the central Pure Land practice for Chikō, he had to confront the question as to why birth in the Pure Land is possible though the recitation of "Namu Amida Butsu." According to the *Contemplation Sūtra*, one of the major texts of Pure Land Buddhism, even a thoroughly evil person who has committed the five grave offenses⁴⁰ can be born in the Pure Land by calling out "Namu Amida Butsu" for ten full moments of thought (*jūmen* 十念) on his or her deathbed. (Inagaki 1994: 348) This was a crucial passage for Pure Land believers, since it opens the way for salvation for all people, even the most wicked. But how can such simple practice override the cumulative effects of all the evil actions that one has committed in the past and allow one to be born in the Pure Land? This was perhaps the single most important question confronting Pure Land thinkers, and a number of solutions were offered to this problem over the ages. Chikō's explanation is as follows.

38. The first paragraph is based on a passage found at T 47. 89b, the second paragraph on that found at T 47. 90a, and the third paragraph on that found at T 47. 88c.

39. The original is at T 12. 352b-c.

40. The most serious offences in Buddhism: patricide, matricide, killing an arhat, causing blood to flow from the Buddha's body and causing discord in the community of Buddhist monks.

Question: (According to the *Contemplation Sūtra*) if people of evil karma who have committed evil actions and the five grave offenses, meet a good spiritual friend and recite the name (of Amida Buddha) for ten instants of thought, they can gain birth in that land and arouse the aspiration for enlightenment. How can such a thing be possible for ordinary beings?

Answer: These people have aroused the aspiration for enlightenment in the past, but have fallen back and have committed evil actions (in the present lifetime). (Hence) they should fall into the evil paths. (But) because they have encountered favorable conditions, they arouse the aspiration for enlightenment, recite the name for ten instants of thought and attain birth (in the Pure Land). Because they originally possess the seed of Buddhahood in this way, even though they commit the five grave offenses upon encountering evil conditions, because they are endowed with superior cause (for Buddhahood), they arouse the aspiration for enlightenment and attain birth. If this is not the case, even though they may meet a good spiritual friend and recite the nembutsu for ten instants of thought, they could not be born (in the Pure Land). This is because they lack sincerity and lack deep faith. From the perspective of the true (teaching), people who are bound by defilements who have yet to plant the seed of Buddhahood, when they resolve to create evil and commit the evil karma of the grave offenses, whether they be determinate or not determinate, such people, when they face the end of their lives, will encounter a good spiritual friend, hear the Dharma, accept it in faith and complete the ten thoughts, and attain birth in the Pure Land of Peace and Bliss (Anraku Jōdo 安樂淨土, i.e., Amida's Pure Land). (Etani 1976: 474)

Here Chikō explains that the evil person described in the *Contemplation Sūtra* is a person who has, in fact, aroused the aspiration for enlightenment in the past, but who has, for various reasons, strayed from the spiritual path and has fallen into evil ways. But when he is about to meet his end in this lifetime, he is enabled to meet a good spiritual friend and resolve to recite the nembutsu due to the influence of the aspiration for enlightenment he expressed in the past.

Concluding Remarks

As outlined above, the Pure Land faith had become a permanent feature of Japanese Buddhism by the Nara period. During this age, monks like Chikō began to study Pure Land teachings in earnest as part of their program to gain a firm academic grasp of Buddhist thought. However, practically speaking, Pure Land Buddhism during this time was seen primarily as a potent technique for sending the dead off to a post-mortem paradise. Although the number of people seeking their own birth in the Pure Land increased in the following Heian period, the close connection of this form of Buddhism with the practice of providing for the welfare of the dead continued to remain important, not only in the Heian period, but throughout Japanese history as well.

Abbreviation

- T Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭 eds., *Taishō shīnsbū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (The Buddhist Tripiṭaka Newly Compiled in the Taishō Era), 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1934.

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