

The Tale of Mokuren:
A Translation of Mokuren-no-sōshi

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Introduction

Mokuren no sōshi tells the story of Śākyamuni Buddha's disciple famous for his mastery of magical powers, Maudgalyāyana. The legend of Maudgalyāyana (Ch. Mulian, Jp. Mokuren) who, with the help of the Buddha and by virtue of offerings made to the community of monks, saved his dead mother from the fires of hell (or from the privations of life as a hungry ghost) is, of course, one familiar to all students of East Asian Buddhism. It is this tale that forms the narrative core of the most important festival of the ritual calendar and explains the mechanism of the transfer of merit for saving ancestors. The evolution of this legend, its literary development in China, and the history of the late summer Ghost Festival (Ch. Yūlan pen, Jp. Urabon) have been studied in detail by Stephen F. Teiser, so I refer the reader to his excellent work.¹

The festival was celebrated in Japan from quite an early date, merging with the indigenous *tama matsuri*, a late-summer 'All-Souls' Festival, in which the dead were welcomed back to dwell with the living for a few short days.² The earliest (reliable) recorded occurrence of the Buddhist festival in Japan was in 657. The *Nihon shoki* traces the celebration of the Urabon Festival back into

¹ Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1988); also see David Johnson, ed., *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual* (Berkeley: Institute for East Asian Studies, 1989) for various perspectives on the place of Mulian opera narratives in Chinese funerary ritual (primarily that of contemporary Fujian [Fukien] and Taiwan); and also Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming) on the place of the Mulian narrative in the creation in China of a specifically Buddhist conception of filial piety emphasizing the mother/son relationship.

² Alicia and Daigan Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1969), p. 173.

the early seventh century. State sponsored observation of the ceremony was instituted by Emperor Shōmu in 735. The tenth-century *Engi shiki* refers to the festival numerous times, and it is also mentioned often in court diaries and 'women's writing' through the eleventh and twelfth centuries.³ The eleventh-century *Eiga monogatari* records Fujiwara no Michinaga's observation of the *Urabon kō* at Hōjōji, and the *Genji monogatari* also contains an allusion to the story of Mokuren saving his mother.⁴ The oldest extant appearance in Japan of the legend related in full can be found in the tenth-century *Sanbō ekotoba*.⁵ Later versions, based on the non-canonical Chinese popular renditions of the story, are included in two Japanese compendiums of Buddhist folk literature, the thirteenth-century *Shijū hyaku innen shū* and the fifteenth century *Sankoku denki*.⁶ We can surmise, from the antiquity of the practice of the festival and the wide distribution of references to it and its legend in written sources, that the narrative cycle associated with the festival was well known in every corner of Buddhist Japan by the time of the composition of *Mokuren no sōshi* in the fifteenth or sixteenth century.

Mokuren no sōshi is a work belonging to the very broadly defined genre known as Muromachi period short fiction.⁷ Many

³ Fujii Masao, "Urabon to minzoku" in *Kōza Nihon no minzoku shukyo*, vol. 2 (Kōbundo, 1980), p.135; and Edward Kamens, *The Three Jewels* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center For Japanese Studies, 1988), note 9, p. 340.

⁴ Iwamoto Yutaka, *Jigoku meguri no bungaku* (v. 4 of *Bukkyō setsuwa kenkyū*, includes *Mokuren densetsu to Urabon*, originally published in 1968) (Kaimei shoten, 1979), pp. 50-55. Hikaru Genji is in this scene extending words of sympathy to the Empress Akikonomu who worries about the posthumous fate of her mother Lady Rokujō, who died with a deep attachment of jealousy to the shining prince, and whom Genji by now knows to be a dangerous and vengeful spirit. See Edward Seidensticker, *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 675. For Michinaga's celebration of the festival see Helen and William McCollough, trans., *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), p. 562.

⁵ See the translation in Kamens, *The Three Jewels*, pp. 337-341.

⁶ Iwamoto, p.57, p. 63. These versions include the former name of Raboku 羅卜 (Ch. Lobu, "Turnip") for Mokuren and his mother's name Shōdai 清提 (Ch. Qingti). These names, absent in the canonical versions of the tale, show the influence of Chinese popular literature on these retellings. These names do not appear in *Mokuren no sōshi*.

texts like this one were used in performances at temple festivals or market days to entertain the gathered crowds as well as educate them regarding, for example, the origins of the temple, and also to cajole them into giving donations. This "vocal literature" of late medieval Japan is rich in Buddhist themes and remains largely unexplored in Western scholarship.⁸ Written almost entirely in the Japanese syllabary known as hiragana with hardly any Chinese characters, the text at hand bears little resemblance to the classical story of Mokuren and his mother as it appears in the sūtras and in Chinese popular literature. Much is missing; much is added.

Sākyamuni Buddha appears in *Mokuren no sōshi* only as a rather shadowy figure in the background, whereas in the usual version he takes an active role, guiding his disciple every step of the way. The festival of Urabon, or Obon as it is popularly known, is an occasion for people to make offerings to the assembly of monks who then transfer the merit generated thereby to save seven generations of ancestors. This event usually forms the denouement of the Mokuren story: Mokuren's mother was finally delivered from suffering when he followed the Buddha's instructions to present offerings to the sangha on the last day of the summer retreat. In our story, however, it is the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* that saves Mokuren's mother, and it is this woman herself, not the Buddha, who instructs Mokuren regarding the means of her salvation.

Perhaps the most striking difference is the detailed description

⁷ For translations of this literature see Virginia Skord, *Tales of Tears and Laughter* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991); and, Margaret Helen Childs, *Rethinking Sorrow* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1991). For an introduction to the problems of the genre designation *otogi zōshi* and attendant issues, see Barbara Ann Ruch, *Otogi bunko and Short Stories of the Muromachi Period* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1965). Also see, James T. Araki, "Otogi zōshi and Nara ehon: A Field of Study in Flux" in *Monumenta Nipponica* 36:1 (1981); and Chieko I. Mulhern, "Otogi zōshi: Short Stories of the Muromachi Period" in *Monumenta Nipponica* 29:2 (1974).

⁸ The term "vocal literature" is Barbara Ruch's; this literature was usually read aloud from a script and was thus not memorized like oral literature in the strict sense. See Barbara Ruch, "Medieval Jongleurs and the Making of a National Literature" in *Japan in the Muromachi Age*, ed., John W. Hall and Toyoda Takeshi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

of Mokuren's adolescence and his relationship with his mother. Throughout the text, long before the mother dies, the voice of the narrator is primarily concerned with describing the protagonist's experience of longing and his feelings arising from separation and loss. Unlike other versions of the tale, *Mokuren no sōshi* provides a picture of Mokuren before he became a disciple of the Buddha. The particulars of the story of the youth Mokuren and the deep affective bonds between him and his mother are familiar from Japanese popular hagiography. Also, the damning sin Mokuren's mother commits is transformed from one of deed to one of mind. While in the canonical version she is a greedy crone who deceives her son and withholds offerings from Buddhist mendicants, here she is a loving parent who more than anything desires happiness and success for her son. *Mokuren no sōshi* recasts Mokuren's mother as a deeply sympathetic character. Originally a hopelessly wicked and spiteful woman, in this retelling she becomes one who is guilty of that most understandable crime of *kokoro no yami*, excessive love for her child that blinds her judgment.⁹

Another fascinating particularity of this version is its focus on Mokuren's robe. Indeed, it could be argued that the story is really about the robe itself. The discussion of Mokuren's precious robe, a keepsake of his mother, and how it came to be scorched by the fires of hell is unique to this text. The lore of the monastic robe is of course widespread in East Asian Buddhism. Here it becomes an ambiguous, if ultimately affirming, symbol of the bonds of family. The corpus of Muromachi period short fiction contains a great many examples of *jisha engi*, texts that explain the miraculous origins of shrines and temples and the deities, relics, or images they house. *Mokuren no sōshi* can be seen at one level as an *engi* text that explains how this wondrous robe, a relic that enables parents and children to be reunited after death, made its way to Japan.

The text closes with explanation of the robe's journey across Asia, and the story it tells can also be understood as the product of

⁹ See Wakita Haruko, "Bosei no sonchō shisō to saigyōkan" in Wakita, ed., *Bosei o tou* (Kyoto: Jinbun shoin, 1985), vol. 1, p. 178.

a similar journey of the imagination. The action of the narrative is explicitly set in ancient India, but the details of description belie a less remote milieu; allusions to Chinese and Japanese classical literature appear throughout. The great significance of the medieval Japanese text translated here lies in the variety and breadth of its influences.¹⁰ *Mokuren no sōshi* transforms the Urabon legend, woven in China from strands of Indian *avādāna* and *vinaya* literature, into a story which inhabits the world of the Heian court, the literary and aesthetic places of the Japanese aristocracy of former centuries. Ancient northeast India is transformed into Heian Japan. The Buddhist mythological past becomes the Japanese cultural past.

Notes on the Text and Translation

The only extant copy of the text, dated 1531, is housed at the Tenri Library.¹¹ A paper tag affixed to the back names an imperial prince, Fushimi no Miya Kunisuke (1513-1563), as the copyist. The prince would have been nineteen at the time the text was copied. While this is of little help in establishing the identity of the author, it does, if a correct attribution, show that the story was read, known, and circulated at the very highest levels of society.¹²

As to the original author, Ichiko Teiji suggests that a great many of the short stories of the Muromachi period were written by Buddhist priests, who became the new intellectual elite after the waning of aristocratic institutions of higher learning.¹³ The close familiarity with Buddhist scripture and ritual and the several oblique

¹⁰ So says Iwamoto Yutaka in "*Mokuren no sōshi no haikai*" in *Bungaku* vol. 44, no. 9 (1976), p. 88.

¹¹ I have relied on Iwamoto Yutaka's edition of the text in *Jigoku meguri no bungaku*, pp. 83-133. For another edition, see Yokoyama Shigeru and Ōta Takeo, ed., *Muromachi jidai monogatari shū*, vol. 2, (Okayama shoten, 1938), pp. 413-429. A detailed description of the text appears in Yokoyama and Ōta, pp. 564-565 and photographs of the cover as well as the first and last pages of the original copy of the text appear on pp. 663-664.

¹² Ichiko Teiji, *Mikan chūsei shōsetsu kaidai* (Rakuryo sho, 1943), p. 231.

¹³ Ichiko Teiji, *Chūsei shōsetsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1955), p.129.

references to Buddhist scholarly discourse in *Mokuren no sōshi* suggest that the author may well have been educated in a monastic setting, if not actually an ordained monk or nun. Any speculation about the profession, class, or identity of the author, however, remains precisely that.

I have relied on the critical edition of the text found in Iwamoto Yutaka, *Jigoku meguri no bungaku* (vol. 4 of *Bukkyō setsuwa kenkyū*, includes *Mokuren densetsu to Urabon*,) (Kaimei shoten, 1979), pp. 81-133. I have mentioned Iwamoto where the notes in his edition inform the notes in this translation. I have also indicated the very few places where I disagree with his interpretation of the *kana* text. Chinese characters have been included in the notes only where they serve to clarify a point of language or are not readily available in standard dictionaries.

Buddhist names and terms remain in Japanese in the text of the translation, with Chinese or Sanskrit equivalents in the notes. This I have done to emphasize the Japanese flavor of the original text. There are however, three exceptions to this general rule: where Shakuson or Shakabutsu appears, I have rendered it as Śākyamuni; Anan, as Ānanda; and the title Rakan I have translated back into Arhat. I thank Prof. Susan Matisoff, Prof. Barbara Ruch, as well as the editor of this journal, Prof. Jan Nattier, for their guidance, encouragement, corrections and comments received in the preparation of this translation. My version also benefited from the comments of two anonymous reviewers. Any errors that remain should be considered my own.

The Tale of Mokuren

The karmic bond of love between parent and child is like no other. This tie cannot be broken, even if the two are separated.¹ This is why the Buddha taught that we must perform ceremonies, offering food to parents and nurturing them in accord with filial piety. As the father of all the living beings in the triple world, Śākyamuni Buddha² cares for each one as his own child.³ We should emulate the example of Prince Jōzō and Prince Jōgen who led their father King Myōshōgon away from his heretical beliefs.⁴ Yes, still today as in olden times, what love could be deeper than that shared by parent and child?

Long, long ago, there were sixteen great kingdoms in the land of India. Of all of these, the greatest by far were the four ruled by the beloved sons of King Shishikyō, the wheel-turning monarch.⁵ His four princes became King Jōbon, King Kokubon, King Hakubon, and King Kanrobon.⁶ The Great Sage Śākyamuni who dwells in his Pure Land on Spirit Mountain was the son of King Jōbon.⁷ The Venerable Ānanda, foremost in wisdom among the Buddha's disciples, was the son of King Hakubon.⁸ Mokuren, the most adept of all the disciples in the spiritual penetrations due to his insight into the truth of ultimate Emptiness, was the son of King Kanrobon.⁹

Let us look into the circumstances of this Mokuren. Now, as a boy Mokuren was extraordinarily dear to his mother. She was queen of Kushinakoku¹⁰ and consort to King Kanrobon.¹¹ She loved the boy so deeply that she never let him out of her palace, and in this manner his boyhood years went by. Meanwhile, for forty-two years, his father the King had daily provided one thousand Buddhist monks with various offerings and had them perform ceremonies. News of this traveled, and one day the King was approached by an Arhat¹² sent from Śākyamuni Buddha. Śākyamuni had instructed the Arhat, "When the King asks you, 'Who in all the five regions of India is the most assiduous in Buddhist practice?', tell him, 'Their numbers are to be found in every house and home.'"

Hearing this the King replied, "But how can that be? Surely by virtue of my having thus diligently sponsored Buddhist ceremonies for these forty-two years, I must have accrued a great store of merit!" The Arhat answered, "You see, there are various and sundry Buddhist ceremonies and Dharma festivals, but none of these can surpass the merit produced by leaving one's home and taking the monastic vows.¹³ If but one child takes tonsure, seven generations of ancestors will be saved. The moment he arouses the mind of enlightenment, he will become a Buddha in his present body.¹⁴ There are no Buddhist ceremonies or offerings to monks that can approach the good roots generated by sending one's child into the monastic life.¹⁵ If this is so for one, how much greater the merit if several should renounce the world. The merit of this would be hard to measure even with the wisdom of the Buddhas. . ." Upon hearing this, the Queen exclaimed, "Oh, that I could be guided down that dark road of the hereafter by my only child, my beloved Prince!" The Arhat intoned, "This is auspicious, auspicious indeed! I shall return for the boy when he has reached the age of twelve," and he took his leave.¹⁶

Spring drifted by; summers came and went. As the days and months slipped by unchecked, the boy turned twelve.¹⁷ When the Arhat appeared at the palace to announce to the Queen that he had come to fetch the Prince, all of the people there were speechless. They could not even manage to sigh, "So soon?" Oh, how painful the parting must have been! The mother and son who had never left one another, even for an instant, day or night, were now to be separated for the first time. It was such a poignant scene that everyone was terribly moved. Even the sleeves of the lowliest servants were darkened with tears.¹⁸

The Queen knew that in this floating world all must part, none can remain together until the end. Still, she reassured herself that even after this parting she would certainly see him again. Her heart thus pulled to and fro, she left the room sobbing.

Never once, in all his twelve years, had the young Prince left the confines of the palace's jeweled curtains. Never once had he come out from behind his mother's screens. As difficult as it was

for him to leave, he worried that any show of emotion might weaken his mother's resolve. Drawing himself up like a full-grown man, he announced, "Although I shall be far away, in the end I will come back and show myself to you. Since it is my lot in life to follow the Buddhist path of practice, let it be a boon for the world to come!" Everyone admired his exceptional composure.

Hearing that he was about to be seen off, his mother came to the edge of her royal screens and said, "Please hear me, my Prince. Although the pain of parting is hard to bear, weakness of the heart will not do, especially for one undertaking Buddhist training. I, too, have now resigned myself to this separation. Pay close attention. Once you have gone with the Arhat, you must forget about the palace entirely. Throw your heart into your scholarship and accumulate merit through ascetic training. Become a monk; then come back and show yourself to me. Let me see you wearing the robe of liberation and the triple kesa.¹⁹ As it is said, to become a monk in name alone while remaining ignorant and illiterate is sin a most grave! If this is how you end up, never return to this palace again. But, if you apply yourself to your training and attain liberation, come back to the palace to visit your dear mother who will have missed you so. If however you fail, consider us mother and child no more! I say all of this that you may strengthen your ties to the Buddha's teaching." The depth of her maternal compassion as she sobbed her admonitions was moving indeed.

So the Prince went up to the temple deep in the mountain forests. He studied at the feet of the Arhat, diligently applying himself in his scholarship, not taking a moment's rest day or night. From the time he awoke in the morning until he went to sleep at night, he heard his mother's words in his ears. He thought, "To neglect my studies would be unfilial, and would cause trouble in this world and in the next." When the boy grew lonely for the palace, he prayed, "Oh, that I may speedily complete my studies and become a monk. . . ." With such sentiments, he dutifully pursued his scholarship, applying himself equally in each and every subject, disliking none. The other boys there often took leave to go visit their mothers and fathers, and seeing this only made him miss

his mother more. The young Prince was so lonely for the palace! Soaking his sleeves with tears of solitude, he thought, "As in a clear and precious mirror, she is always reflected in my thoughts. . ."²⁰

How many springs, how many autumns passed like this, as the days sped by too quickly to be counted! One day, the foothills of the surrounding mountains shrouded themselves in mist and the sky grew dark with unrelenting rains. Hearing the bells of the temple ringing out the hour, the Prince awakened to the truth of that line of scripture, "*shogyō mujō* -- all conditioned things are impermanent."²¹ Seeing the flowers that bloomed on the ridge behind the temple buffeted by the storms, he realized the despair of the line, "*zesshō meppō* -- as they arise, they must also perish." The smell of the plum blossoms suspended above the temple eaves reminded him of the cherry tree in front of the Southern Hall, his home at the palace. "It, too, must be in bloom by now." As a flock of wild geese flew overhead, he envied them their destination, knowing that they were returning to their native place.²² A visit from the chirping cuckoo, drawn from its nest by the light of the dawn moon seeping through the chinks in the dense forest canopy -- this too deepened his feelings of loneliness. It was heartbreaking to see him so distraught.

The Prince's emotions intensified as autumn descended upon him, the dew now mingling with his teardrops to dampen his sleeves. Crickets thronged about his pillow. A deer called plaintively in the evening fog, a fog undisturbed by travelers to his hermitage. All of this added to his melancholy. Without a single word from the palace the boy felt lonelier still, his only visitors from that direction being the gusts of wind whispering outside his door. He reassured himself, though, "So be it, my mother must have her reasons for this too . . ." He saw the autumn grasses and wildflowers blooming according to their season, and with a heart of deep compassion prayed, "The flowers, the trees, and all the things of the Buddha Field are living beings!"²³ May we all be enlightened and liberated together!" He sat awake on his bed through the silent nights. He rejoiced in the spotlessness of the light emanating from the moon

of innate enlightenment.²⁴ He marveled at how the flowers and butterflies manage to take shape and to color themselves so brilliantly despite their ignorance of the conventions of painting. Hoping to repay his debt of gratitude to his mother and father, he stayed awake winter nights when leaves blew down in torrents from the frost-nipped crowns of the trees that towered on all sides. He sat up on those winter nights, and, gathering the moonlight reflected in the snow for light, gleaned wisdom from one text after another.²⁵

Whatever the reason -- perhaps it was only that he hoped to hasten the arrival of the day he would again see his mother -- Mokuren threw himself into his lessons with all his being. The Arhat was delighted beyond measure, thinking, "I have taught him but a little while, and already he has mastered a hundred thousand points of doctrine. He is able to discern the flavor of the deep and expansive Dharma when he studies the teachings. Indeed, the signless and non-grasping Dharma is different from the finger pointing at the moon!"²⁶ Oh, the incredible liberation he shall awaken to in the future!"

Meanwhile, with the passing of the years, the young Prince, all the while applying himself to his studies unremittingly, had turned fifteen. Autumn wore on and the surrounding mountains swathed themselves in colorful brocades. Seeing this, he thought of the hills of his distant home.²⁷ Watching the sky, now cloudy, now clear, now rainy, he became deeply saddened at the misfortune of living in a changing and uncertain world. Just then, he heard a voice from the past. It was one of the palace servants.

Feeling all the more nostalgic, the boy beckoned the servant to approach his seat. The Prince asked about everything. He wanted all the news of the palace and of his mother and pressed the servant for details. The man replied, "My Lady thinks only of you day and night, the image of your face continually before her eyes. She misses you terribly, lamenting, 'This is indeed the way of the floating world.'²⁸ If I were to die with such feelings of loneliness, surely I would go astray on the dark road of the hereafter. Ah, what to do?" She has been feeling out of sorts lately, and in the past two or three days has become quite ill. She is greatly troubled,

'Oh, if we were to call the prince to come back and he were to see me in such a state! It saddens me to think how painful it would be for him. And yet, I feel that only seeing him can cure my affliction.' With such words as these, she grows weaker day by day." Hearing this news from the servant, the Prince's heart became heavy, and he felt a pain in his breast. As it is often expressed in the holy scriptures: *rōshō fujō* -- "death can come at any age".²⁹ While we have today, tomorrow is never certain. Our bodies are ephemeral like the dew, carried off with the first gust of wind. Even when the body is healthy, it is not to be depended upon. How much more so when it lies suffering in a sick bed. How lamentable!

The boy wanted more than anything to rush off and see his mother, but he remembered her admonition: "When you come back it will be as a monk . . ." He went to the Arhat to explain the circumstances. The Arhat replied, "All people, even those of the lower classes, must ask their parents' permission before renouncing the world. You must report to the palace before you can take tonsure." The Prince said, "My mother, the Queen, has been stricken with a grave illness. Moreover, she had me promise not to return until I had become a monk, so surely there can be no cause for hesitation." The Arhat assented, "Well, if that is the case. . ." and took him before the main image of the temple to perform the ordination ceremony.

*Ruten sangai chū/ onnai funō dan/
kion nyū mui/ shinjitsu hō'on ja*

"In this revolving triple world,
there is no end of loving indebtedness to parents.
To cast away indebtedness and enter the unconditioned,
this is true filiality."³⁰

The formula was chanted three times and then the youth took the five, the eight, and the ten great precepts, vowing to uphold them all. He then donned the triple kesa over his robe of liberation.³¹ Thus, accruing great merit, the Prince observed all the rites of the

ceremony in full: the administration of the precepts, the Dharma transmission, and the presentation of the robes and begging bowl. The Arhat then bestowed upon him his religious name, the Venerable Mokuren.

He directly took his leave of the Arhat with the words, "I must make haste to the palace!" Had Mokuren remained at the capital, as the prince of King Kanrobon, he would have had the honor of riding in a jeweled palanquin supplied with outriders to clear the way before him. Although he would have had this great good fortune, now the youth was one pursuing training in the Buddhist path. And so he traveled on foot, traversing the precipitous mountains along narrow paths obscured by fallen leaves, craggy cliffs towering on either side. He went striding through the tall grasses, never pausing to wring the dew from his drenched sleeves. He soon arrived at the palace, but things there seemed completely changed from when he had left but three years before. He was saddened to see everyone, high and low, looking so grief-stricken!

Mokuren asked himself apprehensively, "What could the matter be?" He summoned some people entering the Southern Hall and told them to announce to the Queen that Mokuren had arrived. They just burst into tears and could not answer him.

Finally composing herself, one of them replied, "The Queen had considered her affliction merely a passing thing. Thinking that it would be wrong to disturb you over such a trifling matter, she put off calling for you. Then, her condition worsened and she became gravely ill. She weakened progressively, finally departing this world just before dawn one morning, at the Hour of the Tiger.³² We really should have sent word to you at once, but the temple is so far away. We knew we must somehow inform you of the manner of her death and of our arrangements thereafter, but decided to wait until after the first week's memorial service, and quickly took her body away to the far-off funeral ground."³³ Before he had even heard the end of this speech, Mokuren collapsed next to the jeweled curtains on the edge of the verandah and sobbed inconsolably, rolling around on the ground, now looking heavenward, now face down.

He had done just as his mother, the Queen, had instructed him, throwing himself body and soul into his studies. Gathering the reflected light of the snow around his bed on the cold and gloomy winter nights, he had piled up merit reading sutras. In the height of the hot and humid summer, he had captured fireflies to hang in his window for light. Mokuren had succeeded in becoming ordained very quickly indeed. Now at last, he had thought, he was to see his mother again. How he had longed to finally come before the mother he had pined for these three long years! How she must have missed him! He grieved, "Whom shall I gladden now with my presence? The way here was most arduous as I climbed the steep paths over the mountains on my long journey. But, knowing that it was all in order to see the Queen again, I persevered, hurrying along toward the palace. Now who will be my staff? What will sustain me as I make my way back to the temple through the dewy underbrush?" It was unbearable even to look at him as he lay on the ground lamenting his loss.

"Here is the robe she sewed with her own hands that the Prince might wear it upon his return."

Now, as this robe was presented, he understood the depth of his mother's love for him. Reflecting on his failure to fulfill the promise to show himself to her wearing the kesa of a monk, what remorse he must have felt. He said, "Let this robe stand as an offering for the repose of her soul. . ."³⁴ He named it his "keepsake robe" and donned it right away.³⁵

He summoned a guide for the road, and, tearfully attempting to collect himself, set out for the funeral ground. As he saw his companion beckoning him to follow, Mokuren reflected that crossing a gloomy field like this in autumn would have inspired feelings of sadness even under ordinary circumstances -- how much more so now. The humming of insects crowded his mind. He could no more control the tears that rained down onto his sleeves than could he stop the irksome dew borne by the wind in the kudzu leaves as it flew into his bereaved face. He arrived at the grave site enveloped in the fragrance of the autumn flowers: bellflower, lemongrass, and the rest.³⁶ Here then, in the middle of nowhere, in a place

distinguished only by two or three pine trees, was his mother's final resting place. A grave marker had been erected there in the shade of the pines.³⁷

Standing in this place, Mokuren's voice was choked by tears as he chanted sutras and performed incantations. He lamented, "To think how much sadder she would have been that day I left the palace if she had imagined it was to be our final parting. . . How pointless! Sorrow is not limited to those living in the world; the monk is not immune to sadness."

He then opened the coffin and, tears streaming down his face, he formed the Sanskrit character "A" on the chest of the deceased.³⁸ Below this he wrote:

Shogyō mujō/ zesshō meppō/ shometsu metsui/ jakumetsu iraku.

"All conditioned things are impermanent/ as they arise, so must they perish/
stillness is the cessation of arising and perishing/ in quiet stillness there is joy."³⁹

He then performed the transfer-of-merit and the proclamation-of-the-vow.⁴⁰ He inscribed the wooden sotoba marker and set it up.⁴¹ The sotoba symbolizes the original vow of Dainichi Nyorai, giving form to that which is ungraspable in the triple world.⁴² The power of its merit is hard to fathom even with the wisdom of the Buddhas.

As he put the sotoba in place, the spot was protected from above by Bon-ō and Taishaku and from below by Emma and the Ten Kings.⁴³ It was also protected by all the Buddhas of the triple world.

"I implore that the blessed spirit of the departed may attain enlightenment in this very body, due to the entry of a child into the monastic order. . .", he chanted as the transfer-of-merit.⁴⁴ The grief of the farewell at the burial ground still filling his heart, he traveled back to the capital. There, he performed the memorial services for his mother. He observed all the rites, from the first-

seventh-day through the forty-ninth-day, and also the one-hundredth-day.⁴⁵ He diligently carried out his filial duty, nurturing her spirit and repaying his debt to her, never slackening as he busily performed ceremony upon ceremony.

Mokuren continued in these endeavors even after he had returned to the temple. He erected halls and monuments dedicated to her memory and also chanted and copied sutra upon sutra, commentary upon commentary, all in her behalf. He set his heart single-mindedly on scholarship and pursued it with even greater fervor than before, with the wish, "Oh, that my mother could somehow see me from where she lies, beneath the grass of the Queen's Palace grounds . . ." Eventually coming to feel that not even the temple offered enough solitude, the Venerable One moved out into the deserted mountain forests. He lived on seeds and nuts and made his bed under trees and on top of rocks.⁴⁶ There, he awakened to the truth of the signless Dharma.

Eventually, although not yet seventeen years old, he eclipsed his master, the Arhat, and became the abbot of the mountain training center.⁴⁷ At twenty, he had surpassed the Five Hundred Arhats⁴⁸, and in his twenty-seventh year he entered the ranks of the Ten Great Disciples.⁴⁹ Mokuren attended the sermons of the Buddha on Vulture Peak⁵⁰ and obtained the wings of great wisdom and enlightenment. Dwelling in monasteries, he obtained the six spiritual penetrations.⁵¹ He became known as "Mokuren, foremost in the spiritual penetrations", as has been handed down to us in the Buddhist teachings.

When the Venerable One was thirty-seven years of age, he was performing ceremonies in his native city of Kushina.⁵² At that moment, purple clouds drifted into the palace while strains of music could be heard resounding in the heavens.⁵³ Mokuren died suddenly and unexpectedly. A thousand disciples lamented him, rolling about -- now looking skyward, now face down. It was all to no avail. Could it be that not even an Arhat, replete with the spiritual penetrations, can avoid the path of death and rebirth? Verily, although Mokuren had climbed to the rank of Arhat, he too was led off on that journey from which there is no return. None can escape

the maxim: *shōja hitsumetsu* -- "what arises must also perish." What must have been the feeling in his innermost heart as he turned down that dark road of the hereafter?

It is generally held that when people are dying they exhibit fifteen signs. First of all, their eyes cloud over slightly and they only breathe out, no longer inhaling. Even though their eyes are open, they cannot distinguish black from white. They feel all topsy-turvy, as if heaven and earth had changed places. Their eyes spin around like the wheels on a flying chariot.⁵⁴ They scramble as if trying not to tumble down into hell.⁵⁵ They feel like they are sliding down a great stone slab forty or fifty yards high.⁵⁶ The sight is enough to make one regret having been born into this world at all.

Once they have exhausted their strength and can no longer stop themselves from falling, they breathe their last. The text of a certain sutra describes the pain people experience at death: "It is as if one were to flay the hide of a live ox and chase it into a thicket of briars."⁵⁷

On the dark road of the hereafter, there is no light from the sun or moon. In the gloom, it is impossible to discern north, south, east and west. Like a moonless starry night, though a dim glow remains, the color and shape of things are hard to discern. Your feet cannot feel the ground as you stumble along. As you apprehensively wander on alone, there are none familiar from the Shaba world,⁵⁸ neither relatives nor retainers, to accompany you now.

How painful such suffering must be! In a certain sutra it is taught: *kangyō kyakujō sokubō* -- "at the extremity of life, past practice is suddenly forgotten."⁵⁹ All of this pain redoubles the repentance of the sinners as they plod down the road. On the first-seventh-day at the Hour of the Horse,⁶⁰ they come upon the crossroads of the six paths.⁶¹ All of their strength is used up and they long for food. It seems that only on each of the seventh-day memorial services might they find a slight respite from their hunger, receiving a bit of parched rice.⁶²

But even trudging such a road, Mokuren was not distraught.

"Thoughts arising from the true nature may be held in the heart but are not to be uttered. . ." was what he told himself as he strode north across a vast plain. But, indeed, words cannot convey the pathetic sight of the multitudinous sinners wandering along lost. Some distance ahead there stood a red gate, untold yards tall, with living creatures of every type pouring through it.

A strange figure stood before the gate. It was like the shaft of a tall halberd topped by the head of a deity.⁶³ This creature surveys the lightness and gravity of the sins of all the sentient beings in the greater trichiliocosm.⁶⁴ Those who see the head's kindly aspect, welcoming its gaze as if basking in sunlight or moonlight, are the good. But when the sinners look upon the head, they see a fierce and terrifying face that breathes out fire as it speaks; the mouth spews hot iron cables that coil around their bodies. Then they are led away by the hell-warders⁶⁵ and taken before the Ten Kings. There is not a thing here that comes before the eyes or falls upon the ears that is not truly pitiful. How envious the sinners must have been of the Venerable One as he strode past this place, not forced into their ranks.⁶⁶

At the end of the road, there are many tall, snow covered mountains. In comparison to the snow of this world, the snow there is more than one hundred million times colder. The snow on these mountains changes to ice, so that they become sword mountains.⁶⁷ As the sinners cross these mountains, the swords slice their flesh into tiny pieces. When the good cross, the swords melt away as if it were a balmy summer day. Some people are carried off in the cart of fire⁶⁸, and some lose their way on the mountain road of death.⁶⁹

There is a master of these mountains; he is called the General of the Underworld.⁷⁰ There are also five birds. These are known as the Birds of the Five Virtues.⁷¹ Perhaps they correspond to the Five Elements.⁷² These birds flock to the mountains that the beings of the triple world must cross. However, they do not nest in the fields nor do they nest in the mountains, but only at people's homes. As they chirp and crow day or night, they announce the passage of time and startle the residents of those houses. With their songs the

birds declare the mutability of the world; they elucidate the impermanence of this earthly life. People, however, do not realize this and strive only to climb in rank, the lower classes pursuing the happiness that cannot be theirs. Because of this, after they die, their flesh is hacked to bits as they cross the mountains and falls upon the heads of the chickens below. Indeed, that is why this mountain path is called the Slope of Heads.⁷³

Flowering shrubs grow in the mountains, and cuckoos nest in these shrubs.⁷⁴ The cuckoo is a bird that nests here in the mountains of death and is also known as "the field-boss of death."⁷⁵ So, even in this world of the living, if one hears the song of a cuckoo in some gloomy place, it is a very bad omen. Chickens are also like this: when some evil is to befall the master of the house, the cocks crow at night. And if there is an undiscovered corpse lying beneath the water, one will hear the cry of a crested ibis and can be assured that there is a dead person somewhere below, even if in a deep, deep underwater gorge.⁷⁶ All of these birds are to be considered quite different from the ordinary birds of this world.

Also, there is a great river called the Sanzu.⁷⁷ It is spanned by three bridges: one gold, one silver, one bronze. The various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas traverse the uppermost golden bridge; good people, the middle silver bridge. Now, the lowest bronze bridge is quite wide, but when sinners attempt to cross it narrows to the breadth of a thread. When it breaks off in the middle, the sinners are plunged into the river and become food for four serpents called the Shija.⁷⁸ If they chance to make it across, they are met at the foot of the bridge by the ogress called the Sanzu Hag.⁷⁹ She strips the clothes off the bodies of the sinners when they come near. She hangs the clothes on the tree called the Hiranju.⁸⁰ Having crossed the Sanzu river their ordeal does not end however; it seems that each will have to undergo sufferings yet more terrible.

It is here that Jizō Bosatsu,⁸¹ whose compassionate vow⁸² is unlike that of any other, leads away those beings who have some karmic connection⁸³ with him. Our Mokuren also fell in line behind Jizō Bosatsu. Thus, from the first seventh day, Mokuren proceeded in turn past the courts of King Shinkō, King Shōkō,

King Sōtei, and then he came before the fifth seventh day's King Emma.⁸⁴

As the Venerable One looked around him, he saw the hell-warders and the Abō ogres forcing all the many sinners out into the courtyard to come before King Emma's bench.⁸⁵ It was here that the gravity of their various sins was to be judged. Those guilty of certain offenses would be sent off directly to the evil paths.⁸⁶ The beings constantly reborn into the five paths are innumerable, flowing through this place in a constant stream.⁸⁷ Thus it is difficult indeed to seek any reprieve from the Ten Kings or their henchmen.

The Ten Kings were startled to see Mokuren present and all rose from their thrones to prostrate themselves on the ground before him. All evil spirits and the like sprang from their seats and fled in every direction. King Emma spoke to Mokuren, "I appear here only provisionally, incarnated as a trace-manifestation of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas."⁸⁸ Attending to the judgment of sins, I see the evil and foolish deeds of the sentient beings increase year by year, as they ignore the rituals for expiating sin. When I think of the karma they generate, I wonder how they will be able to pay for all of their sins. I have asked you here to preach for the first-seventh-day memorial service since you are a Venerable One, worshipped throughout the triple world, one of the disciples who deigns to appear in this Shaba world in order to spread the teachings of our Lord, Śākyamuni."⁸⁹ When the time came for the ceremony, King Emma's court was decorated with flags and banners, while gods and sages alike thronged to the place.

As Mokuren stood upon the preaching platform, his words were true to the Buddha's own, like a parrot mimicking its master; his voice possessed all the beauty of the song of the Karyūbinka bird.⁹⁰ The nature of the Dharma he taught was so deeply mystical and inspirational that it is certainly impossible to describe in mere words. Everyone was moved to tears, from the Ten Kings to the Wondrous Strong-men.⁹¹ Even the sundry demons of hell broke off their cruel horns. Indeed, it seemed as if all the beings from the eight great hells up to the one-hundred thirty-six minor hells might gain liberation.

When this first-seventh-day sermon had ended, the great King ordered seven cartloads of the finest gold to be brought as alms.⁹² To this, Mokuren responded, "I have no desire for even one million gold pieces."⁹³ Instead show me my mother who was taken from me when I was but fifteen years of age!" But when Mokuren said this, the great King became very angry and bellowed, "There are no distinctions drawn between relatives and strangers here! This is a rule of the dark road of the underworld! Though she was the mother of a venerated saint, now that she has fallen into one of the great hells for her sins, we certainly cannot go to the extreme of lightening her punishment!"⁹⁴

"The debt to parents is only life-long. For you to see her again now is completely out of the question!" said the King. Mokuren brought the broad sleeves of his robe together, pressing his palms against one another in supplication, and sobbed, "Of all the sentient beings in the trichiliocosm, are any born without a mother and father? As it is said in the scriptures, 'Even a Buddha must somehow faithfully repay his debt to his parents.'⁹⁵ If I can preach for the benefit of strangers, as I have just done, surely I can help my own mother. Am I not even more beholden to her?" As he finished saying this he was choked with tears. King Emma was greatly pained to see the extremity of Mokuren's lamentations and he summoned an underworld official, asking him, "Which hell is Mokuren's mother in?" The hells are: the Kotsuho Hell, the Tōkatsu Hell, the Kokushō Hell, the Shugō Hell, the Kyōkan Hell, the Abi Hell, and the Great Kajū Hell.⁹⁶ To the question "Which of these?" the official answered, "She is in the Kokushō Hell."

Although it is a terrible dwelling place, Mokuren was joyful to hear of his mother's whereabouts, thinking he might soon see her once more. So he set off directly, with the official as his guide, toward the hells. As they approached the entrance to the hells, the underworld official announced, "I am on a mission from the King, open the gates!" As a hell-warrior went to open the iron door, King Emma's official warned Mokuren, "Venerable One, please stand back. Do not be burned by the flames." Mokuren responded, "Mine is the body of the signless truth-of-thusness; what is there to

burn?"⁹⁷ The doors flew open and flames shot out, searing everything for five thousand eight hundred leagues.⁹⁸ However, Mokuren was unscathed. Only parts of his inner robe, his koromo, were scorched where it was not covered by the kesa.

That it was burned was due to the particular fondness Mokuren had for this robe. It was the one he had called his "keepsake robe", the one the Queen had made for him with her own hands when he was fifteen. He had worn the robe since that day, never parting from it even for an instant. Because of this one shred of attachment the robe was singed, just where it hung away from the kesa. Hearing this, know that the sacred power of the kesa is wondrous and great indeed.

The Venerable One entered the place and looked around him, yet the billowing smoke and leaping flames did not hurt his eyes. Sinners could be seen here and there, rising and sinking in the foam of the seething cauldrons. Oh, how great is Jizō Bosatsu, able to appear in any of the six paths!⁹⁹ He does not recoil from such terrible scenes, but descends into the hells, appearing there to undergo pain and suffering in place of the sinners.¹⁰⁰

Then, Mokuren said, "Show me my mother!" A warder fished a turtle with a honeycomb-patterned shell out of the cauldron. "What is this?" the Venerable One demanded. He was told, "This is the Venerable One's mother. After spending many eons in this hell, she has now been reborn as the turtle you see here."¹⁰¹ When he heard this, Mokuren felt as if he were dreaming.

Overwhelmed, Mokuren sobbed, "Let me see her now, just once, in her unchanged form." In response to this, the hell-warder pried off the turtle's shell and threw it back into the cauldron. Having been told that this was his mother, how heartsick Mokuren must have felt to see her handled so mercilessly. He felt that he could not hold back a flood of tears.

The hell-warder then grabbed a long lance and stirred about the many sinners in the boiling cauldron, looking for Mokuren's mother and yelling, "This one? This one?" One was indistinguishable from another. At that moment, Mokuren remembered, "I painted the mark of the Sanskrit syllable 'A' on my mother's chest."¹⁰² No

matter how she changes, that emblem should not fade away." Recognizing her by the emblem, the warder impaled her on his lance and lifted her from the cauldron, saying, "See! This must be your mother." She was pitifully blackened like a lump of charcoal. This thing did not look a bit like his mother. Mokuren staggered closer.

The Venerable One sobbed, "Though it is said that the bond between parent and child cannot outlast death, due to the power of wisdom and the spiritual penetrations, I have been able to come and visit you here in this hell. Oh, the happiness of seeing you again!" His mother answered in a thin voice that sounded like the whine of a mosquito, "Usually this hell is reserved for those who have taken other people's lives, those who have killed wild beasts in the mountains and valleys, and those who have made the creatures of the rivers and streams to perish. But, I have fallen into this hell because of you. That is, you were my only child and I loved you to an uncommon degree. After urging you to give up your princely rank, I gathered together treasures from ten million lands, but this still did not satisfy my desires. I prayed from the bottom of my heart that I might give all of these riches to you. Becoming deeply avaricious, I first fell into the realm of hungry ghosts."¹⁰³

"After that, when you had gone away to the temple in the mountain forests and surpassed all the people of the world in scholarship, just imagine how delighted I was. Then, ah my Prince, I hoped for you to become master of the Spirit Mountain Pure Land.¹⁰⁴ I wished that a thousand Arhats, that the Five Hundred Great Arhats might die so that my Prince would stand alone, honored as the greatest teacher in the triple world.¹⁰⁵ I yearned that you be surrounded by the kings of ten thousand countries and by the ten great merchant families, and adored by them.¹⁰⁶ You were nephew to King Jōbon, younger cousin to Śākyamuni, grandson to the wheel-turning King; I thought there was none in all of India who could compare to you.¹⁰⁷ Thus I fell into the sin of arrogance and could not escape the painful torments of the demon world.

"When I prayed for the death of all the Great Arhats, I earned the karma of the gravest of the Five Great Sins.¹⁰⁸ Oh, this hell is

immeasurably tall. Even with the wings of the phoenix,¹⁰⁹ one could not soar to its heights. It is as broad as the void itself. The sound of the molten copper seething in the cauldrons is like one hundred thousand giant stone slabs sliding and tumbling down from a high peak. My son, in this place learn the meaning of genuine suffering." When she finished, Mokuren shed tears and said, "I must find some way of freeing you from this pain." Hearing this, his mother replied:

"Of all of the holy teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha, none is to be dismissed, but it is the *Lotus Sutra*, the One Vehicle, which possesses the truth-of-thusness.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, you should copy out this *Hōkke-kyō* in the space of one day, character by character, line by line, and make an offering of it.¹¹¹ If you do this, perhaps I may find some succor. And also the *Agon-gyō* . . ."¹¹² Before she was able to finish her sentence, the hell-warrior came and, impaling her on his lance, pitched her into a cauldron. "In hell there is not a moment's respite," he said. She bobbed up and down for a few moments, shrieking and wailing. Then the only sound was the seething of the cauldron; her voice was heard no more.

All of the Venerable One's painful yearnings were to no avail. "What would she have me do with the *Agon-gyō* -- copy them? Read them?" he wondered. "If only I could have heard her plea to the end. How long our parting has been!" He cried aloud, moaning unabashedly, and yet, as this was to be the end of the repayment of his debt to her, he would never see her again. Then, although things had not turned out as he would have had them, he made his way, sobbing, back to the King's Palace.

Here, Mokuren took his leave of King Emma, and he returned to the Shaba world.¹¹³ He had gone to the underworld on the twenty-fifth day of the third month and was restored to life at the Hour of the Tiger on the first day of the fourth month. The joy of his one thousand disciples was extraordinary.¹¹⁴

Although he had died and left this world, his complexion had not grown a bit pallid. And also, though today was to be his first-seventh-day memorial service, his body was still warm. The disciples asked him all about the time he had spent on the dark

road of the underworld and all of the things he had experienced there, beginning with the question of how he had come to scorch his keepsake robe. He related the whole story to them in detail, clearing up any doubts and uncertainties. Then, Mokuren commissioned eight thousand Arhats to come from Mt. Gijakussen¹¹⁵ to perform rites for the sake of his mother, the Queen, and had agate brought from Badaika as an offering.¹¹⁶ He copied out the *Lotus Sutra*, the Glorious Scripture of the Truth-of-Thusness, in one sitting.¹¹⁷ Then he offered it up with a ceremony, appointing the Venerable Furuna to officiate.¹¹⁸ At just that moment, purple clouds drifted in low and long, and strains of music could be heard. A voice as beautiful as the Karyūbinka bird's sang out, "Due to the power of these good roots, she shall forthwith be delivered from all suffering and go quickly to a favorable rebirth." As this miraculous voice reverberated in the air, Mokuren appreciated ever more deeply the blessings of this sutra. He could hardly fight back his tears of joy. On the same day, he also copied out the *Agon-gyō* and offered it up without delay.

After this, Mokuren returned to Kushinakoku and, as stated in the Buddha's teachings, performed ceremonies on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. He built a tall platform and arranged food offerings of one hundred flavors. He held a festival of ten thousand lanterns, calling all the Buddhas of the triple world to the place, and reaching out to seven generations of ancestors.¹¹⁹ Mokuren brought in monks from the ten directions¹²⁰ and had them pray that this Queen might experience *shutsuri shōji/tonshō bodai* -- "escape from the round of birth and death/sudden attainment of Buddhahood." Then his dear mother did indeed climb to the highest level of enlightenment.

Thus the essentials of the story were related and laid down in a sutra one fascicle long which was thenceforth spread out into the world.¹²¹ And so, every year on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the beings of these latter days¹²² come together, their hearts one in purpose and, in accord with the teachings, call this festival Urabon.¹²³ And so, up to the present we still observe this day in order to save seven generations of ancestors and also all other

sentient beings. It all started in India. The custom was then taken up in China, in Korea, and even spread to our own country.¹²⁴

Mokuren's scorched robe found its way to Khotan and inspired many people there.¹²⁵ Then it went into China and eventually arrived in the Tang capital.¹²⁶ There it was widely revered and worshipped. When Kōbō Daishi went to China, he became the disciple of Keikaku Wajō and brought the robe home with him.¹²⁷ It became the prized possession of Emperor Saga¹²⁸ and then was placed in the treasure storehouse of Mt. Hiei.¹²⁹ At the time of Lord Yorimichi, it was moved to the storehouse of the Byōdō-in.¹³⁰ Now, when the All Sutras Festival is held at Uji each year on the third day of the third month,¹³¹ the robe is taken out and displayed. As the robe is held aloft, it is proclaimed, "All of you gathered here today, friends, by virtue of this robe, you will be able to meet your parents again." Everyone attends this festival, from the lord of the grandest mansion down to the pauper from the humblest shack.

Our small country is said to be but one in a myriad, an insignificant mote of dust on this earth. And yet, due to the skill-in-means of the Buddhas, priceless treasures like this robe have been transmitted to every place where Buddhism has spread -- even to our remote islands.¹³² One must control one's heart and mind and stave off attachment to the world. Pray for rebirth in the Land of Never-retreating Bliss.¹³³ I have set this story down for the benefit of the foolish and unlettered. By no means is it offered as a scholarly work. May those who read it carry out their filial obligation to their parents and gain hearts of great compassion.

Junroku 4 (1531), Second Day of the Fifth Month

*Wagami yo ni
nakaran nochi wa aware tomo
tare ka iwane no
mizukuki no ato.*

When I am in the world
no longer, how very sad,
-- nobody to intone
these scribblings.¹³⁴

Notes to the Translation

¹ *jōkō o hedatsuredomo, tsukuru koto nashi*. Literally, "Even if there is an end to intimate contact, [the bond] is not exhausted." Iwamoto Yutaka, the text's editor, supplies the characters 商較 *shōkō* "comparison," which would yield, "Try as one might, there is no relationship that can be compared to it." (Literally, "it exhausts the limits of comparison.") In light of the way the theme of separation is developed in the story that follows, I have chosen to instead read it as 情交 *jōkō* "intimate contact."

² *Shakuson*. Śākyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha. Here I make an exception to my practice of retaining the Japanese readings of Chinese transliterations of Sanskrit names and terms in this translation. In the text, in addition to being referred to as Shakuson, Śākyamuni also appears as Shaka Butsu.

³ *sangai no shujō no chichi to shite*. The triple world consists of the world of desire, the *kāmadhātu*, the realm of pure form, the *rūpadhātu*, and the realm beyond form, the *arūpadhātu*. The vision of the Buddha as the father of the sentient beings is very much grounded in the imagery of the *Lotus Sūtra*, (Jp. *Myōhō renga-kyō*, Skt. *Saddharma-puṇḍarikāsūtra*), a text which looms large in the religious world of this story, as will be seen below. It is indeed due to the power of this sutra that Mokuren's mother is finally saved.

⁴ Chapter 27 of the *Lotus Sūtra* tells the story of Jōzō (Vimalagarbha), Jōgen (Vimalanetra) and their father, King Myōshōgon (Śubhavyūha). Note that this chapter has the two sons asking their mother for permission to become monks before she tells them that they must convince their father first. Iwamoto points out that in Japan, the legend is mentioned in medieval Japanese literature, for example: *Ryōjin hishō* (12th C.), "King Myōshōgon quit his old ways and went with Jōzō and Jōgen to hear the preaching of the one true Buddha vehicle" (#165) and, "This is a tale to be emulated when heard. The two sons of King Myōshōgon, Jōzō and Jōgen led their father to set forth upon the path to enlightenment." (#166) and also in the Heian period work of fiction entitled *Sagoromo monogatari*. Brief allusion to the passage appears as well in the perennially popular thirteenth-century martial tale *Soga monogatari*. (See Iwamoto Yutaka, *Nihon bukkyōgo jiten* (Heibonsha, 1988), p. 438).

⁵ The *tenbōrin-ō* (Skt. *dharmacakra pravartī rājan*) is the Cakravartin or "wheel-turning monarch," the ideal Buddhist king.

⁶ Shishikyō (Śimhahanu) and sons Jōbon (Śuddhodana), Kokubon (Droṇodana), Hakubon (Śuklodana), and Kanrobon (Amṛtodana). Iwamoto notes that there are scattered references to this genealogy in the sūtras and *vinaya* texts and refers the reader to chart two in Akanuma Chizen's *Indo bukkyō koyū meishi jiten* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1967) for details.

⁷ The Pure Land of Spirit Mountain refers to the permanent abode of Śākyamuni Buddha on Vulture Peak (Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa) which appears in Chapter 18 of the

Lotus Sūtra, "The Lifespan of the Thus-Come-One." This mountain was considered the site of the palace-city of King Sindhahanu. What I have rendered Spirit Mountain, Ryōzen 霊山, is in fact an abbreviation for "the mountain of the sacred vulture," Ryōjusen 霊鷲山. However since Vulture Peak is often rendered in Japanese, and indeed elsewhere in this text, as Washi-no-mine 鷲の峰, I have decided to translate Ryōzen as Spirit Mountain to better capture the semantic slippage that occurs as a result of the abbreviation. The name of the same mountain also appears below in transliteration as Gijakussen.

⁸ *Anan*. (Ānanda) This disciple of the Buddha was not in fact known as "foremost in wisdom"; Śāriputra was.

⁹ *Mokuren*. (Skt. Maudgalyāyana, Ch. Mulian) This disciple of the Buddha is the hero of the present tale.

¹⁰ *Kushinakoku*. (Kūśinagara) This is the name of the city where Śākyamuni passed into *parinirvāṇa*. Here it is conceived of as "the country of Kushina."

¹¹ *bunin, kasaki*. I have translated Mokuren's mother's usual term of address, *kasaki*, or "consort," as Queen below to retain the level of respect implied by the term. The social background is an admixture of ancient Indian and classical Japanese, and it is not clear if she is the only consort or even the main consort. What is clear, though, is that her residence is her own and that the relationship she and Mokuren share is much more intimate than the relationship of either to the King, who is essentially absent from the rest of the story.

¹² *rakan*. The word *rakan* (Ch. *lohan*) is an abbreviation of *arakan*, a Sino-Japanese transliteration of *arhat*. This is another exception to my rule of leaving names and titles in Japanese.

¹³ *shukke*. Literally, "leaving home"; rendered "take vows" or "take tonsure" in the translation. This is seen as an act of great merit in Buddhism. In some of the earliest Buddhist literature, the verses composed by monks and nuns of the first renunciant community, the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā*, the experience of leaving home is described as a joyous one of having "laid one's burden down." The East Asian, and especially the Japanese, view of this event is quite different. To leave the home life and become a monk or nun was regarded as a particularly noble, but devastatingly tragic decision in classical Japanese literature. The sadness of such a retreat from the world is described with great poignancy. This latter model is very influential on our text.

¹⁴ *sokushin jōbutsu*. Literally, "becoming a Buddha in this very body." This is the goal of practitioners of esoteric Buddhism in Japan. The doctrine states that the ultimate goal of Buddhahood is available to the initiated in this lifetime and that the traditional three incalculable eons of practice are not necessary. Through the union of one's body, speech, and mind with Dainichi Nyorai (Vairocana Buddha), it is held, the highest gnosis is attainable "in this very body." It is also possible that this sentence means that once the child arouses the mind of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), seven generations of ancestors will gain immediate Buddhahood.

¹⁵ *zenkon* (Skt. *kuśala-mūla*). Agricultural metaphors are often used to describe

the workings of karma. Actions are the roots that will produce the karmic fruit. "Good roots," wholesome and meritorious action, planted in the present will yield good results in the future.

¹⁶ The traditional system of age reckoning in Japan renders a child one year old at birth and two years old after passing the New Year. A year is added each New Year's day. Thus, although the boy is said to be twelve years old, he is actually younger in the Western count by a year or more

¹⁷ *tsukihi ni sekimori nakushite*. Iwamoto points out that in the Nō play script *Matsuyama kagami*, there appears the following line: "There is no check-point garrison on the road of months and years; three years had already lapsed since the day she was separated from her mother." This play takes as its theme a mother who has fallen into hell and is saved by her daughter's pious activities. The parallels to our story are clear.

¹⁸ The trope of tears on sleeves is, of course, a stock image in classical Japanese literature, common to poetry, fiction, and diaries. It expresses *mono no aware*, the quality of emotional sensitivity. This depth of feeling, often evoked by the phenomena of the natural world, was a mark of refinement. Here, the parting scene moves even those of coarser sensibilities.

¹⁹ *kesa, koromo o kakete*. Both *kesa* and *koromo* can correspond to the Sanskrit *kaśāya*, or monk's robes, but here and elsewhere in the text *koromo* designates the simple robe of the novice while *kesa* denotes any of the three robes worn by a fully ordained monk according to the formality of the occasion. This clothing is of great symbolic importance for monastic and lay Buddhists alike. To donate them is a great act of merit-making, and their transmission plays a key part of legitimating the lineage. See for example Bernard Faure, "Quand l'habit fait le moine: The Symbolism of the Kaśāya in Sōtō Zen" in *Cahiers d'Extreme Asie* 8 (1995), pp. 335-369. Here Faure explores one aspect of *kaśāya* symbolism particularly relevant for our story: the correspondence drawn between the robe and the womb or placenta. Also see note 31 below on the robe.

²⁰ *omoimasumi no kagami narikeri*. There is a pivot, *kakekotoba*, on *omoimasu* "to pine for more and more" and *masumi no kagami* "a perfectly clear mirror." (for examples of these two expressions used in early poetry see the *Man'yōshū*, 4.595 and 16.3885, respectively). On *kakekotoba* see Robert Browner and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), pp. 203-208.

²¹ *shogyō mujō, zesshō meppō*. Here, and in other places where Buddhist scripture is quoted in the Sino-Japanese of the sutras rather than in the vulgate of Japanese translation, I have reproduced it and then translated it into English to try to preserve the effect of the intrusion of these somewhat liturgical formulae into the native Japanese narration. The reference to the bell and these two lines of scripture appear at the opening of the *Heike monogatari*, the great military tale of thirteenth-century Japan, and are taken from the thirteenth fascicle of the *Nehan-gyō* (*Nirvāṇasūtra*), where the bell is that of the great monastery of the Jetavana Grove (Gion shōsha in Japanese), and the scene is that of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha.

See note 39 below.

²² As Iwamoto notes, this line and the preceding one allude to the "Suma" chapter of *Genji monogatari*, where Hikaru Genji, sent into exile in remote Suma, parts with his step-mother and secret lover Fujitsubo and leaves his many other lovers behind. (cf. Edward G. Seidensticker, tr., *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). pp. 243, 244.).

²³ *sōmoku kokudo, ujō nari*. . . This is an expression of the doctrine of *hongaku*, "innate enlightenment," which holds that all sentient beings, and even the phenomena of nature are innately and fundamentally enlightened. This philosophy, inherited from Chinese Buddhist exegetes, was extremely influential in Japanese Buddhism, especially in the Tendai thought of the late Heian and early Kamakura period. "Buddha Field" refers to the land presided over by any particular Buddha and its physical features, in this case the Sāhā world of Śākyamuni. See Iwamoto's note on page 92 of his edition for a few of the many Chinese and Japanese Buddhist texts that contain similar reference to the enlightenment of inanimates. For a similar passage in *Soga monogatari*, see Thomas J. Cogan, tr., *The Tale of the Soga Brothers* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1987), p. 279.

²⁴ *hongaku no tsuki no hikari no suminaki koto*. The moon is the primary symbol of the Buddha-nature and of "innate enlightenment," *hongaku*. The adjective *suminaki* has a dual meaning here: on one hand it means that the light of the moon is without shadows or impurities, and on the other hand it means that no corner is left dark, nothing unrevealed or unknown.

²⁵ *yuki no hikari o atsumetsutsu*. As Iwamoto notes, this is based on the story of Sun Kang 孫康 included in the seventh-century Chinese history of the Jin dynasty, the *Jin shu* (*Jp. Shinsho*). He was a sensitive boy who loved to study, but his family was so poor they could not afford lamp-oil, so he read by the light of the moon reflected in the snow. Later in his life, as a result of his diligence, he scaled the heights of worldly success.

²⁶ *tsuki o sasu yubi*. The "finger that points at the moon" symbolizes the corpus of Buddhist teachings and emphasizes their incomplete or provisional nature. The words and letters of the sūtras are not to be confused with the ultimate Dharma behind them or with the experience of enlightenment (i.e. the moon), which is direct, unmediated, knowledge of Dharma.

²⁷ *furusato no hazama*. "the little valley of his native place" This has a very rustic sound and is redolent with nostalgia; it is used here as a pastoral convention. Let us not forget the young Prince's true origins at the palace in the "capital," Kuśinagara. (Ironically, the Kuśinagara described in the Pali *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* is an obscure and remote village that was once a bustling center, in the age of a Buddha of the past.)

²⁸ *ukiyo no narai nareba*. The "floating world," *ukiyo*, is a Japanese Buddhist term describing the ephemeral and insubstantial nature of life. Here the *uki* means floating (from the verb *uku*), it is also homophonous with *uki* meaning "unpleasant" or "sorrowful" (from the adjective *ushi*) Thus *ukiyo* also means "this sorrowful

world". Paradoxically, in later times the prefix *ukiyo*, "the floating world" would be applied to literature and art describing intrigues in the pleasure quarters.

²⁹*rōshō fujō*. This maxim appears widely in Japanese Buddhist and secular literature. For example, in the *Kanjin ryaku yōki* attributed to Genshin (942-1017) and in the "Gio" chapter of the *Tale of Heike*. See *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1976), v. 20, p. 534 for more citations.

³⁰*ruten sangai-chū*. . . This formula is from the liturgy of the ordination ceremony found in the *Sifenlū xingshi chao* (*Shibunritsu gyōji shō*) T. 1804, compiled by Daoxuan (596-667). Iwamoto notes that our text has 断 (断) "end" (*dan*) where the original has 脱 "escape" (*datsu*).

³¹*gedatsu no onkoromo no ue ni, san-e no gokesa o kaketamau*. The "triple kesa," *san-e*, refers to the three types of outer robe, *kaṣāya*, worn over the basic robe. Which of these is worn depends upon the solemnity of the occasion. The most formal robe, the *saṅgāṭi*, is worn for the most important ceremonies, such as the recitation of the monastic rules, the *Prātimokṣa*. Next are the *uttarāsaṅgha*, and, for everyday use, the *antarvāsa*. The "robe of liberation," *gedatsu no onkoromo*, is another word for the *kaṣāya*; here, though, it refers to the *koromo*, or under-robe.

³²*tora no toki*. The Hour of the Tiger is from three to five o'clock A.M.

³³*ichi-shichi-nichi nochi koso*. For an explanation of the "seventh-day" memorial services, see note 45 below.

³⁴*kore wa onkokorozashi no koromo nareba* . . . The word *kokorozashi* carries two meanings here, both "a present to express one's pleasure or gratitude", and "an offering on behalf of the dead." The presentation of robes to the monastic community is one of the oldest and most widely practiced merit-making activities within Buddhism.

³⁵*katami no koromo*. *Katami* means "keepsake" here, but the phrase resonates with *katami* meaning a "half-finished (garment)." The term *katami* came to mean a keepsake in the ordinary sense, but classically it referred to a repository for the soul of the dead. See Gary Ebersole, *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan* (1989), p. 273. Robes as momentos of the dead figure prominently in *Soga monogatari* (See Cogan, tr., *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, pp. 166, 265.)

³⁶*kikkyō, karukaya*, and the rest of the "seven autumn grasses."

³⁷*sōgi*. Iwamoto supplies the characters 葬城 "funerary castle," but I have been unable to locate this word in any sort of dictionary. Gorai Shigeru discusses the use of temporary burial sites to allow decomposition before final burial in the extreme southwest of Japan and the Ryūkyūan archipelago. These places are called *gusuku* written with the character 城 "castle." He suggests that the 岩城 *iwaki* ("crag castles") referred to in the ancient poem collection, *Manyōshū*, may be caves for this purpose. (Gorai Shigeru, *Sō to kuyō* [Osaka: Tōhō Shuppan, 1991], pp. 67-72.) It could simply refer to a grave mound, or perhaps to a small wooden model of a house such as I have seen placed over new graves in Shingon sect graveyards in modern Ibaraki Prefecture. The funeral of the text would, after all, seem to be very much in accord with Shingon ritual and symbolism. On the

relationship between pine trees and graves see Katsuda Itaru, "Sonraku no bōsei to kazoku" in Minegishi Sumio, ed., *Kazoku to jōsei* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1992), pp. 191-192.

³⁸ *a-ji*. The Sanskrit letter "A" is seen as the foundation of all the letters, and is imbued in esoteric Buddhism with special meaning. As the basis of all sounds, the syllable "A" expresses the deepest and subtlest teachings of Buddhism: it embodies the "originally unborn and undying" principle of the cosmos. (See Richard K. Payne, "Ajikan: Ritual and Meditation in Shingon Tradition" in Richard K. Payne, ed., *Re-Visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, in press]) A meditation practice involving the visualization of the character upon one's chest was widely practiced in Japan from at least the end of the Heian period as is attested to by the *Ajigiden*, an illustrated text from the Kamakura period (see Mochizuki's *Bukkyō daijiten*, v.1, p.23). I am unaware of other references to the practice of writing the character on a corpse as we see here, however, the *Mikkyō daijiten* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1968-1970), v. 3, p. 1384 mentions the practice of writing a white *a-ji* on the coffin.

³⁹ *shogyō mujō*. . . The first half of this famous verse from the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* (T. 375, v. 12, pp. 692a, 693b) appears above. See note 21.

⁴⁰ *ekō*, *hotsugan shi-tamaite*. The transfer-of-merit, *ekō* (Skt. *pariṇāmanā*), is chanted after Buddhist ceremonies to transfer the merit accrued by the performers and sponsors to the Buddhas and other powerful deities who can then transform it into the merit of the intended beneficiary of the ritual, here Mokuren's mother. (See Yuichi Kajiyama, "Transfer and Transformation of Merits in Relation to Emptiness" in the collection of Kajiyama's works edited by Kazumi Mimaki, et al., *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy (Selected Papers)* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co., 1989), pp. 1-26.) The proclamation-of-the-vow, *hotsugan*, states the purpose of the ritual, dedicates it and makes the plea that it be efficacious. Fundamentally it expresses an aspiration (on behalf of the deceased) for enlightenment or birth in the Pure Land. Throughout this section, which describes medieval Japanese funerary ritual, I have retained the Japanese readings of ritual objects, terminology and liturgy.

⁴¹ *sotoba*. This word, often shortened to *toba*, is derived ultimately (through the Chinese *zutapo*) from the Sanskrit *stūpa*, a monument to mark the resting place of a relic or "presence" of the Buddha or some other great personage. Grave stones in Japan were often made in the shape of a five-sectioned "*stūpa*" (*gorin-no-tō*), each section representing one of the five elements. (On the history of this practice and on medieval Japanese funerary ritual in general see Suitō Makoto, *Chūsei no sōsō, bōsei: sekitō o tsukuru koto* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1991). Here *sotoba* refers to a tall and narrow wooden slat shaped at the top like a five-sectioned *stūpa* with Sanskrit letters written on each section. It is also inscribed with the posthumous name of the dead and a prayer for their salvation. These slats are placed at the grave sites of the dead during the funeral and subsequent memorial services and anniversaries.

⁴² *sanze fukatoku no katachi, Dainichi nyorai no sammaya-kei naraba*. The *sammaya* (Skt. *śamaya*) form means that attribute of a deity that serves as the

iconographic embodiment of him or her. Dainichi ("great-sun," Skt. Vairocana) is the main Buddha of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. As the Dharmakāya ("law-body") of all Buddhas, he is seen as all-encompassing, present in all things and all phenomena. He is represented by a stūpa (usually a three-dimensional stone or metal one, here the slat-style or stake-style wooden *sotoba*).

⁴³ *ue wa Bon'ō, Taishaku, shita wa Emma-ō, jū-ō*. That is, the Indian Gods Brahma and Indra, and Emma-o (Skt. Yama-raja, Ch. Yan-luo wang) who is himself one of the Ten Kings. King Emma is the chief justice of the tribunal bureaucracy of the hereafter, and each of the other nine kings presides over his own respective court. This vision of the underworld solidified in China during the Tang dynasty and was very much influenced by indigenous Chinese beliefs. On the Ten Kings see Stephen F. Teiser, "Having Once Died and Returned to Life": Representations of Hell in Medieval China" in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2 (Dec. 1988); and Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, The Kuroda Institute, 1994).

⁴⁴ *sokushin jōbutsu*. See note 14 above.

⁴⁵ The first seven memorial services are held in seven-day increments after the funeral (although there was not a seven-day week in traditional East Asia). In China, this is called "doing sevens." After this initial mourning period of forty-nine days, there is usually a service on the one-hundredth day after the funeral and on the first and third-year anniversaries of the death.

⁴⁶ *juge sekijō*. This is a standard description of the ascetic life.

⁴⁷ *chōrō*. "Elder" There are two meanings given in Ōta, *Bukkyō daijiten* (Ōkura shoten, 1928), p. 1202: i) an "elder" disciple of the Buddha, and ii) the abbot of a Zen monastery. Both are in play here since the setting of the story is ancient India while the cultural feel of the text in such details as the funerary ritual or the architecture of the palace is clearly Japanese.

⁴⁸ *go hyaku rakan*. These are variously described as the first five hundred arhats who gained enlightenment after the passing, or *parinirvāṇa*, of the historical Buddha or as the five hundred scholars (actually four hundred ninety-nine) who attended the council convened by King Kaniṣka, the so-called Vaibhāṣika Council.

⁴⁹ The Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha are, according to East Asian tradition: Sharishi (Śāriputra), first in wisdom; Mokuren (Maudgalyāyana), first in spiritual penetrations; Mahakasho (Mahākāśyapa), first in asceticism; Anaritsu (Aniruddha), first in clairvoyance; Subodai (Subhūti), first in analysis; Furuna (Pūrṇa), first in preaching; Yupari (Upāli), first in observing the precepts; Kasenen (Katyāyana), first in debate; Rashōra (Rāhula), first in esoteric practice; and Ananda (Ānanda), first in hearing and remembering the Buddha's words.

⁵⁰ *Washi-no-mine*. Gr̥dhṛakūṭa, Vulture Peak. This mountain, frequently the site of the Buddha's sermons, appears in the text variously as Washi-no-mine, Gijakussen, and Ryōzen. See note 7.

⁵¹ *roku jinzū*. Mokuren was the disciple of the Buddha foremost in the magical

powers of clairvoyance and self-transformation known as the *jinzū* (Ch. *shen tong*, Skt *abhijñā*), or "spiritual penetrations." They are: 1) *tengan* (heavenly-eye), 2) *tenni* (heavenly-ear), 3) *tashin-zū* (penetration of mind-reading), 4) *shukuju-zū* (penetration of [knowing] past-lives), 5) *jin-soku* (magical feet -- flying), 6) *rōjin-zū* (the penetration of the exhaustion of outflows).

⁵² *Kushinajō*. Above the city of Kuśinagara is referred to as Kushinakoku, but here it becomes Kushinajō, its usual appellation in Buddhist literature.

⁵³ The purple clouds and music signal Amida's "welcoming descent" as he comes to take the dying to his western Pure Land, Sukhāvātī. This image is common in Japanese tale literature and in testimonials to birth in the Pure Land.

⁵⁴ *tobu kuruma* or *tōkuruma*. The orthography とふくるま makes either of these possible. Iwamoto takes this to be the latter 籐車, "lattice-work carriage." However, the former 飛ぶ車, "flying carriage" seems more likely.

⁵⁵ *jigoku*. Perhaps this, one of the six realms of rebirth in Buddhism, is better rendered as "purgatory" since punishment there is not eternal, just very, very long. I have used the term "hell," though, and have not capitalized it since there are many.

⁵⁶ ten or twenty *jō*. The *jō* is a unit of length equal to about 3.03 meters.

⁵⁷ *tatoeba ikitaru ushi* . . . I have been unable to locate the source of this vivid imagery.

⁵⁸ *Shaba-sekai* (Skt. *Sahāloka*). This is the world-system of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, where we and the people of the story live. Note that the usage here differs greatly from the traditional one where the hells would indeed be the most typical part of *Sahā*, this impure Buddha field. Here it means "the world of the living."

⁵⁹ *kangyō kyakujō sokumō*. Iwamoto locates a similar formula in the second part of the sixth fascicle of the *Miaofa lianhua ching xuanyi* (*Myōhō rengo-kyō gengi*, T. 1716, v. 33, pp. 654-681) by Zhiyi (538-597). He takes it to mean that when one grows old and dies as an ordinary person, a *prthagjana* (Jp. *bonbu*, Ch. *fanfu*), one forgets one's personal history. It also indicates that the benefits of religious training are lost. Those more advanced on the path of practice remember their past lives and retain the knowledge gained in those lives.

⁶⁰ *muma no toki*. The Hour of the Horse is from eleven A.M. until one P.M.

⁶¹ *rokudō*. The six paths, or *gati*, of rebirth are: i) *ten* (*devas* or gods), ii) *ashura* (*asuras* or jealous gods), iii) *ningai* (humans), iv) *chikushō* (animals), v) *gaki* (*pretas* or hungry ghosts), and vi) *jigoku* (hell-dwellers).

⁶² *kareii*. This is rice pre-cooked and then dried for use while traveling. It forms part of the offerings to the dead.

⁶³ *dōji*. This word normally means a child or the boy acolyte of a deity (Skt. *kumāra*), but it here should be taken to mean a deity or bodhisattva. For this usage see Ōta, *Bukkyō daijiten*, p. 1282c.

⁶⁴ *sanzendaisen no sekai*. (Skt. *trisāhasramahāsāhasra lokadhātu*) This is the

"three-thousand, great-thousand-world." Each world consists of one central mountain surrounded by eight rings of mountain ranges and eight seas, four continents, a sun, and a moon. One thousand of these is a "lesser-thousand-world"; one thousand of the latter form one "middle-thousand-world" (i.e. one million worlds); one thousand of these (i. e. one billion worlds) combine to create the greater trichiliocosm. See Randy Kloetzli, *Buddhist Cosmology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp. 51-90. This cosmology never held sway over the popular imagination in Japan, and is invoked strictly hyperbolically.

⁶⁵ *goku-sotsu*. These are the cruel henchmen of King Emma who administer the tortures.

⁶⁶ Iwamoto here amends the text's *tsuranaru* "to line up" to *tsunagaru* "to bind," but the text makes sense as it stands.

⁶⁷ *tsurugi no yama*. The mountain of swords is standard in the Japanese geography of hell. The idea that they are made of ice is to the best of my knowledge peculiar to this text.

⁶⁸ *hi no kuruma*. This is a cart enveloped in flames that comes to carry the sinner off to judgment.

⁶⁹ *shide no yamachi*. Another example of mountain imagery in Japanese conceptions of the place of judgment. Mt. Yoshino in particular was known as *shide no yama*, but as poetic trope the phrase refers to death in general. For the origins of the term and its use in the Heian period, see Gorai Shigeru, *Nihonjin no jigoku to gokuraku* (Kyoto: Jinbun shoin, 1991), pp. 181-189.

⁷⁰ *Myōkyō taishō*. I have not been able to locate this name in any dictionary, but it almost certainly refers either to King Yama or to the General of Mt. Tai who determines life span. The two were often conflated.

⁷¹ *gotoku no tori*. There are multiple lists, but, according to one, the five virtues are: i) awareness of time, ii) truth, iii) benefit, iv) compassion, and v) benevolence. These are the five virtues, but the birds remain obscure.

⁷² *godairin*. The five elements are: i) earth, ii) water, iii) fire, iv) wind, and v) space.

⁷³ *kashirazaka*. This recalls images of a slope composed entirely of skulls seen in Kamakura period hell pictures. The text here reads "these chickens," but up until now it has been speaking of the five birds.

⁷⁴ *utsugi*. Deutzia, a large shrub with white flowers that blooms in mid-spring.

⁷⁵ *shide no taosa*. Iwamoto finds this name for the cuckoo in a poem by Fujiwara no Toshiyuki in the *Kokin wakashū* (poem 1013), and also in the fourth chapter of the Kamakura period collection of Buddhist tales attributed to Saigyō, the *Senshū shō*. According to *Nihon shūkyō jiten* (Tokyo: Sogensha, 1957), p. 283, the name originated in China where it was believed that this bird returned from the land of the dead around planting time in the spring to supervise the work of the living on behalf of the ancestors.

⁷⁶ *toki o tsukureba*. This phrase means "if a battle cry is raised," and Iwamoto

supplies the character 闘 "battle cry" for *toki*. However, since the subject is birds and water, "battle cry" makes no sense here. I have taken *toki* to mean the crested ibis 鶺鴒 and the *o tsukureba* to be a confusion in the text or a lost play on words.

⁷⁷ *Sanzu tote daika ari*. Also called *Sōzu no kawa*, *Shōzu no kawa*. *Sanzu* can be interpreted as "three crossings" or "three paths." It can also refer to the three evil paths of rebirth, i.e. hell, hungry ghosts and animals. Iwamoto cites a very similar description of this crossing to the present one in the seventh chapter of the illustrated *Hōkke jū-ō santan e-shō*. For extensive discussion of the *Sanzu no kawa*, see Iwamoto, *Jigoku meguri no bungaku*, pp. 312-333 and Gorai Shigreu, *Nihonjin, no jigoku to gokuraku*, pp. 163-180.

⁷⁸ *shija*. "The four serpents" The term is actually Buddhist technical language for the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. Here, however, the text is clearly referring to snakes.

⁷⁹ *Sanzu no uba*. She is also known as *Datsueba*, "the clothes-stripping hag."

⁸⁰ *Hiranju*. Usually this tree is called the *Eryōju*, "the clothing tree." Its branches bend under the weight of the clothing; the heavier the clothing, the graver the sin.

⁸¹ *Jizō bosatsu* (Ch. *Dicang pusa*, Skt. *Kṣitigarbha*). This *bodhisattva* was widely held to be an advocate of the dead undergoing judgment and a savior in the hells. In the Japanese system known as *honji suijaku*, a grid of correspondence between deities and their local avatars, he was seen as the "original ground" (*honji*) of King Emma (who was a *suijaku* or "trace manifestation" of the *bodhisattva*), and thus a very powerful advocate indeed. See Alicia Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation* (Tokyo: Sophia University/ Tuttle, 1969), pp. 38, 236.

⁸² Iwamoto reads the text here as *Jizō no hikan* 地蔵の被官, taking it to mean "Jizō's deputy." I prefer to read it *higan* 悲願, "compassionate vow," especially since an alternate appellation for Jizō in esoteric Buddhism is *Higan kongō* 悲願金剛, "Adamantine One of the Compassionate Vow." (see Ōta, *Bukkyō daijiten*, p. 1460).

⁸³ *kechien no shujō*. These are beings who have established a karmic relationship with Jizō by praying to an image of him, attending ceremonies dedicated to him, etc.

⁸⁴ *Shinkan-ō*, whose *honji* ("original nature") is *Fudō Myō-ō*, presides over the first-seventh-day. *Shōkō-ō*, whose *honji* is *Shaka Nyorai*, is in charge of the second-seventh-day's proceedings. *Sotei-ō*, whose *honji* is *Monju Bosatsu*, is the judge/king of the third-seventh-day (Mochizuki, *Bukkyō daijiten* [Sekai seiten *kankō kyōkai*, 1954-1958], p. 2025c, 2831b, and 3092a, respectively). Also see note 81.

⁸⁵ *abō rasetsu*. Iwamoto notes that although these demons appear in various sutras of Chinese origin, the original meaning of *abō* is unclear and there is no known Sanskrit equivalent.

⁸⁶ *akudō* (Skt. *durgati*). These are the three lowest realms of rebirth: animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-dwellers.

⁸⁷ *godō tenrin suru mono*. The Five Paths is an alternate model of the wheel of transmigration. It is the same as the six paths minus that of the *asuras*, or 'titans'. Perhaps it is used here (while elsewhere in the text the six path model is in play) because of the association of the King Godō-tenrin, the last of the Ten Kings, who as his name states, "Turns the Wheel of the *Five Paths*," determining the next rebirth of the dead.

⁸⁸ *butsu-bosatsu no kesshin to shite kari ni suijaku shigen shite*. Here King Emma expresses the concept of *honji suijaku*, the idea that deities have an original ground and also trace manifestations. See notes 81, 84.

⁸⁹ Iwamoto amends the text's *shakusen* しゃくせん (釈せん) "explain, preach" to *shūsen* 修せん "perform," but I believe that the original makes good sense in this context. It is not clear for whom this first seventh-day ceremony is being conducted.

⁹⁰ *Karyūbinka*. This is the mythical Kalavinka bird, often praised in the sutras for the uncanny beauty of its song.

⁹¹ *myōrikishi*. These are the hell-warders, the *nirayapāla*.

⁹² *embudagon*. (Skt. *jāmbūnada-suvarṇa*). Either platinum or a special grade of gold panned from the Jāmbū River.

⁹³ *ryō*. An old unit of measurement for gold or silver coins.

⁹⁴ *daijigoku*. There are sixteen Great Hells, eight hot and eight cold.

⁹⁵ *hōon o itasu*. This is to repay the kindness shown to one by one's parents by nurturing them after death through the family cult of the dead and bring them to the status of ancestor. The source referred to is unclear.

⁹⁶ All but the first of these seven hells is standard and identifiable: *Tokatsu* "constantly reviving," *Kokushō* "black-rope," *Shugō* "thronging," *Kyōkan* (*Kyōkatsu* in the text) "screaming," and the *Abi* "avici" or "no interval." The last, the *Daikajū jigoku* (here *Daikōjū*) "great heaps of fire," is part of the *Abi jigoku*. The first, *Kotsuho*, is not included in the usual lists and its meaning is obscure. The eight hot great hells are the five above plus the *Shōnetsu* -- "burning heat", the *Daishōnetsu* -- "great burning heat" and the *Daikyōkan* -- "great screaming" (see Ōta, *Bukkyō daijiten*, p. 1216).

⁹⁷ *musō shinnyo no tai*. The three qualities of thusness (*shinnyo*, Skt. *tathatā*), are that it is *musō* -- "signless", *mujō* -- "birthless", and *mushō* -- "nature-less."

⁹⁸ *ri*. a unit of distance equal to approximately 3.9 kilometers.

⁹⁹ *rokudō nōge*. This means that Jizō can appear at will in any of the six realms of transmigration in order to help beings wherever needed.

¹⁰⁰ *zainin no kuken ni kawari*. This describes Jizō in his role as *migawari*, a surrogate who endures the tortures of hell in place of the sinner.

¹⁰¹ *kō* (Skt. *kalpa*). This is an extremely long time - it has been described as the length of time that it takes to wear away a mountain of granite by passing a piece of gossamer over it once a year. We need not concern ourselves with the paradoxical fact that someone who died a mere twenty years earlier has spent many kalpas in this hell.

¹⁰² *a-ji no hoshi*. The word *hoshi* usually means "a star," but here it is used to mean a design or emblem. The association with Hawthorne here is as inevitable as it is unfortunate. Of course, this "A" is no scarlet letter. See note 38 on the syllable "A."

¹⁰³ *gakidō*. This is the realm of the *preta*, who have stomachs the size of mountains and needle-thin throats. They constantly run after food to satisfy their hunger and water to quench their thirst, but everything turns to fire as soon as it touches their lips. The greedy are reborn here. In most other versions of the story, it is this realm from which Mokuren rescues his mother. In the Chinese versions of the story it is indeed the sin of avarice that lands her in this realm. It seems from what follows below that even as a hungry ghost, Mokuren's mother was able to monitor her former son's activities. This an ironic fulfillment of Mokuren's wish that his mother should be able see him from beyond the grave and take pride in his achievements. It seems that it is her obsessive attachment to his prodigious accomplishments that in fact condemns her to the Avici hell.

¹⁰⁴ *Ryōzen jōdo no nushi*. This is the Pure Land of Śākyamuni Buddha described in the *Lotus Sūtra*; it is situated high atop Vulture Peak (Gr̥dhrakūṭa). How Mokuren could become "master" of this place is unclear, since Śākyamuni fills this role by definition. Perhaps Mokuren's mother imagined her son might eclipse even the Buddha. See note 7.

¹⁰⁵ *chishiki* (Skt. *mitra*). This is an abbreviation of the term *zenchishiki* (Skt. *kalyānamitra*, "good friend"), a word for teachers and senior practitioners who provide warm encouragement and inspiration to aspirants on the path.

¹⁰⁶ *jūnin no chōja*. Why there are so few *chōja* (Skt. *gr̥hapati*, "men of substance" or "noble families") to so many kings is not clear to me. Perhaps Mokuren's mother is simply referring to the ten *chōja* of her native Kushinakoku.

¹⁰⁷ *tenbōrin-ō*. The Cakravartin, or "wheel-turning monarch." This refers to King Shishikyō (Sinhahanu) of page one.

¹⁰⁸ *go-gyakuzai*. The Five Great Sins are: i) killing one's father, ii) killing one's mother, iii) killing an arhat, iv) shedding the blood of a Buddha, and v) disrupting the harmony of the monastic community. Mokuren's mother of course refers to number three.

¹⁰⁹ *hō-ō* (Ch. *fenghuang*). A chimerical bird of Chinese origin.

¹¹⁰ *ichijō shinnyō nari*. Iwamoto points out that the second chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "Skill-in-means," states, "The One Vehicle of the Dharma is not two, not three." This means that there is only one true goal -- that of becoming a Buddha -- the path of the arhat, and of the solitary sage were only posited as liberative devices. The "One Vehicle" (*ichijō*, skt. *ekayāna*) thus refers to the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

¹¹¹ *Hokke-kyō*. the *Lotus Sūtra*.

¹¹² *Agon-gyō*. the four *Āgamas*. In other words, the "Hīnayāna sūtras."

¹¹³ It is not uncommon in such "hell-tour" stories for the protagonist to return to the

world of the living. Here, however, the return is quite abrupt and unexpected and lacks the usual explanation of why the person was called or what special talent or karmic connection gained them freedom.

¹¹⁴ *tora no toki*. The hour of the Tiger is from three to five A.M.

¹¹⁵ *Gijakussen*. Gr̥ḍhrakūṭa, Vulture Peak. Elsewhere in the text this name appears in translation and has been rendered as "Spirit Mountain" for Ryōzen and "Vulture Peak" for Washi-no-mine. This time the name is provided in a transliteration of the Sanskrit in the original text. See note 7.

¹¹⁶ Badaiga appears with some frequency in Japanese sources as the name of a river. *Ashiduo fadi he*, the Chinese transliteration of the name of the Hiranyavati or Ajravati, a river flowing close to the site where Śākyamuni entered *parinirvāṇa*, was shortened to *Fadi he* (Jp. *Badaiga*). (see Iwamoto, *Nihon bukkyōgo jiten*, p. 581) Also, Bhadrīka (rendered in Japanese as *Badairika* or *Badaika*) is the name of one of the five ascetics who became the Buddha's first followers after he preached to them in the Deer Park directly following his enlightenment. Significantly, this Bhadrīka was the son of King Kanrobon (Amṛtodana), which, according to the genealogy of page two, would make him a brother to our Mokuren. (Ōta, *Bukkyō daijiten*, p. 1451). Iwamoto takes *badaika* to be "Bhadrīka (Pali, Bhaddiya), a village in Anga province in ancient India." However, he says, this place is not known as a source of agate. In his *Nihon bukkyōgo jiten*, he also glosses Bhadrīka (Bhaddiya) as the name of an evil and miserly man of great wealth who changed his ways under the influence of the teaching of Mokuren and his co-disciples.

¹¹⁷ *shinnyō myōten*. "The wondrous scripture of the truth-of-thusness," that is, the *Lotus Sūtra*. *Tonsha*. (Ch. *dunsye*) means "writing suddenly" and refers to the meritorious practice of copying a sūtra, particularly the *Lotus*, from beginning to end in one day.

¹¹⁸ *Furuna sonja* (Pūrṇa). Pūrṇa was most eloquent in preaching of all the ten great disciples of Śākyamuni Buddha.

¹¹⁹ *mandō-e*. A ritual offering of light to the buddhas and bodhisattvas aimed at repentance and the expiation of sin. It was first practiced in Japan in 651, and came to be held yearly during the Heian period. Every year on the 15th of the tenth month, lanterns would be lit at the Great Buddha Hall of Nara's Tōdaiji. Other temples and shrines, such as Yakushiji, Kitano Tenmangu, Chūsonji and so on, also began to host the ceremony towards the end of the Heian period. It also came to be a yearly celebration at Mt. Kōya where it is still observed.

¹²⁰ The ten directions refers to the eight directions of the compass plus the zenith and the nadir. Here it simply means "from everywhere."

¹²¹ *ichikan no kyō*. The word *kan* 卷, "roll" arises from the Chinese custom of rolling texts into scrolls, it means one 'volume' or one fascicle here. There are two canonical versions of the story (T. no. 685 and 686).

¹²² *matsudai no shujō*. The word *matsudai* means the same thing as *mappō no jidai*, that is the last of three periods of the history of Buddhism. This is the final period of the Dharma, when living beings are sinful and hard to teach. The

concept is exceedingly important in Japanese Buddhism. Here, however, the sense of the word in context seems less narrowly defined and more inclusive, meaning, perhaps, "in the generations after the demise of the Buddha."

¹²³ *Urabon* (Skt. *Avalambana* or *Ullambana*, Ch. *Yu-lan pen*), usually called Bon or Obon in modern Japanese. This is the late summer festival for saving ancestors based on the story of Mokuren saving his mother. See Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton University Press: 1988), pp. 21-23 for a summary of scholarly speculation on the etymology of this name.

¹²⁴ *Shintan*, *Kanchō*, *honchō ni itaru made*. Iwamoto takes *Kanchō* here to mean Korea 韓朝, but it is more likely that it means China 漢朝 (the word *kan* in this second interpretation refers to the Han dynasty, but was used generally to refer to China in any period). *Shintan* 震旦 also means China, but the text's author below refers to *Shintan* and *Daitō* 大唐 ("the great Tang") as two different places when in fact both words refer to China. I have kept Iwamoto's "Korea," though, since Buddhism was in fact transmitted through Korea and it improves the English text. Perhaps the sense of *Shintan* as used here is broader, referring to Central Asia as well as China.

¹²⁵ *Kyūshōkoku*. In his *Mikan chūsei shōsetsu kaidai* (Tokyo 1943, p. 228), Ichiko Teiji glossed this place as Kucha 龜茲国, an ancient Buddhist kingdom on the northern rim of the Tarim Basin in what is today eastern China. As an oasis in the Taklamakan Desert, Kucha was important stopping place on the northern Silk Route. Iwamoto, however, disagrees with this, taking the implied characters to be 九相国 and stating that the place referred to is Khotan, another ancient Central Asian kingdom, a stronghold of the Mahāyāna, which was located on the eastern edge of the Tarim Basin.

¹²⁶ *Shintan yori daitō ni wattate*. see note 123 above.

¹²⁷ *Kōbō Daishi* ("Great Master who Spreads the Law") is the posthumous name of Kūkai (774-835). He went to study esoteric Buddhism in the Tang capital, Changan, in 804 and returned to Japan in 806. His teacher in China was Huiguo (Jp. Keika, 746-805); the text has the name a bit wrong. *Wajō* (also *kashō*, *washō*, or *oshō* depending on sect, Ch. *heshang*, Skt. *upādhyāya*, *khoṣa*) is a term of respect for monks which originally meant "preceptor" but then came to be applied more generally.

¹²⁸ Emperor Saga reigned from 810-823.

¹²⁹ This mountain, situated just northeast of Kyoto, is of great importance in the history of Japanese Buddhism as a training center of the Tendai sect. It was established in the late eighth century by Saichō (Dengyō Daishi, 767-822).

¹³⁰ Fujiwara no Yorimichi. An aristocrat of the late Heian period, born in 992, son of Fujiwara no Michinaga. Yorimichi held the post of Regent (*kampaku*), essentially governing the country, from 1025 until his death in 1074. The temple he had build in Uji as his retreat during his later years, the Byōdō-in, still stands today.

¹³¹ *uji no issai-kyō e, sangatsu mika ni okonawaruru toki*. This festival which involved the offering up of the entire Buddhist canon in a ceremony originated at

the Byōdō-in in 1063 and from there spread to other famous temples and shrines in the region. (*Sōgō bukkyō daijiten* [Hōzōkan, 1987] vol. 1, p. 56). Gorai Shigeru points out that complete sets of the Song canon began being imported to Japan around this time, providing inspiration for the creation of such a ceremony. The *Uji issai-kyō e* (also called the *Byōdō-in issai-kyō e*) was originally held on the twenty-ninth day of the second month, but was later pushed back a week or so to better coincide with the blossoming of the cherries. (See Gorai's entry *Issai-kyō e* in *Nihon-shi daijiten* [Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992], vol. 1, p. 508) As regards the circumstances of the production of *Mokuren no sōshi*, it is an intriguing note that the fortunes of the Byōdō-in as an institution were at an all time low during the Muromachi period. (See *Kadokawa Nihon chimei daijiten* (Kadokawa shoten, 1978-1991), v. 26:1, p. 1213) In modern celebrations of the festival, held at numerous temples throughout the Chugoku region and on the island of Shikoku, the entire canon is "read" by flipping accordion-style books through the air from one hand to the other while intoning the titles of the works.

¹³² *hotoke no hōben*. *Hōben* (Skt. *upāya*) refers to the ability of the Buddha and other deities to devise methods of teaching appropriate to the situation and level of understanding of each individual. It also refers to the salvific powers of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

¹³³ *keraku futai no kokudo*. This refers to the Pure Land of Amida Buddha in the West. Rebirth in this land assures quick and easy enlightenment as no obstacles to progress on the path exist there, and no back-sliding as the name implies. In Genshin's *Ōjyōshū*, this is the name of the fifth of ten blisses of the Pure Land.

¹³⁴ There is word play here around *mizukuki*, "moist stem(s)," a poetic way of referring to the brush. *Iwane no* means "not spoken," but is a homophone with *iwane no* meaning, "on the rock/crag." *Iwane gusa* (literally, rock grass) means bracken fern. *Iwane no mizukuki no ato* thus means "brush strokes (not spoken)" as well as "(traces of) the moist stems clinging to the rock face."