

# Genshin's "Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth" and the Transmission of Pure Land Buddhism to Japan. Part I. The First and Second Phases of Transmission of Pure Land Buddhism to Japan: The Nara Period and the Early Heian Period

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## INTRODUCTION

The transmission of Pure Land teachings, texts and practices from continental Asia to Japan was a long and complex process. Simplifying, we may divide that process into three phases: the first phase was the introduction of the basic texts, notions and rituals of Pure Land devotionism during the Asuka [552-646] and Nara periods [646-794]; the second phase was the importation to Japan of T'ien-t'ai forms of *nembutsu* and T'ien-t'ai Pure Land texts by Saichō [767-822] and Ennin [794-864] during the early Heian period [794-1185]; the third phase began with the extensive introduction of teachings of the Chinese populist Pure Land masters by Genshin [942-1017] in his *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* [*Ōjō yōshū*]<sup>1</sup> and concluded with the works of Hōnen [1133-1212] and Shinran [1173-1262] of the early Kamakura Period [1185-1333].

A major dynamic of this transmission of Pure Land devotionism from the Asian continent was the gradual introduction and acceptance of the ideas of these populist Pure Land masters. Let us discuss for a moment the populist Pure Land movement. Pure Land devotionism in China took two primary forms, a clerical form and a populist form. The clerical form utilized Pure Land devotionism in general and *nembutsu* [Ch., *nien-fo*]<sup>2</sup> in particular as aids to meditation upon absolute reality and truth, the 'realm of dharmas' [*fa-chiai*; *hokkai*].<sup>3</sup> Their goal was the immediate realization of complete enlightenment. The populist form despaired of achieving immediate enlightenment by self-exertion and instead relied on the compassion of the

Buddha Amitabha<sup>4</sup> to save his devotees by trans-migratory rebirth into his Pure Land, and to bring about their eventual full enlightenment there. For this populist form, devotional practices in general and *nembutsu* in particular were primarily means of expressing reliance upon and devotion to Amitabha Buddha. We call this later form 'populist' because its message was especially directed to the most populous groups of society — to the laity, especially the lower classes, to women, to those who felt themselves to be morally inadequate or intellectually limited, in other words, to the vast majority of ordinary humankind. On the other hand, because of the abstruseness of its doctrines and difficulty of its practices, the clerical form of Pure Land devotionism was primarily directed to and engaged in by Buddhist clergy.

The major figures in the Chinese populist form of Pure Land devotionism were T'an-luan [Donran, 488-c.554], Tao-ch'ō [Dōshaku, 562-645], Chia-ts'ai [Kazai, d. after 648], Shan-tao [Zendō, 613-681], Huai-kan [Ekan, d. 710], Hui-jih [Enichi, 680-748], and Fa-chao [Hōshō, d. before 805]. They advocated what we may call a radical soteriology. While they did not neglect to strongly encourage ethical conduct and rigorous practices, including the deepest meditations, their primary message was that salvation through Pure Land rebirth is available for even extremely evil and deluded sentient beings [*fan-fu*, *bombu*] by means of the simplest of practices, the utterance of the invocation of reliance upon Amitabha Buddha at the moment of death. As we will relate below, the

writings of the populist masters were introduced to Japan, for the most part, during the first phase of transmission, their style of devotional *nembutsu* during the second phase, and their teachings and radical soteriology during the third phase via Genshin's *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth*.<sup>5</sup>

Our study of the transmission of Pure Land piety to Japan will be divided into three parts. Part One will survey the transmission of Pure Land devotionism to Japan during the Nara and Heian periods, i.e., during phases one and two. Part Two will proceed to the third phase of transmission of Pure Land piety and examine the sources of the teachings of the *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* by means of a quantitative survey of its citations of Chinese and Japanese works. Part Three will demonstrate that the primary teachings of the *Essentials* on the cultivation and efficacy of *nembutsu* were heavily influenced by the ideas and techniques of the continental populist Pure Land masters. Part One is presented here. Parts Two and Three will be published in subsequent issues of this journal.

## THE FIRST TRANSMISSION THE NARA PERIOD

Exactly when were teachings on Amitabha Buddha [Amida Butsu] and rebirth into his Pure Land, Utter Bliss [*Gokuraku*], brought to Japan? Scholars are in general agreement that the earliest transmission probably occurred together with the transmission of other forms of continental Buddhism during the late sixth and early seventh centuries [Inoue, p. 42; Satō 1956, p. 1051; Shigematsu, pp. 17-20]. It was once thought that Shōtoku Taishi [573-621] sought rebirth in Amitabha's Pure Land, but more recent research has shown that to be unlikely [Inoue, pp. 3-4; Shigematsu, pp. 17-18].

The first documented account of Pure Land devotionism in Japan is that in the *Nihon Shoki* which records lectures upon the *Sutra of Limitless Life* [*Muryōju kyō*]<sup>6</sup> in 640 C.E. by the

monk Eon at the court of Emperor Jomei [r.629-641] [Inoue, p. 42; Shigematsu, p. 18]. By the end of the Nara Period Pure Land piety had achieved considerable popularity among the aristocracy. Inoue Mitsusada, who has produced the most comprehensive account of the development of Pure Land piety in Japan [1975], relates for example that among just the texts preserved in the Shōsōin Imperial Archives, 320 transcriptions of 32 different Pure Land works were made between the years 731 and 771 [pp. 43-46].<sup>7</sup> He also points out that while there are no records at all of installation of Amitabha Buddha images at the Fujiwara clan Temple Kōfuku-ji between 707 and 749, there are records of ten such installations between 758 and 806 [pp. 8-9]. Moreover, Satō Tetsuei recounts that on the death of the Empress Kōmyō in 761 it was decreed that in all official Provincial Temples [Kokubun-ji] Pure Land images be made, copies of the *Smaller Pure Land Sutra*<sup>8</sup> be transcribed, and offerings be made for the repose in the Pure Land of the deceased Empress [1956, p. 1052].

There also developed three vigorous traditions of Pure Land scholarship during the Nara Period — within the Sanron School, the Kegon School and the Hossō School. The monk Chikō [709-c.775] initiated a scholarly tradition in the Sanron School with several Pure Land works: A commentary on the *Vasubandhu Pure Land Treatise* [*Ōjō ron*] influenced by T'an-luan, a commentary on the *Amitabha Contemplation Sutra* [*Kammuryōju kyō*], and an interpretation of the forty-eight vows of the *Sutra of Limitless Light*. These have survived only as citations in later works. There have also survived from the Nara period copies of a Pure Land *maṇḍala* (an iconographic depiction of the Pure Land) influenced by the *Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* [*Kammuryōjukyō sho*] of Shan-tao which is said to be based on a dream of Chikō and is called the Chikō Maṇḍala. This tradition of Pure Land scholarship and piety in the Sanron School survived into the late Heian period [Inoue, pp. 48-58].

The Kegon tradition of Pure Land scholarship flourished under the leadership of Chikei [d. ca. 754], who wrote commentaries on the *Sutra of Limitless Light*. This tradition was strongly influenced by Korean Hua-yen scholarship [Inoue, pp. 59-74]. The Hossō School Pure Land tradition was represented by scholar-monks such as Zenju [723-797]. Like Chikei of the Kegon tradition, Zenju authored works on the *Sutra of Limitless Life* and was influenced by the Korean Hua-yen School. The Hossō tradition later absorbed the Kegon School Pure Land tradition. These Nara Period Pure Land traditions persisted and produced important works in the late Heian Period, such as the *Ten Causes of Rebirth* [Ōjō jūin] of Yōkan [or Eikan, 1033-1111] and the *Assembled Passages on the Certainty of Rebirth* [Ketsujō ōjōshū] by Chinkai [1092-1152] [Inoue, pp. 74-79; Satō 1956, pp. 1053-1054].

An important dimension of this first phase of the transmission of Pure Land piety to Japan was the importation of Chinese Pure Land texts. It is remarkable that almost all the major Pure Land texts then extant in China were brought to Japan during this period. By 753 there had been transmitted not only the principal Pure Land sutras and *śāstras* such as the *Amitabha Sutra* [Amida kyō], the *Amitabha Contemplation Sutra*, the *Seeing All Buddha Samadhi Sutra* [Hanju sammay kyō], and the *Vasubandhu Pure Land Treatise*, but also populist Pure Land texts such as the works of Tao-ch'ō, Shan-tao, and Huai-kan. The only then extant major populist Pure Land text apparently not transmitted during this first phase of transmission was the *Methods and Merits of Samadhi of Contemplation and Reflection upon the Ocean-like Features of Amitabha Buddha* [Kannen bomōn] of Shan-tao [Inoue, pp. 41-48].<sup>9</sup>

What was the character of the Pure Land devotionalism of this period? Inoue and others have shown that the Pure Land Buddhism of the Nara Period was considerably different from that of Tang China and also from that which would develop later in Japan. First of all, the Pure Land piety of the Nara Period was restricted to the

aristocracy and the clergy. The folk had little opportunity to learn of Amitabha's Pure Land. Moreover, among the aristocracy Pure Land devotionalism was chiefly concerned with assuring the peaceful repose of ancestors. In other words, it functioned primarily as a funerary cult. The interest of clergy such as Chikō and Chikei in Pure Land teachings and texts seems to have been mostly intellectual. And, in any case, the priesthood was prohibited from propagating Buddhist teachings among the peasantry. Scholars concur that while Pure Land texts, ceremonies, and scholarship were richly represented, there was during this phase of transmission little cultivation of *nembutsu* and little concern for personal Pure Land salvation at any level of society [Inoue, pp. 80-84; Shigematsu, pp. 13-14].

Thus, the first transmission of Pure Land devotionalism to Japan familiarized Japanese with major Pure Land texts and teachings and made possible the adoption of Pure Land funerary rites and the development of Pure Land scholarship. The roots of this Buddhism were shallow, however, and it was soon replaced in the lives of the aristocracy by forms of esoteric Buddhism [*mikkyō*] introduced in the early ninth century.

## THE SECOND PHASE OF TRANSMISSION THE REINTRODUCTION OF PURE LAND DEVOTIONALISM BY SAICHŌ AND ENNIN

The second phase of the transmission of Pure Land piety to Japan also occurred as part of a more comprehensive introduction of Buddhism. The early Heian Period saw the importation of forms of continental Buddhism which soon came largely to replace the Buddhism of the Nara schools in the lives of the aristocracy and nation. One of these forms, T'ien-t'ai Buddhism, known as Tendai in Japan, had for centuries been hospitable to Pure Land piety. The founder of the T'ien-t'ai School, Chih-i [538-597], incorporated Pure Land devotionalism into his school's praxis. By the mid-eighth century Pure Land devotionalism had come to be associated with T'ien-t'ai teachings as a path

for laymen and less capable clergy supplemental to the rigorous path of *bodhisattva* discipline and learning laid down by Chih-i for his disciples.

By the late eighth century two works urging Pure Land devotion and rebirth had come to be considered canonical for the T'ien-t'ai. These were the *T'ien-t'ai Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* [*Bussetsu kammuryōjubutsukyō sho*] and the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land* [*Jōdo jūgi ron*] [Satō 1961, p. 643; Pruden 1973, pp. 129-130]. Both works were considered to be compositions of Chih-i, but Satō Tetsuei has shown they were much later works, probably composed during the first half of the eighth century, the products of a long period of influence of the Pure Land movement upon the T'ien-t'ai School [Satō 1961, pp. 567-601 and pp. 619-643].

The latter of these two texts is of particular interest to us. The *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land* is an apologetic work which defends Pure Land piety against the objections (hypothetical objections probably reflecting actual positions) of detractors and rivals such as the Ch'an School and Maitreya movement. While it purported to be a composition of Chih-i, it is actually influenced strongly by the *Assembled Passages on the Land of Peace and Bliss* of Tao-ch'ō, one of the leading populist Pure Land masters.<sup>10</sup> It defends positions central to the populist Pure Land movement such as the rebirth of ordinary deluded persons [*fan-fu; bombu*] through the power of Amitabha's original vows, and the possibility of rebirth for evil beings by ten invocations of Amitabha's name at death [Pruden 1973, pp. 141-144 and pp. 148-151]. In other words, this is a populist Pure Land text masquerading as a T'ien-t'ai work.

The Tendai School was established in Japan by the monk Saichō. To confirm the legitimacy of his teachings and transmission of the T'ien-t'ai, Saichō made a study tour of China between 804 and 805. This was at a time, as we have seen when the T'ien-t'ai was under strong influence of Pure Land piety. The *T'ien-t'ai Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* and the

*T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land* were among the many texts which Saichō brought back to Japan with him. We will see below that the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts* became an important component of the second phase of Pure Land transmission.

Saichō also transmitted important Pure Land devotional practices to Japan. Upon his return from China, Saichō specified two courses of study and training for monks of his Tendai School — esoteric studies [*shana gō*], and training and study in T'ien-t'ai concentration and contemplation [*shikan gō*] [Gröner, pp. 70-71; Satō 1956, p. 1058]. The course in concentration and contemplation consisted in the study and implementation of Chih-i's major text on praxis, the *Great Concentration and Contemplation* [*Makashikan*]. The *Great Concentration and Contemplation* is a monumental treatise in twenty scrolls on meditation in the Mahayana fashion. The core of its praxis is four types of elaborate and lengthy exercises called *samadhis* (skt. *samādhi*) — constantly sitting *samadhi*, constantly walking *samadhi*, half-walking half-sitting *samadhi*, and neither walking nor sitting *samadhi*. Two of these, constantly sitting *samadhi* and constantly walking *samadhi*, involve Pure Land devotions.

Constantly sitting *samadhi* is a ninety-day regimen based on the *Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom Spoken by Mañjuśrī* [*Monju setsu han-nya kyō*]. Its goal is meditative apprehension of reality in its absolute form, the Dharma-realm. However, as an alternative for those not able to immediately contemplate the absolute, and as a means to steady the mind, Chih-i advocates invocation of the name of a buddha of one's choice [Stevenson, pp. 54-58; T46.11b]. By the mid-eighth century, the buddha invoked for constantly sitting *samadhi* was usually Amitabha Buddha [Satō 1956, p. 1059].

Constantly walking *samadhi* of the *Great Concentration and Contemplation* is based on the *Seeing All Buddhas Samadhi Sutra* and enjoins ninety days of virtually uninterrupted circumambulation of an image of Amitabha Buddha while



simultaneously contemplating his physical features and calling upon his name [Stevenson, pp. 58-61; T46.12b]. Thus, both the constantly sitting *samadhi* and the constantly walking *samadhi* incorporate invocational *nembutsu*, the primary practice of the populist Pure Land movement. However, the goal of these T'ien-t'ai exercises was not Pure Land rebirth, but insight into the 'realm of dharmas' and the realization of enlightenment itself.

Half-walking half-sitting *samadhi* of the *Great Concentration and Contemplation* has several forms, one of which is called lotus *samadhi*. This is a twenty-seven-day penitential rite consisting of reciting passages of the *Lotus Sutra* and confessing at six intervals of the day and night the transgressions of the six senses [Stevenson, pp. 61-72; T46.14a]. While it did not include Pure Land devotions, this ritual was later linked to Pure Land ceremonies.

Saichō enjoined that the constantly walking *samadhi* was to be cultivated during the spring and autumn, and the constantly sitting *samadhi* during the summer and winter. In 812 he erected a Lotus *Samadhi* Hall for the practice of the half-walking half-sitting *samadhi*. Apparently he intended to establish chapels for the cultivation of constantly sitting *samadhi* and constantly walking *samadhi* as well, but was occupied with more pressing matters and neglected to do so before his death in 822 [Inoue, pp. 85-86; Satō 1956, pp. 1058-1059].

It was Saichō's disciple, Ennin [794-864] who, in 851 soon after his return from eleven years of study in China, actually inaugurated the regular practice of constantly walking *samadhi* within the Tendai School. He probably also erected at this time a Constantly Walking *Samadhi* Chapel [Jōgyō zammai dō]. Other chapels for the cultivation of constantly walking *samadhi* were constructed at the Tendai Mt. Hiei monastery in 865 and 893, and thereafter at many sites elsewhere in Japan as well [Inoue, p. 87; Satō 1956, p. 1060].

All indications are, however, that the practice initiated in 851 by Ennin and called constantly walking *samadhi* was not the exercise originally prescribed in the *Great Concentration and Contemplation*, but rather a considerably modified form influenced by a devotional type of *nembutsu* then popular in T'ang China. Clues to this are, first, the fact that during his stay in China, Ennin came into intimate contact with the very popular five chorus *nembutsu* [wu-hui nien-fo; goe *nembutsu*] of the populist Pure Land master Fa-chao, and secondly, that by Ennin's order there was initiated at the Constantly Walking *Samadhi* Chapel in 865 (the year after Ennin's death) an annual seven-day rite called ceaseless *nembutsu* [*fudan nembutsu*]. This ceaseless *nembutsu* later developed into a melodious *nembutsu* liturgy or psalmody [*inzei nembutsu*] called 'daily services' [*reiji sahō*] or 'mountain *nembutsu*' [*yama no nembutsu*] which was performed by Tendai monks in tandem with an abbreviated form of the lotus *samadhi* exercise called 'lotus penance' [*hokke sambō*]. The lotus penance was held each morning and the mountain *nembutsu* each evening [Inoue, pp. 87-89; Satō 1956, pp. 1061-1062]. These 'daily services' established a devotional style of *nembutsu* within the Tendai School which eventually spread to the aristocracy and the folk.

Fa-chao, the creator of the five chorus *nembutsu*, is a colorful and important figure in the history of the Chinese Pure Land movement. He first surfaced in 765-766 at Mt. Lu, the ancient, sacred site of the founding of Chinese Pure Land devotionism by Hui-yūan [Eon, 334-416]. There he built a hermitage and cultivated *nembutsu* in the style of Hui-yūan, a style based on the teachings of the *Seeing All Buddhas Samadhi Sutra* combining visual contemplation and oral invocation and seeking an ecstatic vision of Amitabha and the myriads of other buddhas. (We may notice some similarity to the constantly walking *samadhi* of Chih-i, who was also influenced by Lu-shan Hui-yūan.) While pursuing these devotions Fa-chao had a vision of

Amitabha Buddha which inspired him to seek out Nan-yo Ch'eng-yüan [Nangaku Shōon, 712-802], a T'ien-t'ai monk who had been a disciple of the populist Pure Land master Hui-jih [Enichi]. Ch'eng-yüan conducted every summer a ninety-day session of 'seeing all buddhas *nembutsu samadhi*' [*pan-chounien-fosan-mei: hanjunembutsu sammai*], an exercise based on the constantly walking *samadhi* of Chih-i but probably directed to attaining Pure Land rebirth rather than immediate enlightenment. While participating in one of these sessions Fa-chao had another vision of Amitabha, and this time the Buddha revealed to him the so-called five chorus *nembutsu*. In 770 Fa-chao went to Mt. Wu-tai, another famous Buddhist site, where he built a chapel for the cultivation of the five chorus *nembutsu*, the Temple of the Bamboo Grove [Chulin-ssu; Chikurin ji]. Ennin spent a night at this temple while touring Mt. Wu-tai in 840 [E. O. Reischauer, pp. 216-217]. Later Fa-chao was invited to lecture at the imperial court, resided and taught in the capitol Chang-an for a time, and was awarded the title National Preceptor [Kuo-shih; Kokushi] by Emperor Tai-tsung [r. 762-779] [Weinstein 1987, pp. 73-74]. Ennin spent several years in Chang-an at a time when Fa-chao's five chorus *nembutsu* was still very popular there [Satō 1956, pp. 1061-1062; Tsukamoto, pp. 332-362].

Fa-chao's five chorus *nembutsu* was a devotional, ceremonialized, musical form of *nembutsu* which gained wide popularity in his time and contributed significantly to the popularization of the Pure Land movement. 'Five choruses' refers to the structure of Fa-chao's *nembutsu* services. In the so-called first chorus, the congregation seems to have sung slowly and at a moderate volume to a now lost melody the six syllables, *nan-wu O-mi-t'o Fo* [*na-mu A-mi-da Butsu*]. Then in each of the second, third and fourth choruses, the pace became faster and the volume louder. Finally at the fifth chorus, just the last four syllables of the invocation were sung at full volume very rapidly [Tsukamoto, pp. 408-409]. This may have then been followed by a period of silence or silent meditation on

Amitabha seeking *nembutsu samadhi* or a vision of the Buddha. The entire performance was also probably accompanied or bracketed by offerings, hymns, genuflections, sutra chanting and sermons in an elaborate congregational worship service.

The transmission by Ennin of all or part of the five chorus *nembutsu* to Japan as a monastic ritual sowed the seeds of a rich Pure Land devotionism on Mt. Hiei. Implicit in Fa-chao's five chorus *nembutsu* was a deep longing for rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land by means of the power of the Buddha's compassionate vows in an age of the later Dharma [*mo-fa; mappō*] when all other means of salvation were lost. This faith, Fa-chao had inherited from earlier populist Pure Land masters [Tsukamoto, pp. 488-489]. The teachings of these populist masters would be conveyed to Japan more explicitly in the third phase of transmission, but until then, from the mid-ninth century to the mid-tenth, Fa-chao's devotional style of *nembutsu* nurtured Pure Land faith on Mt. Hiei and gradually disseminated it to the secular world below as well.

#### MID-HEIAN PERIOD DEVELOPMENTS TENDAI PURE LAND WORKS AND ARISTOCRATIC NEMBUTSU SOCIETIES

By the second half of the tenth century, the monastic cult of Pure Land devotionism on Mt. Hiei had stimulated three parallel developments — one among the folk, one within the Tendai School, and another within aristocratic society. Let us examine these.

The diffusion of Pure Land piety to the common folk in Japan was greatly facilitated by a type of religious practitioner known as 'holy man' [*hijiri*]. These were itinerant preachers and healers in a shamanistic mode who ministered to the needs of the folk and taught them the many Buddhist paths to salvation. The earliest types of holy men were probably pre-Buddhist, and they played a prominent role already in the development of Nara Period Buddhism.<sup>11</sup> The first prominent Pure Land holy man [Amida *hijiri*, *nembutsuhijiri*] was Kūya

[903-972]. Kūya was ordained as a Tendai monk and probably participated in 'mountain *nembutsu*' services. Sometime around 938 he descended Mt. Hiei and began preaching and wonder-working among the folk of the capitol district. Known as Holy Man of the Market Place [Ichi no hijiri], he would appear in the villages beating his begging bowl to draw a crowd, dancing ecstatically to the rhythm, and chanting or singing the invocation to Amitabha Buddha. While the *nembutsu* had formerly been associated with a cult of the dead, Kūya taught the villagers to chant the *nembutsu* as a means of winning salvation into a paradisaical Pure Land. Under the tutelage of Kūya and other evangelists, Pure Land piety began a slow but momentous growth in popularity among the Japanese peasantry.<sup>12</sup>

Within the Tendai School the undercurrent of Pure Land piety nurtured by the daily *nembutsu* services eventually produced a number of works on Pure Land topics. The author of the most influential of these was Chief Abbot [Zasu] and middle restorer of the Tendai School, Ryōgen [912-985]. Until about Ryōgen's tenure esoteric teachings had prevailed in the Tendai School. Ryōgen attempted to restore emphasis on the Lotus teachings and practices and to promote Pure Land devotionalism as well [Inoue, pp. 87-88; Satō 1956, pp. 1063-1064]. He rebuilt the chapels for lotus *samadhi* and constantly walking *samadhi* and wrote one of the first works of the Heian Period on a Pure Land theme, the *Meaning of the Nine Grades of Rebirth into the Pure Land Utter Bliss* [Gokuraku Jōdo kuhon ōjō gi]. Written in response to a request from an aristocratic patron, the work is an exegesis of the final section of the *Amitabha Contemplation Sutra*, the section which describes the deeds, transgressions and manner of rebirth of nine types of persons, from the most virtuous to the most depraved, all of whom win Pure Land rebirth. It draws heavily on the apocryphal *T'ien-t'ai Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* and also cites Chikō of the Nara Period. Significantly, it affirms the possibility of rebirth of ordinary beings

by just ten invocations of Amida's name uttered at the moment of death.

Thanks to the researches of Satō Tetsuei, who between 1949 and 1951 published a number of works he discovered in temple archives, we now have available several additional works on Pure Land themes composed about the same time as Ryōgen's *Meaning of the Nine Grades* [Satō 1949, n.d., and 1951]. One of these, the *Ten New Doubts on Amida's Pure Land* [Amidashin jūgi] by Tendai Debate Master [Tandai] Zen'yu [909-990], is modeled on the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land* [Satō 1951]. It explores under ten categories doctrinal problems unresolved by the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts*. And like its namesake, Zen'yu's work also affirms the saveability of ordinary beings by the power of Amida's vows. It goes beyond the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts*, moreover, by asserting that Pure Land practices are more effective for salvation than traditional *T'ien-t'ai* practices because of the advent of the latter age of the Dharma.

As we noted in our discussion of the five chorus *nembutsu* of Fa-chao, the idea of the latter age of the Dharma was an important feature of populist Pure Land devotionalism. Ideas about the three ages of the Dharma and the arrival of the age of latter Dharma had been transmitted to Japan already in the Nara Period. Scholars of the Sanron school propounded theories that placed the beginning of the latter age in 552 C.E. Saichō and later Tendai thinkers, however, calculated that the latter age would not begin until 1052, and this view became generally accepted in Japan from around the beginning of the tenth century [Inoue, pp. 108-112; Marra, p. 40].<sup>13</sup> Zen'yu's *Ten New Doubts* demonstrates that serious concern about the demise of 'right Dharma' [shōbō] had become a reality already by the mid-tenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Another text discovered and edited by Satō is the *Ten Vow Testimonial* [Jūgan hosshin ki] of Court Chaplain Senkan [918-983], a disciple of Holy Man Kūya [Satō n.d.].<sup>15</sup> Characteristic of mid-tenth century Tendai thought, the *Ten Vow Testimonial* expresses faith in many sacralities —

Maitreya [Miroku], Samantabhadra [Fugen], the *Lotus Sutra*, Sakyamuni, etc. Yet it also shows deep interest in the Pure Land way. Among Senkan's ten oaths are vows to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land (number one), from there return to the world of suffering as a *bodhisattva* to save other beings (vow number two), and to emulate Amida Buddha in generating a Pure Land for the salvation of others (vow number eight).

Satō also discovered an interesting Pure Land liturgical text of unknown authorship, the *Western Pure Land Penance* [*Saihō sangebō*] [Satō 1949]. The full title of this work, *Rite of Repentance for a Seven-day Nembutsu Samadhi Session* [*Shugyō nembutsu sammai nanoka dōjō myō sange hōhō*], indicates its purpose and suggests its sources. Satō estimates that this text was composed after Ryōgen's *Meaning of the Nine Grades* but before Genshin's *Essentials*. It draws heavily on Shan-tao's *Methods and Merits of Samadhi* which describes a seven-day *nembutsu samadhi* and emphasizes repentance [T47.24; Inagaki 1966]. The *Western Pure Land Penance* was the first Japanese work we know of to cite Shan-tao's *Methods and Merits of Samadhi*, and it anticipates Genshin's attempt to integrate the populist Pure Land style of *nembutsu* with Tendai modes of practice.

These texts all reflect a growing concern for the possibility of Pure Land rebirth, especially for ordinary, 'evil' persons [*aku bombu*]. Aside from the *Western Pure Land Penance*, their main resources for expressing and responding to this concern was the *Amitabha Contemplation Sutra* interpreted by the *T'ien-t'ai Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* and the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land*. The *Meaning of the Nine Grades*, the *Ten New Doubts*, and Senkan's *Ten Vow Testimonial* all affirm the possibility of rebirth for even evil, ordinary beings if they have accumulated good karma in the past [*shuku zen*], and if they are able, under the ideal circumstances described in the *Amitabha Contemplation Sutra*, to call on the Buddha ten times at the hour of death.

And they credit such a salvation ultimately to the saving power of Amida Buddha's vows. This is the fundamental populist Pure Land position conveyed in the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land*. Two of these works — the *Meaning of the Nine Grades* and the *Ten New Doubts* — had recourse also to Nara Period Pure Land scholarship or Korean works influential in the Nara Period.

In other words, these Tendai Pure Land works of the mid-tenth century utilized texts and ideas of the first and second phases of transmission in an attempt to satisfy a developing interest in Pure Land salvation. Moreover, all of these texts, including the *Western Pure Land Penance*, attempted to incorporate their Pure Land interests into the traditional framework of Tendai ideology and praxis: Ryōgen used the *T'ien-t'ai Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* to understand the nine grades of rebirth of the *Amitabha Contemplation Sutra*; Zen'yu asserted that Pure Land practices have priority over T'ien-t'ai practices only because of the decline of the Dharma [Satō 1951, pp. 8-10]; Senkan attempted to utilize Pure Land piety in the pursuit of the traditional T'ien-t'ai *bodhisattva* path of universal salvation through heroic self-exertion; and the *Western Pure Land Penance* was probably intended to replace the penitential rite evolved from the lotus *samadhi*, the 'lotus penance,' which was at that time being performed in tandem with the 'mountain *nembutsu*' rite. Moreover, all of these works value strenuous cultivation of traditional meritorious practices very highly. Ryōgen and Zen'yu cite Huai-kan, but none of these works, except the *Western Pure Land Penance*, cite the primary populist Pure Land masters T'an-luan, Tao-ch'o or Shan-tao. And the scope of the *Western Pure Land Penance*, which cites Shan-tao extensively, was merely that of a liturgical manual, and it apparently did not circulate very widely.

The conclusion we must draw from this examination of mid-tenth century Tendai Pure Land writings is that the transmission of populist practices and doctrines to Japan and the integration of these with traditional Tendai forms awaited the



composition of the *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* at the outset of the third phase of the transmission of Pure Land piety to Japan.<sup>16</sup>

We mentioned above that by the second half of the tenth century, the monastic cult of Pure Land devotionism on Mt. Hiei had stimulated three parallel developments. We have looked at the promotion of Pure Land piety among the folk by the Tendai priest and holy man Kūya and at the expressions of Pure Land faith in several mid-tenth century Tendai works. Now let us examine the spread of Pure Land faith to the aristocrats of the period.

Inoue Mitsusada has argued that it was among the lower ranks of Heian aristocracy that Pure Land faith first took hold [pp. 90-108]. He discusses the declining status and insecurity they suffered in the shadow of the upper aristocracy — the house of the Fujiwara regents — and how that situation fostered a critical [*hihan teki*] attitude toward society, belief in the insubstantiality and impermanence of life [*mujō kan*], and a feeling of utter dependency on inscrutable karma [*shukuse*], all of which were magnified by a growing conviction at all levels of society from the early tenth century of the advent of the age of the latter Dharma. In this frame of mind, these lesser aristocrats found appealing the Pure Land devotionism conveyed in the mountain *nembutsu* services and in works like those of Ryōgen and Zen'yu.

Inoue sees the first signs of this budding Pure Land piety in the organization around the middle of the tenth century by lesser aristocrats and Tendai monks of a *nembutsu* society or Pure Land devotional fellowship called the Society for Encouragement of Learning [*Kangaku-e*]. In 965 the young aristocrat and scholar Yoshishige Yasutane [d. 997] gathered some twenty fellow alumni of the National College and twenty clerical acquaintances to form this group. They took vows to assist each other in times of spiritual need and met twice yearly, on the fifteenth day of the third and ninth months. Their agenda at these meetings was to hear a sermon on the *Lotus Sutra* in the morning, and in

the afternoon to compose poems in praise of the *Lotus*, and then to cultivate *nembutsu* through the night (i.e., unceasing *nembutsu* as in the daily *nembutsu* services on Mt. Hiei). By these activities they sought rebirth in Amida's Pure Land [Inoue, pp. 91-93; Ishida 1963-1964, I, pp. 349-352].

The Society for the Encouragement of Learning dissolved in 985 or a little earlier, about the time that Yoshishige Yasutane entered the priesthood. Shortly thereafter, in 986, Genshin and Yasutane, now called Jakushin, formed a new Pure Land devotional society, this one called the Nembutsu-samadhi Society of Twenty-five [*Ni-jū-go sammai e*].<sup>17</sup> This new society met monthly rather than biannually, and like the Society for the Encouragement of Learning it also practiced *nembutsu* through the night. Its members also took vows to come to the assistance of each other when seriously ill or dying by gathering at the bed-side and encouraging the cultivation of the death-bed *nembutsu* [*rinjū nembutsu*] deemed necessary for Pure Land salvation by such texts as the *Amitabha Contemplation Sutra*, the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land*, and Ryōgen's *Meaning of the Nine Grades of Rebirth*. Originally 25 members, the Nembutsu-samadhi Society of Twenty-five later grew to include 163 laymen and clerics, men and women [Inoue, pp. 147-155; Ishida, I, pp. 342-343 and pp. 349-353].<sup>18</sup>

The significance of this devotional society is twofold: Not only do we have here a much more intense expression of Pure Land faith among the aristocracy than was represented by the Society for the Encouragement of Learning, but we also have the occasion for the composition of *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* (*ōjō yōshū*), the single most comprehensive text on Pure Land teachings and practices ever produced in Japan. The *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth*, written between the eleventh month of 984 and the fourth month of 985, was probably composed as a manual of *nembutsu* cultivation for the Nembutsu-samadhi Society of Twenty-five.<sup>19</sup> It became the guide to Pure Land faith and practice for the next 200 years to the close of the Heian Period.

As a manual of *nembutsu* cultivation, the *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* gives instructions on methods of *nembutsu* and attempts to verify with scriptural citations the benefits of this practice. In the process of thus describing and verifying *nembutsu* cultivation, Genshin introduced to Japan the populist Pure Land ideas and practices contained in texts which for the most part had been transmitted centuries earlier, but which, as we have noted, were not read or comprehended by earlier generations. Thus, while the *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* was itself an outgrowth of the second phase of the transmission of Pure Land piety, it paradoxically transcended its origins and initiated a distinctly new phase. We will explore that new phase in parts Two and Three of this study.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. See 'References' for bibliographical details on this and other texts referred to in this study. 'T' in the 'References' and footnotes refers to the Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon; the numerals following 'T' indicate the text serial number in the Taishō edition. However, 'T' followed by a numeral, a period, and more numerals and characters (e.g., T46.11b) indicates volume, page, and page section in the Taishō collection (in this example, Vol. 46, p. 11, section b).

2. The practice of meditating upon, invoking, or (in a generic, inclusive sense) 'reflecting upon,' a buddha.

3. When discussing Chinese movements, thinkers, and texts we will sometimes give both the Chinese and Japanese for important terms, the Chinese followed by the Japanese.

4. Sanskrit, Amitābha; we will dispense with diacritical marks for Sanskrit words familiar to readers of English.

5. For a general description and study of this work, see Andrews 1973.

6. See 'References' for Chinese titles.

7. Based upon the research of Ishida Mosaku [Inoue, p. 43, n. 5]. To copy or transcribe

a scripture was considered an act generative of good karma.

8. 'Smaller Pure Land Sutra' and 'Larger Pure Land Sutra' will designate any or all items in the entire corpora of texts and translations of these two sutras respectively.

9. While T'an-luan's *Commentary on the Vasubandhu Pure Land Treatise* [Ōjō ronchū] was apparently not among the texts found in the Shōsōin by Ishida Mosaku [Inoue, pp. 43-47], we know that it had been brought to Japan by 755 because it was consulted by Chikō [d. c.775] for his work on the *Vasubandhu Pure Land Treatise* [Inoue, p. 50]. On the other hand, the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts on the Pure Land* [Jōdo jūgi ron] and *T'ien-t'ai Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra* [T'ien-t'ai Bussetsu kammuryōjukyō sho] were probably not composed before the eighth century; see the discussion below.

10. Seven of the ten sections of the *T'ien-t'ai Ten Doubts* were influenced by Tao-ch'o [Satō 1961, p. 642; Pruden 1973, p. 129].

11. Gyōgi Bosatsu [668-748] was the first prominent Buddhist *hijiri*; see Hori 1958.

12. Kūya and other *hijiri* also taught the folk to chant the *nembutsu* to ward off evil spirits [goryō] [Hori 1968, pp. 83-139].

13. It was once thought that Saichō also composed a work entitled *Lamp of the Latter Dharma* [Mappō tōmyōki], but this text has since been demonstrated to be a much later apocryphal work; see Rhodes.

14. Genshin's *Essentials* also contributed to the transmission of this important eschatological view by means of its graphic descriptions of the six transmigration-paths of samsara [Marra, pp. 40-45; Andrews 1973, pp. 45-50; A. K. Reischauer]. But rather than abandon T'ien-t'ai practices in favor of Pure Land ones because of the arrival of the latter age, Genshin attempted to integrate T'ien-t'ai and Pure Land practices [Andrews 1973, pp. 43-120].

15. On Senkan, see also *Konjyaku monogatari shū*, 15.42 [Brower, pp. 441-443].

16. It is also significant, as we will see, that Genshin's *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* cites none of these late second phase works, except Ryōgen's *Meaning of the Nine Grades of Rebirth*.

17. Though the rules of the society [*Ni-jū-go sammai shiki*] were drawn up by Yasutane in 986.5, the group had probably formed somewhat earlier [Ishida, I, p. 342 and p. 350].

18. The former Emperor, Kazan, was also a member of this *nembutsu* society. The number twenty-five in the society's name apparently represents the number of *bodhisattvas* thought to accompany Amitabha Buddha in his descent to welcome believers into his Pure Land. It seems, in fact, that the Nembutsu-samadhi Society of Twenty-five would act out the descent of Amitabha and his twenty-five *bodhisattvas* at the bed-sides of their expiring companions.

19. It is not clear whether the *Essentials* was composed specifically for the use of the Nembutsu-samadhi Society of Twenty-five, or whether it stimulated the formation of this society. In either case, the relation between the composition of the *Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth* and the formation of the Nembutsu-samadhi Society of Twenty-five was very close [see Ishida 1963-1964; I, pp. 342-343 and pp. 350-351].

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T [abbrev.] See *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*.

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## JAPANESE AND CHINESE CHARACTERS

aku bombu 惡凡夫

bombu (fan-fu) 凡夫

fudan nembutsu 不斷念仏

goe nembutsu

(wu-hui nien-fo)

五会念仏

hanju nembutsu sammai

(pan-chou nien-fo san-mei)

般舟念仏三昧

hihan teki 批判的

hijiri 聖

hokkai (fa-chiai) 法界

hokke sambō 法華修法

inzei nembutsu 引声念仏

mappō (mo-fa) 末法

mikkyō 密教

mujō kan 無常觀

na-mu A-mi-da Butsu

(nan-wu O-mi-t'o Fo)

南無阿弥陀仏

nembutsu (nien-fo) 念仏

reiji sahō 例時作法

rinjū nembutsu 臨終念仏

shana gō 遮那業

shikan gō 止觀業

shōbō 正法

shuku zen 宿善

shukuse 宿世

yama no nembutsu 山の念仏