

Article

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva and Pure Land Practice in Heian Period Japanese Literature [†]

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Abstract

Japanese Pure Land Buddhism has often been approached through the lens of Kamakura (1192–1333) doctrinal developments, emphasizing the emergence of an exclusive *nenbutsu* practice. In this article we reconsider pre-Kamakura Pure Land belief by examining *setsuwa* literature from the Heian period (794–1192) and focus predominantly on narratives with appearances of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. With analysis of *kōsōden*, *ōjōden*, and Buddhist *setsuwa* collections such as the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku monogatari shū*, the study demonstrates that aspirations for rebirth in a Pure Land were embedded within a broader religious framework with prevalent practices such as *Lotus Sutra* devotion and repentance rituals. The figure of Samantabhadra emerges as the protector of Lotus practitioners, as a key ritual and narrative agent associated with the removal of karmic hindrances, primarily through repentance. The co-existence of *Lotus Sutra* devotion, repentance, and Pure Land practices such as the *nenbutsu* in these narratives reveals a plural and non-exclusive formation of pre-sectarian Pure Land belief.

Keywords: Samantabhadra Bodhisattva; Fugen Bosatsu; Japanese literature; *kōsōden*; *ōjōden*; *setsuwa*; pure land; Buddhist visual culture; Heian Period

1. Introduction

Pure land Buddhism is often associated with the doctrinal consolidation that happened in Kamakura and later periods. The exclusivity of its key practice, the chanting of Amitābha Buddha's name (Ch. *nianfo*, Jp. *nenbutsu* 念仏¹), and a single goal of rebirth in this buddha's land (designated with various names²) was especially disseminated by figures emerging at the end of the 12th century, such as Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) and their disciples. The term *wangsheng* (Ch.)/*ōjō* (Jp.) 往生 initially implied the attainment of birth in one of the good destinies or realms, such as heavens, buddha-lands (Ch. *fogou/fotu/focha*, Jp. *bukkoku/butsudo/bussetsu* 仏国 仏土 仏刹), or pure lands (Ch. *jingtu*, Jp. *jōdo* 浄土), ideal places without afflictions or hindrances. Before the doctrinal consolidation, however, belief in rebirth in a pure land was neither uniform nor exclusive. Early Japanese pure land thought developed within a religious environment in which various practices, scriptures, and soteriological goals co-existed. This diversity



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is particularly evident in Buddhist literature of the Heian period (794–1192), where such rebirth narratives—either in a pure land or one of the Buddhist heavens—occur alongside *Lotus Sutra* devotion, repentance practices, and other religious methods that might withstand later sectarian classifications.

This article argues that early Pure Land belief in Japan was embedded in a broader ritual and narrative framework centred considerably on the *Lotus Sutra* and repentance practice, with a soteriological goal of escaping or eradicating karmic obstacles, rather than representing a marginal or transitional phenomenon. To do this, we examine *setsuwa* or narrative literature as a key source for understanding this formative stage of Japanese pure land belief. The *setsuwa* collections preserve accounts of monks and lay practitioners that reflect a diverse Buddhist environment in which karmic causality and merit accumulation play central roles. Focusing on the *Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* 日本国現報善惡靈異記 (“Miraculous Stories of the Reward of Good and Retribution of Evil from the Country of Japan”; c. 822, Kyōkai/Keikai 景戒 [?–?]; hereafter *Nihon ryōiki*), the *Dainihonkoku Hokke kyō kenki* 大日本国法華經験記 (“Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra from Japan”; c. 1043, Chingen 鎮源 [?–?]; hereafter *Hokke genki*), and the *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 (“Anthology of Tales of Times Now Past”; early 12th century, compiler unknown; hereafter *Konjaku*), it analyses how rebirth, ritual practice, and divine intervention are portrayed in narratives that overlap the genres of *kōsōden* 高僧伝 (“biographies of eminent monks”) and *ōjōden* 往生伝 (“tales of rebirth in the pure land”) as well. The selection of these *setsuwa* collections was guided by the predominance of the appearance of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva in the narratives, and further examinations of the religious environment were determined by the initially chosen accounts.

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (Ch. Puxian Pusa, Jp. Fugen Bosatsu 普賢菩薩) occupies a distinctive position within these contexts, acting as protector of the *jikyōsha* 持經者 or practitioners of the *Saddharmapundarika Sūtra* (“Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma”; Ch. *Miaofa lianhua jing*, Jp. *Myōhō renga kyō* 妙法蓮華經; 406, translated by Kumārajīva [344–413]³; hereafter *Lotus Sutra*), a central figure in repentance rituals, and a mediator of karmic hindrances. His presence is especially prominent in the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku*, where he functions both as a manifesting deity and as an unseen force acting through dreams, visions, and ritual efficacy. These appearances are closely linked to practices such as the Lotus repentance (Ch. *fahua chanfa*, Jp. *hokke senbō* 法華懺法), or achieving purity of the six senses (Ch. *liugen qingjing*, Jp. *rokkon shōjō* 六根清淨), both of which are integral to the narratives examined in this study. His divine appearance or assistance, however, can be observed in narratives of monks and laypeople who perform various practices, among them the *nenbutsu*, or who aspire for rebirth in Amitābha’s pure land.

The comparative analysis of *setsuwa* narratives demonstrates that Heian period Pure Land aspiration was consistently coordinated with *Lotus Sutra* devotion and repentance practices, a configuration rendered particularly clear through Samantabhadra’s repeated appearances. This plurality of soteriological aims is well attested in scholarship on Heian and medieval Japanese Buddhism, which has shown that rebirth in Amitābha’s Pure Land coincided with aspirations toward Maitreya’s (Ch. Mile, Jp. Miroku 弥勒) Tusita Heaven (Ch. Doushuaitian, Jp. Tosotsuten 兜率天)—sometimes even simultaneously aspiring for both—and other Pure Lands (Stone 2004, pp. 77–78; Rhodes 2017, pp. 41–42). The narratives examined in this paper, however, reveal aspirations that extend beyond the most frequently represented salvific destinations in the sources. They also include rarer narrative attestations of alternative realms, such as the Eastern Pure Land associated with Samantabhadra himself. Taken together, these findings demonstrate and reinforce that Heian Pure Land belief functioned within a plural, practice-oriented religious framework, thereby underscoring the paper’s central argument that early Pure Land aspirations were

embedded within—rather than detachable from—broader systems of ritual efficacy and non-exclusive devotional practice.

2. Pure Land Belief Before the Heian Period

Prior to the examination of Pure Land belief in the Heian period, it is necessary to briefly outline the earlier developments of faith in Amitābha Buddha and his Western Pure Land in Japan. Although the surviving evidence from before the Heian period is limited, both visual materials and textual sources indicate that knowledge of Amitābha and aspirations for rebirth in his paradise were already present by the eighth century. These early traces provide an important background for understanding later developments, even if they do not yet reflect a systematic or practice-centred Pure Land tradition.

Pure Land faith and practice before the Heian period are seldom confirmed in surviving visual materials and written sources. As far as the former is concerned, we find a group of artworks that are largely concentrated at Hōryūji temple 法隆寺 in Nara. Most of the earliest examples of Amitābha triads (Ch. Emituo sanzun, Jp. Amida sanzōn 阿弥陀三尊) are found there, including the mural in the Main Hall (Jp. Kondō 金堂) of the temple (Panel no. 6),⁴ and various bronze statues from the seventh and eighth centuries. Representative examples include the so-called Amitābha triad formerly belonging to Hōryūji, now housed in the Gallery of Hōryūji Treasures 法隆寺宝物館 at Tokyo National Museum 東京国立博物館 (acquisition no. N-144) and dated to the second half of the seventh century,⁵ as well as the personal devotional bronze triad of Lady Tachibana no Michiyo 橘三千代 (?–733), now preserved in the Great Treasure Hall (Daihōzōin 大宝蔵院) of the same temple.⁶

Shirai (2021) highlights that “traditions for making buddha icons were still being formed during this period [i.e., the seventh century] in Japan, so relying on iconography as a means to identify these images is of limited use” (Shirai 2021, p. 98). Although the identities of the buddha figures of these triads have no distinctive characteristics of their own, the identifying features are primarily derived from the headgear of the buddha’s two foremost attendant bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara (Ch. Guanyin, Jp. Kannon 観音) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Ch. Shizhi, Jp. Seishi 勢至) (Nara National Museum 2015, p. 235; Wong 2008, p. 145). On this basis, it may be ascertained that Hōryūji functioned as an important early centre of Amitābha worship and Pure Land belief.

The tradition of Pure Land mandala paintings further testifies to the establishment of Amitābha devotion by the eighth century. Among the earliest visual representations of the Buddha’s Pure Land are the woven Taima mandala 当麻曼荼羅, a National Treasure preserved at Taimadera temple 當麻寺 in Nara Prefecture, and the Chikō mandala 智光曼荼羅 associated with the Gangōji temple 元興寺 in Nara.⁷ The Taima mandala is believed to be a tapestry brought to Japan from China, becoming a significant sacred prototype for ritual usage from the thirteenth century within Pure Land temples (ten Grotenhuis 1983, p. 59). Although the original Chikō mandala from the eighth century was lost in a fire in 1451 and later reproduced in 1498, both mandalas are embedded in narratives of miraculous origin. The Taima mandala, in particular, is said to have been woven in a single night in 763 by a woman known as Chūjōhime 中将姫, a fictional figure whose name first appears in *setsuwa* literature (*Kokon chomonjū* 古今著聞集, “Record of Things Heard, Past and Present”, 1254, compiled by Tachibana no Narisue 橘成季 [?–?]; reference to the weaver of the tapestry as Honganzenni 本願禪尼; NBT 10: 362), and was believed to be a manifestation (Ch. *huaren*, Jp. *kenin* 化人) of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.⁸

Regarding textual transmission, at least one of the three Pure Land sutras⁹ was already circulating in Japan by the mid-seventh century. The *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (“Chronicles of Japan”; 720), compiled by Prince Toneri 舍人親王 (676–735) and others, records

that a monk named Eon 惠隱 (seventh century) expounded the *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經 (or *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sutra*) at the imperial court in 640, the twelfth year of Emperor Jomei's 舒明天皇 (593?–641; r. 629–641) reign. Eon had travelled to the continent during the Sui dynasty 隋 (581–618) in 608 and returned during the Tang dynasty 唐 (618–907) in 639, after spending more than three decades in China. It is therefore highly likely that he was responsible for transmitting this sutra to Japan.

Furthermore, tales in the *Nihon ryōiki* offer additional textual evidence for the circulation of knowledge concerning Amitābha Buddha and his Western Paradise in the eighth century. In three tales (nos. 5, 33 in fascicle 1, and no. 26 in fascicle 2), the text chronicles the installation of Amitābha icons in temples. One of these accounts refers to a group of deities in which the buddha is accompanied by Avalokiteśvara, his common attendant bodhisattva, and Maitreya, depicted in buddha form; other deities are not named (no. 26 in fascicle 2, SNKBZ 10: 198).

Another way to observe the dissemination and conceptual establishment of Pure Land belief is through references to Amitābha's land of ultimate bliss (Ch. Jile, Jp. Gokuraku 極樂) that appears in various forms throughout the text. The Pure Land is sometimes indicated by its direction (nos. 22, 30 in fascicle 1; nos. 2, 7 in fascicle 2; the Preface and no. 30 in fascicle 3), sometimes by its aforementioned name (tale no. 22 in fascicle 1 and the Preface to fascicle 3 [SNKBZ 10: 81, 245]), once as the "Pure Land of infinite life" (*myōjō jōdo* 無量壽淨土 [SNKBZ 10: 101]), and once as the "land of happiness" (*anraku koku* 安樂國 [SNKBZ 10: 372]).

Noticeably absent from these accounts, however, is any explicit reference to the practice of chanting Amitābha's name. The text rather records the invocation of other deities: Śākyamuni Buddha in no. 25 of fascicle 3, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in no. 31 of fascicle 1, and the Twelve Divine Generals (Ch. Shi'er shenjiang, Jp. Jūni shinshō 十二神將) of Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha (Ch. Yaoshi Rulai, Jp. Yakushi Nyorai 藥師如來) in no. 33 of fascicle 3. This absence suggests that while belief in his Pure Land was existent, it had not yet developed into a distinct or dominant ritual practice.

Taken together, these visual and textual materials indicate that Pure Land belief before the Heian period was present primarily as a conceptual and devotional framework rather than as a clearly defined set of practices. Knowledge of Amitābha and his Western Paradise circulated alongside other forms of Buddhist devotion, without the centrality of *nenbutsu* that would later become a characteristic of Pure Land sects. This early, non-exclusive phase of Pure Land belief forms an essential background for understanding the diversification and transformation of Buddhist practice in the Heian period.

3. Literary Framework and Samantabhadra (Not) in the *Nihon Ryōiki*

Before turning to specific narrative examples, it is essential to clarify the literary frameworks within which Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appears in premodern Japanese sources. *Kōsōden*, *ōjōden*, and Buddhist *setsuwa* constitute overlapping biographical and narrative genres that function not merely as literary representations but as testimonial accounts validating religious practice. Understanding the conventions and aims of these genres is therefore a prerequisite for analysing the role assigned to Samantabhadra in Heian-period religious literature.

Samantabhadra's appearance and dissemination in Japan show similarities to that of Amitābha Buddha's: his depiction first appears in the murals of the Main Hall at Hōryūji, his images are being installed throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, but his roles and functions are unclear before the Heian period. He gained prominence in the Heian period primarily due to dispersal of the *Lotus Sutra*, introduction of repentance practices by the Tendai sect, as well as later transmissions of the scripture and said practice to the

Shingon sect. As a bodhisattva explicitly associated with the protection and propagation of the *Lotus Sutra*, Samantabhadra naturally became central in the expanse of Lotus devotion.

The narratives examined in this study are what might be called miracle tales, especially Buddhist miracle tales, of which a subcategory may consist of the ones encompassing and exhibiting the power and efficacy of the *Lotus Sutra*. Originating in Chinese biographical and wondrous narratives, these writings assisted in the dissemination of the sutra and its teachings (Teiser and Stone 2009, p. 34). The tales of the *Hokke genki* draw upon these Chinese Lotus miracle tales, especially in motifs of showing the wondrous forces that are the results of zealous practice.

Most of the tales feature the lives of specific practitioners, monks or lay followers, and therefore can be categorized as *kōsōden*, and even *ōjōden* as a special subtype of the former, when confirmation is provided of the practitioners' rebirth in a pure land. These narratives are therefore not merely didactic tales but are written as testimonies attesting to such rebirths. Blum argues that these accounts were influenced by various literary genres, such as the Indian *adbhutadharmā*¹⁰ or other miracle story traditions (Blum 2007, p. 329). As is true for many Japanese Buddhist literary genres, the roots of the *kōsōden* and *ōjōden* can be traced back to China. The first *ōjōden* in China was the *Jingtu lun* 淨土論¹¹, compiled by Jiakai 迦才 (?–?) during the Tang dynasty, which contains biographies of twenty Buddhist monks. By contrast, the first *ōjōden* in Japan was the *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki* 日本往生極樂記 (hereafter cited as *Gokurakuki*), compiled between 985 and 987 by Yoshishige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (931?–1002)¹², containing forty-five rebirth tales. This period also coincides with the activity of one of the major contributors to Japanese Pure Land thought. The Tendai monk Genshin 源信 (942–1017) composed his *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集¹³ (“Essentials for Rebirth in the Pure Land”) in 985, a work that highlights *nenbutsu* practice and would become an important milestone in the development and dissemination of Pure Land thought in Japan. In his survey of the *Hokke genki*, Harada notes that several tales suggest that Chingen, the compiler of the collection, was familiar with both the *Gokurakuki* and the *Ōjōyōshū* (Harada 1973, p. 249), Harada's comparative studies (Harada 1973, 1974) focus primarily on the influence of the *Nihon ryōiki* on the *Hokke genki*, whereas Dykstra proposes that the compiler may have even met Genshin (Dykstra 1977, p. 192).

The *kōsōden* and the *ōjōden* are biographical tales (Jp. *denki* 伝記) that share several defining characteristics, such as the depiction of supernatural abilities or events that function as proof of the efficacy of Buddhist teachings. Their narrative techniques, wording, and even the practices they describe show considerable overlap. Two major differences may nevertheless be observed: in the *ōjōden*, rebirth occurs in Amitābha's Pure Land, and the protagonists may include lay followers as well as monks. In Japan, as in China, early *ōjōden* narratives can also be regarded as *setsuwa*, the Japanese narrative tale genre that was typically written down after circulating in oral form. *Setsuwa* first appeared in the Heian period and are commonly compiled in collections known as *setsuwashū* 説話集. The term *setsuwa* may also encompass related genres such as folktales (Jp. *minwa* 民話 or *mukashibanashi* 昔話), legends (Jp. *densetsu* 伝説), myths (Jp. *shinwa* 神話), or anecdotes (Jp. *itsuwa* 逸話), although these categories can be used interchangeably.

Buddhist *setsuwa* (Jp. *bukkyō setsuwa* 仏教説話) constitute a further identifiable subgroup, characterized by the presence of Buddhist elements, such as Buddhist monks as protagonists or the miraculous intervention of Buddhist deities. Many of the tales function as parables, regularly instructing their audiences in moral conduct and karmic causality (Ch. *ye*, Jp. *gō* 業). These features are all applicable to the three major Buddhist *setsuwa* collections of the Heian period.

In the *Nihon ryōiki*, a total of 116 tales is compiled in three fascicles. It is based on Chinese antecedents and was influenced in particular by the *Mingbaoji* 冥報記 (“Records

of Miraculous Retributions”), compiled around 653 by Tanglin 唐臨 (601–660).¹⁴ The *Mingbaoji* may be classified as a *kōsōden* insofar as it presents biographical narratives of monks that frequently include miraculous elements, and its primary concern with karmic retribution and reward closely corresponds to that of the Japanese tales. The compiler of the *Nihon ryōiki* explicitly names not only the *Mingbaoji* but also the *Jingang boreji yanji* 金剛般若集驗記 (“Miraculous Tales of the Diamond Sutra”), compiled in 718 by Meng Xi-anzhong 孟獻忠 (?–?), as sources of inspiration in the preface.

Listing the Buddhist deities appearing in the *Nihon ryōiki*, it becomes evident that Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva appear most frequently, each featuring in twenty-one tales. Other bodhisattvas, such as Maitreya and Sudṛṣṭi (Ch. Miaojian Pusa, Jp. Myōken Bosatsu 妙見菩薩), also serve as protagonists in several narratives. By contrast, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva does not appear by name in either the titles or the main body of the text.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in one tale (no. 19, fascicle 1; SNKBZ 10: 74–75), a passage from one chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* in Kumārajīva’s (344–413) Chinese translation from 406 (chapter 28, the *Puxian Pusa quanfapin* 普賢菩薩勸發品 (“Encouragement of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva”) is cited. In this quotation, Samantabhadra explains the punishments that await those who slander Lotus practitioners, one of which is enacted upon a monk in the narrative:

於是，即坐沙彌口喎，斜令藥治療，終不直。法華經云：「若有輕咲之者，當世世牙齒疏缺，醜唇、平鼻、手腳繚戾、眼目角睞。」 (SNKBZ 10: 75)

At that moment, the sitting monk’s mouth was (hideously) distorted. None of the ointments could cure it. The *Lotus sutra* says: “if (someone) slanders (those who uphold this sutra), in their present life their teeth fall out, their mouth becomes repulsive, their nose flat, their limbs twisted, and they go cross eyed.”

The tale quotes Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Lotus Sutra* verbatim, thereby demonstrating the centrality of karmic retribution in early Japanese Buddhist thought.

By the time the other two *setsuwa* collections were compiled, however, Samantabhadra assumes a far more prominent role. His increased presence can be attributed to developments in the ninth and tenth centuries, particularly the introduction of esoteric teachings (Ch. *mijiao*, Jp. *mikkyō* 密教) within the Tendai and Shingon traditions, as well as the expansion of *Lotus Sutra* devotion under the institutional foundation of the Tendai sect. The *Hokke genki* focuses on *Lotus* practitioners, the central scripture of the Tendai school introduced by Saichō 最澄 (767–822) in the early ninth century. It is therefore unsurprising that Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appears repeatedly in these narratives, as he is traditionally regarded as the guardian of the *Lotus Sutra* and its practitioners.

Because *kōsōden*, *ōjōden*, and Buddhist *setsuwa* function as testimonial narratives that validate religious practice through miraculous confirmation, the appearance of a bodhisattva within these texts is never incidental. When Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appears in such accounts, his role must therefore be understood not as symbolic ornamentation, but as narrative evidence for the efficacy of specific practices. This function becomes particularly visible in the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku*, where Samantabhadra’s presence is repeatedly linked to *Lotus Sutra* devotion, repentance practices, and the resolution of karmic impediments.

4. Practices of Heian Jikyōsha: Samantabhadra in the *Hokke Genki* and *Konjaku*

Building on the discussion of literary genres and narrative conventions in the previous section, this chapter turns to a comparative analysis of the two Heian period *setsuwa* collections, the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku*. The former may have been an influence on

the latter, as there are more than eighty tales that show similarities on some scale (Dykstra 1983, p. 4). By examining corresponding tales across these collections, it becomes possible to clarify how Samantabhadra Bodhisattva functions within concrete narrative contexts and how his role relates to religious practice, karmic causality, and devotional ideals in the Heian period. This comparison sheds light on the bodhisattva who consistently occupies the role of a corrective and protective agent whose interventions validate *Lotus Sutra* practice and resolve karmic or ritual deficiencies rather than guaranteeing rebirth alone.

The *Lotus Sutra* and its early introduction to Japan,¹⁶ and above all the growing significance and propagation of the sutra by the Tendai sect are what most arguably made Samantabhadra widely known in Japan. Nevertheless, the deity must have been known among Buddhist monks even earlier, as evidenced by Emperor Shōmu 聖武天皇 (701–756; r. 724–749), who in his edict of 741¹⁷ ordered all provinces to build two monasteries—one for monks (Jp. *kokubunji* 国分寺) and one for female monastics (Jp. *kokubunniji* 国分尼寺). The edict further instructed the monks in these monasteries to recite the *Lotus Sutra* among other scriptures, thereby establishing an institutional framework for Lotus devotion well before the compilation of the Heian period *setsuwa* collections.

In these narratives, the exemplary deeds of devoted practitioners are presented as models to be followed. Characters frequently encounter miraculous events and receive aid through divine intervention. Even unintentional forms of Lotus practice—such as a worm eating the scripture—are understood to generate merit. In addition, the practice of *nenbutsu* recitation also appears in great number but most importantly, these practices do not exclude one another. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appears in two principal narrative contexts. On the one hand, he manifests as a monk whose extensive practice has elevated him to a saintly state comparable to that of a bodhisattva. On the other hand, he appears in dreams, either in his bodhisattva form or mounted on his characteristic white elephant. As illustrated in Table 1, Samantabhadra appears in several narratives in both the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku*, many of which closely correspond to one another.

Table 1. Tales from the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku* with Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (in the order of the *Hokke genki*; in the case of the *Hokke genki*, the number of the tales is given, while in the case of the *Konjaku* it is the fascicle slash number of the tales that are displayed).

Monk or believer	<i>Hokke genki</i>	<i>Konjaku</i>
Ninkyō 仁鏡	16 <i>Atagosan Washi no mine no Ninkyō hijiri</i> 愛太子山鷲峰仁鏡聖 (“The Saint Ninkyō from the Eagle Peak on Mt. Atago”)	13/15 <i>Tōdaiji no sō Ninkyō Hōke wo dokuju suru koto</i> 東大寺僧仁鏡誦法花語 (“About the Tōdaiji Monk Ninkyō, Who Recited the <i>Lotus Sutra</i> ”)
Renbō 蓮坊/蓮防	20 <i>Eizan saitō no Renbō ajari</i> 叡山西塔蓮坊阿闍梨 (“Renbō ācārya of the Western Pagoda on Mt. Hiei”)	(no corresponding tale)
Shunchō 春朝	22 <i>Shunchō hōshi</i> 春朝法師 (“The Monk Shunchō”)	13/10 <i>Shunchō jikyōja kyō no shirushi wo arawasu koto</i> 春朝持經者顯經驗語 (“How the Lotus Practitioner Shunchō Showed the Sutra’s Efficacy”)
Senkū 仙久	38 <i>Iwakura no Senkū hōshi</i> 石蔵仙久法師 (“The Monk Senkū of Iwakura”)	17/39 <i>Nishi no Iwakura no Senkū no Fugen no keshin naru koto wo shiru koto</i> 西石蔵仙久知普賢化身語 (“How People Became Aware that Senkū of Nishi Iwakura Was the Manifestation of Samantabhadra”)

Table 1. Cont.

Monk or believer	Hokke genki	Konjaku
Shōkū 性空	45 <i>Banshū Shoshazan no Shōkū shōnin</i> 播州書写山性空上人 (“The Saint Shōkū of Mt. Shosha in Harima Province”)	12/34 <i>Shosha no yama no Shōgū Shōnin no koto</i> 書写山性空聖人語 (“About Saint Shōgū of Mt. Shosha”)
Eikan 叡桓/睿桓	46 <i>Eizan Anrakuin no Eikan shōnin</i> 叡山安樂院叡桓上人 (“The Saint Eikan of Anrakuin Temple on Mt. Hiei”)	(no corresponding tale)
Hōshū 法秀	55 <i>Atagosan Asahi no Hōshū hōshi</i> 愛太子山朝日法秀法師 (“The Monk Hōshū of Asahi on Mt. Atago”)	(no corresponding tale)
Renson 蓮尊	58 <i>Nijūshichibon no jikyōsha Renson hōshi</i> 二十七品持經者蓮尊法師 (“The Monk Renson, Reciter of Chapter Twenty-Seven of the Lotus Sutra”)	14/16 <i>Gangōji no Renson Hōkekyō wo ji shite zenze no mukui wo shiru koto</i> 元興寺蓮尊持法花經知前世報語 (“How Renson of the Gangōji Temple Upheld the Lotus Sutra and Became Aware of Rewards from His Previous Life”)
Kōson 好尊 (some sources identify him with the name Myōson 妙尊)	61 <i>Kōson hōshi</i> 好尊法師 (“The Monk Kōson”)	13/20 <i>Ishiyama no Kōson Shōnin Hōkekyō wo ju shite nan wo manukaruru koto</i> 石山好尊聖人誦法花經免難語 (“How Saint Kōson of Ishiyama Recited the Lotus Sutra and Escaped Hardships”)
Gyōkū 行空	68 <i>Isshuku no shamon Gyōkū</i> 一宿沙門行空 (“The One Night Shelter Śramaṇa Gyōkū”)	13/24 <i>Isshuku Shōnin Gyōgū Hōke wo ju suru koto</i> 一宿聖人行空誦法花語 (“How the One Night Shelter Saint, Gyōgū Recited the Lotus”)
Shin'on 真遠 (or Jōon 貞遠) ¹⁸	71 <i>Saitō Hōdōin no Shin'on hōshi</i> 西塔宝幢院真遠法師 (“The Monk Shin'en of the Hōdōin Temple of the Western Pagoda”)	17/41 <i>Sō Jōon Fugen no tasuke ni yorite nan wo nogaruru koto</i> 僧貞遠依普賢助遁難語 (“How the Monk Jōon Evaded Hardships Aided by Samantabhadra”)
Kōkū 光空	72 <i>Kōkū hōshi</i> 光空法師 (“The Monk Kōkū”)	17/40 <i>Sō Kōgū Fugen no tasuke ni yorite inochi wo son suru koto</i> 僧光空依普賢助存命語 (“How the Monk Kōgū Preserved his Life Aided by Samantabhadra”)
Kakunen 覺念	78 <i>Kakunen hōshi</i> 覺念法師 (“The Monk Kakunen”)	14/13 <i>Nyūdō Kakunen Hōke wo ji shite zenshō wo shiru koto</i> 入道覺念持法花知前生語 (“How the Monk Kakunen Upheld the Lotus and Became Aware of His Past Life”)
Shinsei 信誓	87 <i>Shinsei ajari</i> 信誓阿闍梨 (“Shinsei ācārya”)	12/37 <i>Shinzei ajari kyō no chikara ni yorite bumo wo ikuru koto</i> 信誓阿闍梨依經力活父母語 (“How Shinzei ācārya Brought Back to Life his Parents with the Power of the Sutra”)
Gansai 願西 ¹⁹ female monastic	100 <i>Bikuni Gansai</i> 比丘尼願西 (“The Female Monastic Gansai”)	(no corresponding tale)
Ganshō 願証 female monastic	(no corresponding tale)	12/30 <i>Ama Gansai no tamoteru tokoro no Hōkekyō yaketamawazaru koto</i> 尼願西所持法花經不燒給語 (“How the Lotus Sutra, Upheld by the Female Monastic Gansai, Did Not Perish in Fire”)
Fujiwara female disciple 女弟子藤原氏	117 <i>Nyodeshi (onnadeshi) Fujiwara-shi</i> 女弟子藤原氏 (“The Female Disciple of the Fujiwara Clan”)	(Corresponding in title only) 15/50 <i>Onna no Fujiwara no uji ōjō suru koto</i> 女藤原氏往生語 (“How the Woman of the Fujiwara Clan was Reborn in the Pure Land”)

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that Samantabhadra’s appearances follow a consistent pattern: he intervenes not primarily at moments of death or rebirth, but at points where practitioners confront limitations in practice, memory, or karmic purity.

This pattern suggests that his primary narrative function in Heian period literature lies in the stabilization and correction of religious practice, rather than in the direct promise of rebirth in a specific pure land.

The narrative prominence of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva in Heian period literature is closely connected to the concrete religious practices attributed to *Lotus Sutra* devotees. In particular, repentance emerges as a central ritual activity through which karmic hindrances are addressed, and scriptural devotion is rendered effective. An examination of the practices described in the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku* thus clarifies the ritual logic underlying Samantabhadra's narrative role and provides a framework for understanding his repeated appearances in these texts. The stories shed light on the lives of Lotus Sutra practitioners in the first half of the Heian period, including their living conditions, daily habits, religious practices, hardships, and rewards. The portrayal of the *jikyōsha* in the *Hokke genki* suggests that they often led a secluded life similar to that of the *hijiri* 聖²⁰, and may be regarded as antecedents of the secluded Pure Land-oriented monks (Jp. *tonseisō* 遁世僧) of the late Heian and early Kamakura periods.

The practices described in the monks' biographies show diversity and no strict sectarian division. Devotion centred on the *Lotus Sutra* is the most significant element, as may be inferred from the title of the collection. The sutra is most commonly read (Jp. *dokkyō* 読経), chanted (Jp. *dokuju* 読誦; *ju* 誦), copied, and venerated (Jp. *shosha kuyō* 書写供養). The second most frequently cited practice in both the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku*, is repentance. For a detailed discussion of the modes of *Lotus Sutra* devotion in the *Hokke genki*, see Hanazono (1990). Some form of penitential practice (Jp. *sange* 懺悔, *keka* 悔過, *keka sansha* 悔過懺謝, *sangebō* 懺悔法; *senbō* 懺法; *hokke senbō* 法華懺法) appears as a recurring component in the narratives, twenty-one times in the former, and twenty-seven times in the latter *setsuwa* collection.

Typically, such rituals are performed by the protagonist monk in addition to *Lotus Sutra* devotion, usually with the aim of accumulating merit or correcting personal shortcomings. In other cases, wrongdoers repent their sins after becoming aware of them through dreams induced by a deity—most notably Samantabhadra—or by heavenly messengers. A representative example is the tale (no. 72) of Kōkū 光空 (?–?), who is falsely accused of a crime. His execution proves unsuccessful because Samantabhadra is protecting him. After the failed attempt, the master who ordered the execution dreams of a figure whose body is pierced with arrows—those that had failed to harm Kōkū the previous day. Repentance was among the earliest roles attributed to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, as attested in scriptures dating from the third to fifth centuries. The earliest of these is the *Samantabhadra Pusa jing* 三曼陀跋陀羅菩薩經 (“Samantabhadra Sutra”), translated at the end of the third century by the lay devotee Nie Daozhen 聶道真.²¹ The association of repentance and the purification of the six senses is further elaborated in the *Samantabhadra Contemplation Sutra*.²² Purity of the six senses was of utmost importance for the monks because the transgressions of these caused bad karma which hindered them in reaching perfect enlightenment. Through repentance rituals they could disperse these karmic hindrances.

Repentance appears under various designations and encompasses different ritual forms in the *setsuwa* narratives. Yajima (2022) examined these practices in the *Hokke genki* but limited his analysis to explicit references to Lotus repentance (*hokke senbō*), identifying a total of fifteen such cases (Yajima 2022, p. 565). When broader terminology is considered, however, it becomes evident that penitential practices are present in a significantly larger number of tales. In addition to *hokke senbō*, the texts also refer to *hokke zanmai* 法華三昧, which Japanese encyclopaedias identify as equivalent practices. The latter is a form of *samādhi* contemplation corresponding to the third category (sitting and walking) of the four kinds of *samādhi* (Ch. *sizhong sanmei*, Jp. *shishu zanmai* 四種三昧²³) and explicitly

includes repentance rituals. This practice was systematized by Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597), the Chinese founder of the Tiantai (Jp. Tendai) school, who outlined its procedures in the *Fahua sanmei chanyi* 法華三昧懺儀 (“Repentance Rite of the Lotus Samādhi”; T no. 1941, 46). His biographies further reveal a close association with Samantabhadra Bodhisattva that likely influenced the deity’s ritual role.

至禪林寺陳宣帝時號修禪寺斯則智者傳法之地又號銀地道場次於寺巽有石象道場此智者大師感得普賢乘象降來摩頂之處古來相傳普賢白象化為大石樣圖不異真象所以稱石象道場 (From the *Meishō ryakuden* 明匠略伝; DNS 1.1: 598)

At the Chanlinsi temple—which was called Xiuchansi temple during the reign of Emperor Xuan of the Chen dynasty—there was a place where Zhiyi preached the dharma. It was also called silver ground meditation seat. Next to the temple, in the south-eastern direction, there was the stone elephant meditation seat. This was the place where Zhiyi sensed that Samantabhadra descended on a white elephant and caressed his head. Long ago it was said that the white elephant of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva turned into a big stone which resembles a real elephant. That is why this place is called stone elephant meditation seat.

大慈寺巽有石象道場此智者大師感得普賢乘象降來摩頂之處古來相傳普賢白象化為大石樣圖不似真象所以稱石象道場 (From the *San Tendai Godaisan ki* 參天台五臺山記 1; DNBZ 72: 336)

On the south-eastern side of the Dacisi temple there is a meditation seat (in the shape of a) stone elephant. This is the place where master Zhiyi sensed the presence of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva who descended on a white elephant and caressed his head. It is said that at this place the white elephant of Samantabhadra turned into stone which resembles a real elephant. That is why this place is called stone elephant meditation seat.

The *hokke zanmai* is a repentance practice based on the *Lotus Sutra* and Zhiyi’s *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (594), and specialized ritual halls (*hokke zanmaidō* 法華三昧堂, or *hokkedō* 法華堂) were constructed specifically for this practice. The earliest example in Japan is attributed to Saichō, as recorded in his biographies²⁴ and in the *Hokke genki*²⁵. Notably, these halls typically enshrined Samantabhadra Bodhisattva as their *honzon* 本尊, or principal icon. Additional early examples are found at Tendai temples, such as the Saitō Hokkedō 西塔法華堂 on Mount Hiei, consecrated in 825. More importantly, from the tenth century onward, Shingon temples also incorporated Lotus repentance halls. Early instances include the Hokke Zanmaidō at Daigoji 醍醐寺, consecrated in 949. Both the Saitō and Daigoji halls housed statues of Samantabhadra.

Comparable ritual practices and halls also existed within the context of Pure Land devotion, also introduced and practiced by Tendai monks. The *jōgyō zanmaidō* 常行三昧堂, dedicated to the practice of constant walking *samādhi* (Ch. *changxing sanmei*, Jp. *jōgyō zanmai* 常行三昧), enshrined images of Amitābha Buddha and served as the setting for a ninety-day *nenbutsu* ritual, during which practitioners circumambulated the buddha’s image while continuously chanting his name. This type of hall was introduced to Japan by the monk Ennin 円仁 (794–864) after his ten-year sojourn in Tang China. According to his diary, Ennin observed “the place for the practice of *hanju*” (般舟道場) during his visit to Mount Wutai 五台山 in 840.²⁶ The term *hanju* refers to the *hanju zanmai* 般舟三昧 practice, which corresponds to *jōgyō zanmai* in the Tendai tradition. During his stay at Mount Wutai, Ennin witnessed both the *hokke zanmai* and the *jōgyō zanmai*, and upon his return, he established a hall for the latter at Mount Hiei.²⁷ Although both had already been practiced there since the time of Saichō,²⁸ Ennin implemented in 851 a ritual called *nenbutsu zanmai* 念仏三昧 that he witnessed on Mount Wutai (五臺山念佛三昧之法).²⁹ This paired

installation of Lotus and Pure Land practices and their respective halls continued as an institutional model. In the tenth century, Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1028), one of the most powerful statesmen of the Heian period, constructed a *hokke zanmaidō* and a *jōgyō zanmaidō* side by side, thereby demonstrating his commitment to both *Lotus Sutra* devotion and Pure Land belief.

Given the proliferation of Lotus practice halls featuring Samantabhadra icons and the bodhisattva's association with repentance rituals in canonical sources, it is unsurprising that such practices recur frequently in the narratives examined here:

住大鷲峰晝夜讀誦法華經。六時修行懺悔方法。(NST 7: 520)

(The monk Ninkyō) lived on the Falcon Mountain Pass, recited the *Lotus Sutra*, day and night, and six times³⁰ practiced repentance.

誦法華。懺六根罪。(NST 7: 522)

(The monk Renbō) recited the *Lotus Sutra* and repented the offenses of the six senses.

修行妙法。所謂法花三昧。六根懺悔法也。(NST 7: 537)

(The monk Hōshū) practiced the wonderful law [Lotus Sutra], the Lotus *samādhi* and the repentance ritual of the six senses.

The prominence of repentance in these narratives indicates that spiritual progress is framed not simply as the accumulation of merit, but as the continual removal of karmic obstacles. Within this framework, Samantabhadra functions as a ritual authority who enables Lotus Sutra practice to remain effective despite human imperfection.

Karma already played a central role in earlier collections such as the *Nihon ryōiki*. Although the *Hokke genki* often depicts the results of actions as less immediate, karmic consequences nonetheless remain significant, frequently manifesting in subsequent lives. A recurring motif in Samantabhadra-related tales concerns difficulties in memorizing the *Lotus Sutra*. Two narratives focus on monks unable to recall specific passages, echoing the earlier *Nihon ryōiki* (tale 18; SNKBZ 10: 70–73).

In the *Hokke genki*, the stories of Renson 蓮尊 (?–?; tale no. 58) of the Gangōji temple 元興寺 in Nara, and Kakunen 覺念 (?–?; tale no. 78) develop this motif further. Renson is unable to recall the Samantabhadra chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, while Kakunen cannot remember three lines of the text.³¹ Whereas the protagonist in the *Nihon ryōiki* seeks the aid of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, in the *Hokke genki* both monks receive assistance from Samantabhadra. Renson, for example, venerates the bodhisattva's image for ninety days. In both cases, the resolution comes through dreams: Renson encounters a heavenly child (Ch. *tiantong*, Jp. *tendō* 天童³²) acting as Samantabhadra's messenger, while Kakunen is visited by an elderly monk. Both narratives attribute the monks' difficulties to karmic hindrances related to the Lotus Sutra, which must be overcome through repentance.

The prominence of repentance in these accounts reveals a model of religious life in which salvation depends on the continual removal of karmic obstacles, a process in which Samantabhadra serves as a central ritual authority. This examination of repentance, ritual practice, and karmic correction demonstrates that Samantabhadra's narrative role is deeply embedded in the lived religious experience of Heian period Lotus practitioners. This understanding further illuminates the plural and practice-oriented nature of early Japanese Buddhist belief.

5. Samantabhadra and Pure Lands

While repentance and Lotus Sutra devotion form the foundation of religious life in these narratives, they do not preclude aspirations for rebirth in a pure land. On the con-

trary, the resolution of karmic hindrances through repentance appears to create the conditions under which Pure Land practice, particularly *nenbutsu*, becomes effective. This relationship is especially visible in later biographies and expanded narrative versions.

The third most frequently mentioned practice is the invocation of Amitābha Buddha's name, commonly known as *nenbutsu*. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is also present within Pure Land thought: he appears among the audiences of the three Pure Land sutras and is counted among the twenty-five bodhisattvas of Amitābha Buddha who descend to welcome the deceased to the Western Paradise, a scene depicted in images known as *laiyingtu* (Ch.) or *raigōzu* (Jp.) 来迎図.

There are numerous ways in which Pure Land belief and practice are referenced in the tales. The most common include *nenbutsu*, the name of Amitābha Buddha, his buddhahood Sukhāvātī, or the western direction. These elements appear far less frequently in the *Hokke genki* than in the *Konjaku*. In the former, *nenbutsu* practice is explicitly mentioned in twenty-four tales and is most prominent in the concluding part of the third fascicle, which focuses on lay followers and female monastics. In the *Konjaku*, by contrast, references to Amitābha and related practices appear in eighty-seven tales. There is some overlap between the two collections, amounting to nineteen corresponding narratives.

The term *nenbutsu*, literally meaning “reflection on the Buddha,” denotes a practice through which the salvific compassion of the Buddha is invoked. In his *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin discusses *nenbutsu* practice in detail, distinguishing among different modes according to the practitioner's level of religious awareness and ability. While he places particular emphasis on contemplative *nenbutsu* (Ch. *guannian nianfo*, Jp. *kannen nenbutsu* 観念念仏), which is rooted in the visualization and meditative (*samādhi*) practices of the Tendai tradition, he also presents simpler alternatives—namely recitative or vocal *nenbutsu* (Ch. *koucheng nianfo*, Jp. *kōshō* or *kushō nenbutsu* 口称念仏)—for those unable to engage in more complex practices (Andrews 1977, p. 258; Rhodes 2007, pp. 255–56). Ishibashi (2011) argues that contemplative *nenbutsu* predominated during the Heian period, whereas vocal *nenbutsu* became widespread from the Kamakura period (Ishibashi 2011, p. 22). Although the *Hokke genki* generally does not distinguish explicitly between different modes of *nenbutsu*, one example can be identified in tale no. 94, Shami Yakuen 沙弥葉延 (“The Novice Yakuen”), where contemplative practice is specifically mentioned.

乃至夜明及干巳時。念仏觀行誠以不退 (NST 7: 555)

From dawn to the hour of the snake [between 9 and 11 am], (the novice Yakuen) tirelessly practiced the *nenbutsu* of visualization.

Nenbutsu practice is prominent in the lives of monks and lay followers associated with notable Heian period Pure Land figures such as Genshin. It is a constant feature, for example, in the biographies of the female monastic Ganshō 願証 (953–1034), the younger sister of monk Genshin who is sometimes (mistakenly?) identified as Gansai 願西 (?–?), the elder sister of the same monk. Gansai appears in the *Hokke genki* (no. 100, *Bikuni Gansai* 比丘尼願西, “The Female Monastic Gansai”; NST 7: 556–557), as a devoted Lotus practitioner and reciter of the *nenbutsu* to accumulate merit, and who is protected by Samantabhadra:

讀法華經。及數萬部。積念佛功。不知其量。 (...) 普賢來護 (NST 7: 556)

She read the Lotus Sutra several tens of thousands of times, and accumulated the merit of *nenbutsu*, the extent of which was beyond measure. (...) Samantabhadra came and offered protection to her.

The same name appears in the *Konjaku* in tale 12/30 (*Ama Gansai no tamoteru tokoro no Hokekyō yaketamawazaru koto* 尼願西所持法花經不焼給語, “How the Lotus Sutra, Upheld

by the Female Monastic Gansai, Did Not Perish in Fire”; *SNKBZ* 35: 234–236), as well as in the *Zoku honchō ōjōden* 続本朝往生伝 (“Continuation of the Record of the Rebirth in the Pure Land in Our Land”; 1101–1110, compiled by Ōe no Masafusa 大江匡房 [1041–1111]; biography no. 40, *Bikuni Gansai* 比丘尼願西, “The Female Monastic Gansai”; *NST* 7: 579). Although the biographical details differ considerably across these sources, the descriptions of *Lotus Sutra* devotion and Pure Land practice are strikingly similar. Notably, however, Samantabhadra disappears from the narrative in both the *Konjaku* and the rebirth account. Moreover, in the *Konjaku* tale the appearance of the designation An’yōni 安養尼, another Buddhist name associated with Ganshō, suggests that the use of the name Gansai in the title is most likely erroneous.

The *Hokke genki* employs a range of expressions to denote *nenbutsu* practice. Most commonly, it appears as *Mida nenbutsu* 弥陀念仏, but other formulations—such as *nenbutsu zanmai* 念仏三昧³³, *rainen Mida* 礼念弥陀³⁴, and *shōnen Mida (butsu)* 称念弥陀(仏)³⁵—are also frequent. Representative examples include:

希望極樂。礼念弥陀 (*NST* 7: 528)

(The monk Senkū) longed for the birth in Pure Land, so he prayed and chanted the name of Amitābha Buddha.

雖有煩惱。誦法華經。一心念仏即世焉 (*NST* 7: 563)

(A female disciple of the Fujiwara clan) at the end of her life she was afflicted with sickness, and when she left this world, she was still chanting the *Lotus Sutra* and reciting the *nenbutsu* wholeheartedly.

Although Pure Land practice is not prominent in Samantabhadra-related tales within the *Hokke genki*, it becomes more explicit in later narrative expansions. This is evident in the case of the monk Senkū: while the *Hokke genki* does not mention his rebirth, the longer *Konjaku* version does:

亦、寤寐も専に極樂に生れむ事を願て、念仏を唱ふる事隙無し。(…)法華の薫修、自然ら至て、遂に命終る時、心乱れずして、念仏を唱へ、經を誦して、失にけり (*SNKBZ* 36: 391–392)

(The monk Senkū) constantly wished to be born in the pure land of Amitābha Buddha, no matter whether he was awake or asleep, so he recited that buddha’s name. (...) His zealous practice bore its fruits, as he passed away while reciting the *nenbutsu*, and chanting the *Lotus Sutra*.

When *ōjōden* collections from the Heian and Kamakura periods are taken into account, further modifications to earlier biographies become apparent. These often follow a similar pattern: emphasis shifts from repentance or other practices toward *nenbutsu*. In some cases, Samantabhadra disappears from the narrative altogether, while in others the core structure remains intact. Kakunen’s biographies illustrate this phenomenon: whereas the *Hokke genki* and *Konjaku* accounts remain largely consistent, the *Shūi ōjōden* (“Gleanings of Biographies of those Reborn in the Pure Land”; before 1139, compiled by Miyoshi Tameyasu 三善為康 [1049–1139]; biography no. 13) omits Samantabhadra and repentance entirely, focusing instead on Lotus practice and devotion to Amitābha:

毎日行業。誦法華經一部。勤修阿弥陀供養法 (*NST* 7: 594)

(The monk Kakunen) practiced every day, recited the *Lotus Sutra* once from memory, and held a service to Amitābha Buddha.

Beyond rebirth in Amitābha’s Western Pure Land, the tales also record rebirth in other realms. Two heavens of the desire realm (Ch. *liuyutian*, Jp. *rokuyokuten* 六欲天) appear in the *Hokke genki*: Trāyastriṃśa (Ch. Daolitian, Jp. Tōriten 忉利天) and Tuṣita.

Trāyastriṃśa appears four times in the *Hokke genki* and six times in the *Konjaku*. Located atop Mount Sumeru and ruled by Śakra (Indra), this heaven is frequently associated with female or non-human rebirths. Tale no. 124 (*Ecchū no kuni Tateyama no nyonin* 越中国立山女人, “A Woman from Tateyama in Ecchū Province”; *Konjaku* 14/7) recounts the rescue of a woman from Tateyama hell (Jp. *Tateyama jigoku* 立山地獄) and her rebirth in this heaven:

女子着微妙衣。合掌白言。依法華力。觀音護助。出立山地獄。生忉利天宮矣 (NST 7: 566)

The woman was wearing wonderful clothes, she joined palms and said: “By the power of the *Lotus Sutra* and with the help of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, I emerged from the Tateyama hell and was born in the palace of the Trāyastriṃśa heaven.”

There is a mountain in Toyama Prefecture 富山県 called Tateyama 立山, and a valley called Jigokudani 地獄谷 (“Hell Valley”) which became the centre of a religion called *tateyama shinkō* 立山信仰 (“Tateyama faith”). Tateyama is also connected to pure land faith: according to tradition, the local kami, Tateyama Gongen 立山権現, was the emanation (Jp. *suijaku* 垂迹) of Amitābha Buddha, the mountain was associated with his Western pure land, and its valley with Buddhist hells.³⁶

It is no coincidence that women are reborn in this heaven where Śākyamuni’s mother, Māyā, dwells. Similarly, women are reborn here in tales no. 127 (*Suzaku ōji no yakan* 朱雀大路野干, “A Fox on Suzaku Road”; *Konjaku* 14/5) and no. 129 (*Kii no kuni Muro gun no ashiki onna* 紀伊国牟婁郡悪女, “A Wicked Woman from Muro District in Kii Province”; *Konjaku* 14/3):

夢此女来。(…)語男言。(…)今往忉利天。此恩無量 (NST 7: 567)

This woman came (to him in his) dream. (...) She said to the man: (...) I am now dwelling in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven. My gratitude is immeasurable.

其夜聖人夢。一僧一女。(…)来道成寺。一心頂礼三宝及老僧白言。依清淨善。我等二人遠離邪道。趣向善趣。女生忉利天。僧昇兜率天 (NST 7: 569)

That night the saint saw (another) dream. A monk and a woman (...) came to the Dōjōji temple. With our whole mind, we bow to the three jewels, then the old monk said: “Relying on your pure goodness, we are detached from the wrong path and go toward the good destinies.” The woman was born in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven, and the monk ascended to Tuṣita heaven.

We can see that here both heavens are showcased. The woman goes to the second, while the monk is bound to the fourth heaven, Tuṣita. It is located between the heavens Yāma (Ch. Yemotien, Jp. Yamaten 夜摩天) and Nirmāṇarati (Ch. Hualetian, Jp. Kerakuten 化樂天). Tuṣita heaven appears more frequently (fourteen times in the *Hokke genki* and nineteen times in the *Konjaku*), and is associated with encounters with Maitreya, the future Buddha. According to Lowe (2017), this heaven was the most common destination in the Nara period, and it is still more prominent in these *setsuwa* collections than Amitābha’s Western Paradise (Lowe 2017, p. 74). A representative example is *Hokke genki* tale no. 16:

年百二十七歲入滅。故老夢云。棒法華經。上昇虚空。我今往生都率內院。值遇彌勒矣 (NST 7: 537)

(The monk Ningyō) at times, was regularly visited by a lion, becoming tame and familiar; at other times a white elephant would come and remain day and night on guard. (The monk) thus became aware that Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra were protecting him. At the age of one hundred and twenty-seven, he entered

nirvāṇa. According to an elderly man, he would declare in a dream: “Upholding the *Lotus Sutra*, I ascend into the sky. I now attain rebirth in the Inner Court of Tuṣita, where I will encounter Maitreya.”

Another form and destination of rebirth appear in *Hokke genki* tale no. 128 (Konjaku 13/34), in which the monk Dōkō 道公 (?–?) assists a *dōsojin* (travellers’ guardian deity; pronounced *saenokami* さへのかみ in the text) deity in abandoning its inferior *kami* 神 (Japanese term of *shintō* deities or spirits) body and attaining rebirth in Potalaka (Ch. Butuoluo, Jp. Fudaraku 補陀落), the Pure Land of Avalokiteśvara. The deity requests that the monk recite the *Lotus Sutra* on its behalf for three days and three nights to attain an excellent, wondrous, pure, and meritorious body. Following this practice, the deity is reborn in Potalaka. This Pure Land is in the southern direction, and in Japan the practice of undertaking a sea voyage to reach it (Jp. *Fudaraku tokai* 補陀落渡海) has been attested since the mid-Heian period. The tale is set on the Kii Peninsula 紀伊半島, which is regarded as the place of origin of this tradition.³⁷

今欲捨此下劣神形。得上品功德之身。(…)今免此卑賤受苦身。獲得勝妙淨功德身。所謂補陀落世界。為觀音眷屬。昇菩薩位 (NST 7: 568)

I now wish to abandon this inferior body and obtain a body merits of a higher level. (...) Now freed from this inferior body that experiences suffering, I attained a most excellent and pure body of merit. That is to say, (I am now in the) Potalaka realm. I am in the retinue of Avalokiteśvara and I ascend to the bodhisattva stage.

This narrative not only demonstrates the diversity of pure lands but shows the development of the *kami* and buddha relationship, attesting to the theory formed around the eighth century that *kami* were looked upon as inferior beings who needed salvation from the Buddhist dharma.

The story of the Fujiwara laywoman (tale no. 117; *Nyodeshi Fujiwara shi* 女弟子藤原氏, “The Female Disciple of the Fujiwara Clan”) introduces yet another Pure Land, located in the east: the land of Ratnatejo’bhyudgatarāja Buddha (Ch. Baoweideshangwang, Jp. Hōitokujōō 寶威德上王).³⁸ Samantabhadra himself declares that he came from this land when he heard Śākyamuni preach the *Lotus Sutra*:

世尊我於寶威德上王佛國遙聞此娑婆世界說法華經 (T no. 262, 9: 61a13–14)

World-Honoured One! While I was in the land of Ratnatejo’bhyudgatarāja Buddha, I heard you from afar, preaching the *Lotus Sutra* in this Saḥa world.³⁹

The Fujiwara woman’s rebirth in this land thus mirrors Samantabhadra’s own origin, a detail unique among the examined tales.

入滅之夜。妹夢。裝束淨潔。如天女形。如尋常時。備食物勸進。即答云。我今更不用此世界食。其故何者。煩惱惡業所薰習食故。我飯食在寶威德上王佛國土。所謂法喜禪悅食也。如是語竟。指東方界而飛去矣 (NST 7: 563)

This night (the Fujiwara lay follower) died her younger sister saw a dream in which she was wearing pure clothes and took the form of a heavenly maiden. As always, the sister was preparing the usual food for her and urged her to eat, but she replied: “I no longer eat the food of this world because they are tainted by the afflictions and the defilements of evil karma. My food is now in the pure land of Ratnatejo’bhyudgatarāja Buddha. This food is the dharma-joy⁴⁰ and meditative bliss⁴¹.” Having spoken this, she pointed towards the eastern realm and flew away.

The *Hokke genki* identifies her as the elder sister of the wife of Fujiwara no Takaie 藤原隆家 (979–1044), a government official serving at Dazaifu 太宰府 at the time. Dykstra

notes that there is no other variant of this tale, which is accurate insofar as its narrative content does not correspond directly to any other account. Nevertheless, two additional references to a Fujiwara laywoman disciple appear elsewhere: first in the *Gokurakuki* and later in the *Konjaku*. Although these tales share the same title (*Nyodeshi Fujiwara-shi* 女弟子藤原氏), their contents differ substantially. In the latter accounts, the woman is portrayed as engaging exclusively in Pure Land practice through *nenbutsu*, while only her exceptional abilities and rigorous commitment to Buddhist practice remain consistent across the sources.

The increasing prominence of *nenbutsu* does not replace earlier practices but is layered upon them, preserving *Lotus Sutra* devotion and repentance as integral components of religious life. This concurrence confirms that early Pure Land belief functioned within a plural practice environment rather than as an exclusive path. Finally, material culture and literary descriptions from the late Heian and early Kamakura periods confirm the continued co-existence of Amitābha and Lotus devotion. The following representations may therefore be read as visual confirmation of patterns already established in narrative and ritual contexts, rather than as evidence of doctrinal transformation.

There are records indicating that Amitābha Buddha and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva were enshrined next to each other, not just in adjacent Buddhist halls for repentance: from the beginning of the Kamakura period, sources also attest to the joint veneration of this buddha and bodhisattva through the placement of their painted images side by side. The earliest such reference appears in the *Hōjōki* 方丈記 (“An Account of the Ten Foot Square Hut”, 1212), written by Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1156?–1216). In his description of the modest living conditions, he notes that on the northern wall of his hut he hung a painting of Amitābha Buddha, beside which he placed an image of Samantabhadra; in front of these images, he also set a copy of the *Lotus Sutra*:

北によせて障子をへだてて阿彌陀の絵像を安置し、そばに普賢をかき、前に法花経を置けり。(SNKBZ 44: 29)

To the north, beyond the sliding doors, a painting of Amitābha was placed; beside it an image of Samantabhadra was hung, and in front of them the *Lotus Sutra* was placed.

A comparable spatial arrangement is described in the *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 (“Tale of the Taira Clan”; mid-thirteenth century, author unknown). In an episode set in 1186, the retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河法皇 (1127–1192; r. 1155–1158) visits the former empress Kenreimon’in 建礼門院 (Taira no Tokuko/Noriko 平徳子, 1155–1213), the second daughter of Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛 (1118–1181), who became a monk and was living in a hut at Ōhara 大原, North of Kyoto. Having taken monastic vows, she was living in a hermitage at Ōhara 大原, north of Kyoto. The narrative describes an Amitābha triad is enshrined within the hut; to its right is a painted image of Samantabhadra, and to its left a painting of Shandao 善導 (613–681), the influential Chinese patriarch of Pure Land thought, placed alongside an image of the former emperor (Jp. *sentei* 先帝). In front of these images, as in the earlier example, a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* is again displayed:

御庵室に入らせ給ひて障子を引き開けて御覧ずれば一間には来迎の三尊おはします。中尊の御手には五色の糸を懸けられたり。左には普賢画像、右に善導和尚並びに先帝の御影置きたり、八軸の妙文九帖の御書も懸けられたり。(SNKBZ 46: 514)

When he was led into the hermitage and the sliding doors were drawn open for him to see, there appeared within the single room, a descending and welcoming (*raigō*) triad. In the hands of the central figure were suspended threads of five colours. To the left, an image of Samantabhadra, and to the right a set of images of the monk Shandao and of the former emperor were placed. In addi-

tion, eight hanging scrolls of sacred texts and nine booklets of wondrous writings were displayed.

Kenreimon'in had been the consort of Emperor Takakura 高倉天皇 (1161–1181; r. 1168–1180) and was the mother of Emperor Antoku 安徳天皇 (r. 1180–1185). The visit described in the narrative took place shortly after the defeat of the Taira clan at the Battle of Dannoura 壇ノ浦 in 1185, during which the child-emperor Antoku perished—only five years old at the time. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the portrait mentioned in the account represents her deceased husband or son.

6. Conclusions

The examination of Heian period *setsuwa* literature demonstrates that early Japanese Pure Land belief developed within a complex, pluralistic, and non-exclusive religious environment. The narratives found in the *Nihon ryōiki*, the *Hokke genki*, and the *Konjaku monogatari* reveal a religious world in which rebirth aspirations, karmic causality, repentance rituals, and scriptural devotion co-exist without rigid doctrinal boundaries. Rather than privileging a single practice or destination, these tales depict multiple paths to salvation, including rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land, ascent to various heavens, or the resolution of karmic hindrances within one's lifetime. In the light of Pure Land scholarship, this narrative evidence complements studies that have focused on doctrinal and systematic formulations of Heian Pure Land thought—most notably those centred on the *Ōjōyōshū*—by demonstrating how rebirth aspirations were embedded in lived religious practice and narrative representation rather than articulated as an exclusive soteriological system.

In this context, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva emerges as a key figure linking *Lotus Sutra* devotion, repentance practice, and early Pure Land thought. His appearances are closely tied to the concerns that dominate Heian period religious thought: the accumulation of merit, the purification of the six senses, and the removal of karmic obstacles that impede spiritual progress. Whether manifesting directly, appearing in dreams, or acting through ritual efficacy, Samantabhadra functions as more than a purely eschatological saviour, distinguishing him from Amitābha while still situating him firmly within the soteriological imagination of the period. By foregrounding Samantabhadra's corrective and stabilizing role, this study offers a new interpretive lens for early Pure Land belief, one that shifts attention from rebirth destinations alone to the ritual and karmic conditions under which salvific aspirations were understood to become effective. Moreover, by examining rare narrative attestations of salvific destinations beyond the Pure Lands of Amitābha and Maitreya—such as the Eastern realm associated with Samantabhadra—the paper highlights a broader range of soteriological aspirations embedded in Heian religious practice.

The analysis of the *Hokke genki* and the *Konjaku* further shows that religious biographies were not static records but adaptable narratives that evolved alongside changing devotional emphases. As *nenbutsu* practice gained prominence over the centuries, some biographies were expanded or reconfigured to highlight Pure Land aspirations more explicitly, while others retained their original focus on Lotus practice and repentance. These transformations do not suggest a linear progression toward exclusivist Pure Land belief, but rather a gradual rebalancing of practices within an already diverse religious field.

The textual and—as a supplement—visual materials examined in this paper demonstrate that Heian period Pure Land belief, as reflected in *setsuwa* literature, was neither uniform nor exclusive. Instead, it was interwoven with *Lotus Sutra* faith, repentance rituals, and a broader cosmology of karmic recompense and divine intervention. Samantabhadra's recurring presence in these narratives highlights the extent to which early Pure Land thought was embedded in other ritual practices and literary tradition. Recognizing this plural configuration, the paper not only repositions Samantabhadra within the study

of Japanese Buddhism but also highlights the limits of sectarian categories for understanding the religious landscape of pre-Kamakura Japan.

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Abbreviations

Ch.	Chinese
DDZ	<i>Dengyō daishi zenshū</i> 伝教大師全集 [Collected Works of Dengyō Daishi/Saichō]. Edited by the Hieizan Senshūin Fuzoku Eizan Gakuin 比叡山専修院附属叡山学院. 5 volumes. Sakamoto (Shiga): Hieizan Tosho Kankōjo 比叡山図書刊行所, 1926–1927.
DNBZ	<i>Dai nihon bukkyō zensho</i> 大日本仏教全書 [Comprehensive Collection of Japanese Buddhist Texts]. Edited by the Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan 鈴木学術財団. 100 volumes. Tokyo: Kōdansha 講談社, 1970–1973.
DNS	<i>Dai nihon shiryō</i> 大日本史料 [Great Collection of Japanese Historical Records]. Edited by the Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo 東京大学史料編纂所. 428 volumes. Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo 東京大学史料編纂所, since 1901 (under publication).
GR	<i>Gunsho ruijū</i> 群書類従 [Collection of Japanese Classics]. Edited by Hanawa, Hoki'ichi 塙保己一 (1746–1821). 29 volumes. Tokyo: Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai 群書類従完成会, 1959–1960.
Jp.	Japanese
NBT	<i>Nihon bungaku taikei</i> 日本文学大系 [Compendium of Japanese Literature]. Edited by the Kokumin Tosho Kabushiki Gaisha 国民図書株式会社. 25 volumes. Tokyo: Kokumin Tosho Kabushiki Gaisha 国民図書株式会社, 1925–1928.
NST	<i>Nihon shisō taikei</i> 日本思想大系 [Compendium of Japanese Philosophy]. Edited by Ienaga, Saburō 家永三郎, Ishimoda, Tadashi 石母田正, Inoue, Mitsusada 井上光貞, et al. 67 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 岩波書店, 1970–1982.
RS	<i>Rikkokushi</i> 六国史 [The Six National Chronicles]. Edited by Saeki, Ariyoshi 佐伯有義. 12 volumes. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha 朝日新聞社, 1940–1941.
Sk.	Sanskrit
SNKBZ	<i>Shinpen nihon koten bungaku zenshū</i> 新編日本古典文学全集 [New Edition of the Complete Collection of Japanese Classical Literature]. Edited by Mabuchi, Kazuo 馬淵和夫, Kunisaki, Fumimaro 国東文磨, Inagaki, Taiichi 稲垣泰. 88 volumes. Tokyo: Shōgakusan 小学館, 1994–2002.
Sk.	Sanskrit
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大藏經 [Buddhist Canon Compiled under the Taishō Era (1912–1926)]. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1932.

Notes

- Throughout the text, names of persons and deities, and titles of texts are written in the language that they were native to. One exception is the *Lotus Sutra*, which is mentioned in the largest quantity; therefore we use its abbreviated English title. Names and titles of the Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures and other Chinese writings are written with Traditional Chinese characters. Names and titles of Japanese origins are given with Japanese *kanji* as used today in Japanese academic writing.
- It is commonly referred to as the Land of Ultimate Bliss (Skt. Sukhāvatī, Ch. Jile, Jp. Gokuraku 極楽). Other names include Land of Peace and Sustenance (Ch. Anyanghuo, Jp. Anyōkoku 安養国), or Land of Peace and Delight (Ch. Anleguo, Jp. Anrakukoku 安樂国).

- 3 There are two complete Chinese translations of the sutra; the most referred to is Kumārajīva's version (*T* no. 262, 9). I use this text when citing this scripture. The other translation is Dharmarakṣa's (?–1058) *Zhengfahua jing* 正法華經 ("Lotus Sutra of the True Dharma"; *T* no. 263, 9) from c. 286. There is also the supplemented translation of Jñānagupta (523–605?) and Dharmagupta (?–619) from 602, the *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing* 添品妙法蓮華經 ("Supplemented Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law"; *T* no. 264, 9).
- 4 For more about this mural, see (Wong 2008, pp. 145–47).
- 5 For more about these bronze statues, see (Nara National Museum 2015).
- 6 For more about these bronze statues, see (Nara National Museum 1998, p. 212; 2015, pp. 251–52; Kaneko 2000).
- 7 With the Seikai mandala 清海曼荼羅 (996, Chōshōji temple 超昇寺, Nara), these three are the mandalas depicting the pure land of Amitābha Buddha (*jōdo san mandara* 淨土三曼荼羅). They are also referred to as (*jōdo*) *hensōzu* (淨土)變相図, or images of pure lands and hells.
- 8 For more about the Taima mandala and its belief, see (Suda 2012).
- 9 *Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經 ("The Sutra on the Buddha of Infinite Life" or *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*; third century, translated by Saṃghavarman [third century]), *Guan Wuliangshou Fo jing* 觀無量壽佛經 ("The Sutra on the Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life"; 424, translated by Kālayaśas [fifth century]), and *Emituo jing* 阿彌陀經, ("Sutra on Amitāyus Buddha" or *Shorter Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*; fourth-fifth centuries, translated by Kumārajīva [344–413]).
- 10 One of the twelve Indian literary genres (Skt. *dvādaśāṅga*). Other genres include the sutras or the *jātaka* stories.
- 11 Three fascicles. *T* no. 1963, 47: 83b02–104a15. Biographies of monks and lay followers. For more about Chinese pure land teachings and their dissemination, see (Jones 2019).
- 12 A Japanese person of letters (Jp. *bunjin* 文人). In 986 he became a Buddhist monk at Enryakuji 延暦寺 on Mt. Hiei 比叡山 (Tendai).
- 13 *DNBZ* 38: 263–329. For more about this, see (Rhodes 2007, 2017).
- 14 For more about these, see for example (Kiribayashi 2021).
- 15 In tale no. 30, fascicle 3 his presence might be suggested as one of the flanking bodhisattvas of Śākyamuni Buddha (Ch. Shijia Rulai, Jp. Shaka Nyorai 釈迦如来): 「尺迦丈六亦脇士」, "Śākyamuni (one) *jō* and six (*shaku*) [app. 4.8 meters] (in size) and assistants" (*SNKBZ* 10: 331). In addition, in tale no. 30, fascicle 1, in which a pure land to the north is mentioned: 「放生之者生北方无量淨土」, "who let go of the beings, (who are usually caught and killed), those will be born in the Northern immeasurable pure land" (*SNKBZ* 10: 101). Note 17 on page 99 explains that this is Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's pure land, although in the *Guan Puxian Pusa xingfa jing* 觀普賢菩薩行法經 ("Sutra of Contemplation of the Dharma Practice of Universal Sage [Samantabhadra] Bodhisattva"; translated by Dharmamitra between 424–442; hereafter *Samantabhadra Contemplation Sutra*) states that the bodhisattva comes from the Eastern pure land (「普賢菩薩乃生東方淨妙國土」, "Samantabhadra Bodhisattva was born in the Eastern pure land", *T* no. 277, 9: 389c15). The origin of this note is unclear.
- 16 The earliest recorded reading of the *Lotus Sutra* dates to the reign of Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (554–628, reigned 593–628), specifically to the fourteenth year of her reign (606). On this occasion, Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (574–622), serving as the empress's regent, lectured on the sutra at the Okamoto Imperial Palace. According to the *Nihon shoki*, "the empress expressed great delight and subsequently ordered that one hundred *chō* of rice fields in Harima Province be granted to the prince and incorporated into his Ikaruga Temple" (「是歲。皇太子亦講法華經於岡本宮。天皇大喜之。播磨國水田百町。施于皇太子。因以納于斑鳩寺。」, *Nihon shoki* 22, *SNKBZ* 3: 554). Ikaruga Temple 斑鳩寺, founded by the empress and Prince Shōtoku in 607, was destroyed by fire in 670 and later rebuilt near its original location. In the *Nihon shoki*, the temple is already referred to as Hōryūji at the time of its destruction (*Nihon shoki* 27, *SNKBZ* 4: 286).
- 17 *Shoku nihongi* 14, *RS* 3: 298–299.
- 18 In the *Konjaku*, his name appears as Jōon; however, the content of the narratives strongly indicates that the individual in question is indeed Shin'on.
- 19 Female monastics are designated as *bikuni* 比丘尼 (Skt. *bhikṣuṇī*) or are identified by the addition of the character *ni* (or *ama*) 尼 to their Buddhist names. In the case of Gansai, her name is sometimes recorded as Gansaini 願西尼, though this usage is not consistent. This inconsistency is potentially problematic, as a monk bearing the same name and written with identical Chinese characters was active during roughly the same period.
- 20 For more about the *hijiri*, see for example (Shinno and Swanson 1993; Gorai [1975] 2011).
- 21 In this short early Mahāyāna sutra Samantabhadra discerns the mode of repentance to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva (Ch. Wenshu Pusa, Jp. Monju Bosatsu 文殊菩薩). There are seven groups of sins that are a mix from the seven branches (Ch. *qizhi*, Jp. *shichishi* 七支) and the ten unwholesome activities (Ch. *shie*, Jp. *jūaku* 十惡). For more about this sutra, see (Kiss 2024, 'Samantabhadra szútrák fordítása és hatása Japánban', pp. 91–115; Nakamikado 1999, 2024; Shih 2013).
- 22 For more about this sutra, see Hamar (2024), 'Samantabhadra kultusza Kínában', pp. 29–81.
- 23 These four are included and explained in Zhiyi's *Mohe zhiguan*. For more about this, see (Stevenson 1986).
- 24 See, for example, the *Eizan daishiden* 叡山大師伝. 「弘仁三年七月上旬ニ。造リ二法華三昧堂ヲ一。」 "In the first third of the seventh month, third year of Kōnin era (812), a Lotus Samādhi Hall was erected." *DDZ* 5: 27.

- 25 「建立法華三昧堂。吹大法螺。日夜不斷誦誦法華。」 “A Lotus Samādhi Hall was erected, the great Dharma conch was sounded, and the *Lotus Sutra* was chanted without interruption, both day and night.” *NST* 7: 515.
- 26 *Nittō guhō junrei kōki* 2, *DNBZ* 72: 110.
- 27 *Eigaku yōki* 1, *GR* 24: 525.
- 28 [Proffitt \(2020\)](#) suggests that the *jōgyō zanmai* might have been taught earlier by Saichō as well. For more about this, see ([Proffitt 2020](#), p. 144). Tendai sources also attest to this (*Eigaku yōki* 1, *GR* 24: 525.).
- 29 *Eigaku yōki* 1, *GR* 24: 525.
- 30 Originating in India, the six times of the day when practice (worship) is done. The six times are (*jinjō* 晨朝 [6 am], *nicchū* 日中 [noon], *nichimotsu* 日没 [dusk], *shoya* 初夜 [6 to 10 pm], *chūya* 中夜 [midnight], and *goya* 後夜 [appr. 4 am]).
- 31 Eubanks examines in detail the tales that discuss faulty memory, see ([Eubanks 2009](#), pp. 218–219). Additional examples of this motif appear elsewhere in the *Hokke genki*. In one tale (no. 31), the Daigoji monk Ezō 恵増 (?–?) is unable to remember two characters of the *Lotus Sutra*, while in another (no. 77) the monk Gyōhan 行範 (?–?) fails to memorize an entire chapter. Gyōhan is said to have been a horse in a previous life, serving a monk who recited the *Lotus Sutra*; the chapter he cannot now recall is precisely the one he did not hear in that former existence. Gyōhan’s case thus closely parallels that of the Renson’s.
- 32 Skt. *suragarbha*, celestial guardians of the dharma, who manifest as youthful messengers representing the buddhas and bodhisattvas.
- 33 The *samādhi* (or meditative concentration) of chanting the name of Amitābha with which practitioners can obtain the merits of the buddha, just as with the *nenbutsu*.
- 34 *Rainen* 礼念 means “worshipping and keeping in mind the buddha”).
- 35 *Shōnen* 称念 means “chanting a buddha’s or bodhisattva’s name and keeping them in mind”, or can be a compound word from *shōmyō* 称名 (“chanting a buddha’s or bodhisattva’s name”) and *nenbutsu*.
- 36 Tateyama hell would become widely known in later times, especially after its depiction (Tateyama mandala) appears, depicting blood pools as a special hell for women, based on the Chinese apocryphal scripture, the *Xiepen jing* 血盆經 (“Blood Pool Sutra”) which is disseminated from the fifteenth century. For more about the Tateyama hell, see ([Fukue 2005](#)).
- 37 For more about the *Fudaraku tokai*, see ([Moerman 2005](#); [Ōshika 2013, 2015](#)).
- 38 The land is only mentioned in two sutras: two Chinese translations of the *Lotus Sutra*, first in Kumārajīva’s (*T* no. 262, 9: 61a13–14), then in Jñānagupta’s and Dharmagupta’s (*T* no. 264, 9: 194c4), and in the *Guanfo sanmei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經 (“Sutra on the Ocean-Like Samādhi of the Visualization of the Buddha”; translated by Buddhābhaya [358–429], *T* no. 643, 15: 688b24).
- 39 For more about this, see ([Lopez and Stone 2019](#), pp. 258–62).
- 40 Dharma-joy means to enjoy the dharma so much like someone enjoys food that nourishes the body.
- 41 The nourishment from the joy of mystical trance or meditation.

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