

Amidaist Practices in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* (“Continuation of the Biographies of Japanese Reborn Into the Pure Land”)

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Abstract. The article discusses practices for reaching rebirth in the Pure Land recounted in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* (“Continuation of the Biographies of Japanese Reborn Into the Pure Land”), composed in 1101-1111 by Ōe-no Masafusa. These practices include those mentioned in the stories as being performed during one’s lifetime, intended to show one’s strong devotion to Pure Land, as well as death-bed practices: the description of the death hour is the crucial point of every biography. Some of these practices belong to the Pure Land tradition (the most important to be mentioned is *nenbutsu*, “recollection of Buddha [Amida]”), while others are more likely to be attributed to other traditions (the most important one being reading and reciting the Lotus Sutra): the author obviously does not feel any need to draw a line between them. Normally, these practices are only mentioned in the text and not discussed in detail. This aspect of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* is analyzed in comparison with other important Pure Land texts: *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* (“Japanese Records of Rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy”) by Yoshishige-no Yasutane and *Ōjōyōshū* (“The Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land”) by Genshin. As compared to *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, much stronger emphasis is placed on the death-bed practices than on the lifetime actions and evidence of rebirth. Often, the text focuses on the state of mind of the dying person, his or her determination in performing

death-bed practices. In his work, Ōe-no Masafusa leans on the idea expressed in *Ōjōyōshū* that these are the last moments of life that are decisive and determine one's rebirth, illustrating it with examples.

Keywords: Buddhism in Japan, Pure Land Buddhism, *ōjōden*, Ōe-no Masafusa, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, Genshin.

Introduction

It is believed that the first historically verifiable information about Pure Land Buddhism, or Amidism, in Japan dates back to 640, but it is since the 10th century that this school of Buddhism gains popularity. Representatives of the Tendai school actively participated in its development (here, one must mention Ryōgen, 912–985), with the major role played by Ryōgen's disciple, Genshin (942–1017), who composed *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集, (“The Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land”) (985) – the first large Japanese text dedicated to the veneration of the “Pure Land” (about early Amidism, see: [Andrews 1989; Rhodes 2007; Trubnikova & Bachurin 2009, pp. 282–293]. Genshin's text is a theoretical work, consisting of a huge number of quotations (more than a thousand from over 160 various sutras and treatises). In the same time period, Yoshishige-no Yasutane (933–1002) creates *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* 日本往生極樂記, (“Japanese Records of Rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy”) (for the Russian translation, see [Ōjō Gokurakuki 2001]), a narrative text which started the genre of *ōjōden*, “legends of rebirth in the Pure Land” – collections of biographies of people who, allegedly, gained rebirth in the *Gokuraku* (Sanskrit. *Sukhavati*), the land of Supreme Joy of Buddha Amida, for their good deeds. Both texts laid the foundation of the tradition of Amidism, the former from the point of view of systematic elaboration of the doctrine, and the latter – from the point of view of “vitalizing” it by providing proof of the existence of the Pure Land and the means of achieving it by using the stories of concrete people [Rhodes 2007, pp. 251–252].

In 1101–1111, an aristocrat, scholar, and man of letters Ōe-no Masafusa (1041–1111) composed *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* 続本朝往生伝, (“Continuation of the Biographies of Japanese Reborn Into the Pure Land”), thinking of it as the continuation of *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* (which he states directly in the foreword). Like *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* includes 42 stories arranged in a strictly defined order. It begins with persons of high standing: two stories about emperors – Ichijō and Go-Sanjō, three stories about aristocrats – Minister of the Right Horikawa, *gon-chūnagon* Akimoto and *sangi* Ōe-no Otondo. The larger part is composed of biographies of monks of various ranks: *sōjō* (community elders), *sōzu* (community heads), *shamon* (monks), *ajari* (spiritual teachers) (25 stories), and, in the end, there are biographies of lay men (7 stories), as well as women – nuns and lay women (5 biographies). All heroes of the stories whose years of life are known from other sources lived in the 9th–11th centuries (the are also many about whom there is no information except for what is present in this text), i.e. the text focuses on the relatively recent, from the author’s point of view, past.

Among others, the collection includes biographies of Genshin (this is one of the longest stories; incidentally, it mentions six works by Genshin, including *Ōjōyōshū*) and Yoshishige-no Yasutane. Generally speaking, most monks featuring in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* are representatives of the Tendai school, many of whom are somehow connected to Ryōgen and the Ryōgen-in temple in the area of Yokawa on Mount Hiei. It is there where, in 986, the community of *Nijūgo sammai-e*, (“Gathering of the Twenty-Five Types of Concentration”) the goal of which was joint practice to reach rebirth in the Pure Land, was formed (Genshin was a part of this community, and Yoshishige-no Yasutane was close to it).¹ Apparently, Ōe-no Masafusa had close ties to Ryōgen’s disciples, and, therefore, his text can be called not only a continuation of Yoshishige-no Yasutane’s

¹ The establishment of this community is believed to be one of the major milestones in the formation of Amidism in medieval Japan (see, for instance, [Stone 2016, p. 29]).

work, but also an attempt to reflect upon (and apply in practice) the ideas of Genshin and his circle. It is interesting to see how the Amidist practices, elaborated by Genshin in such detail in his *Ōjōyōshū*, are represented in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*.

Lifetime Practices to Gain Rebirth in the Pure Land

Genshin did not deny the efficiency of various “open” and “secret” practices of the Tendai school, but proclaimed that, for the era of *mappō*, the End of the Law, the “simple way” of the Pure Land practices is most appropriate for the majority of people, the most important of these being *nenbutsu* 念佛, “recollection of Buddha [Amida]”. It is worth noting that, according to him, *nenbutsu* refers to several actions: from complex contemplation exercises based on the visualization of Amida, to simply repeating the phrase “*namu Amida Butsu*”. Genshin devotes a substantial part of his text to the description of right ways to practice *nenbutsu* (*shōshūnenbutsu* 正修念佛) [Rhodes 2007, pp. 254–256].

In *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, as well as in *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, a lot of attention is paid to the *nenbutsu* practice. Suffice it to say that the term “recollection of Buddha [Amida]” is mentioned in 29 biographies out of 42. As a rule, this term is not elaborated (and this is, again, where *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* follows its predecessor): the heroes just 修念佛 or 念佛爲業 – “practice recollection”,² but it is not stated how exactly they do it. An exception is the biography of Otsugi (37), which says: 此日故懸鐘於頸。念佛遶室。 – “On this day, having hung a bell on his neck, he was pacing the room while repeating *nenbutsu*.”

² As a rule, the heroes do it by themselves, with rare exceptions: for example, in the biography of Emperor Ichōjō (1), the “recollection” is read for him by Abbot Keien. This is where *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* differs from *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, where there are more similar cases.

The only detailed theoretical discussion of this issue is given in the biography of Genshin (9): “Someone secretly asked: “Monks’ knowledge and practice are so diverse. Which practice of perfection should be preferred?” [Genshin] responded: “First of all, *nenbutsu*.” They asked again: “In various practices, one reaches success by means of the mind. Should one contemplate *dharmakaya*³ during *nenbutsu*? He replied: “[It is sufficient to] only repeat Buddha’s name.” They asked again: “Why is it not necessary to contemplate?” He replied: “To be reborn [in the Pure Land], calling is sufficient, that is why it is not necessary to contemplate. However, contemplation is not difficult. When one contemplates, the mind is clear and there are no hindrances.”⁴

Some stories also imply other practices connected to the Pure Land. For example, in the biography of Kanshun (11), one can find the mention of contemplation *sangannen* 三觀念, “contemplative recollection”, i.e., concentration on the images of Amida and the Pure Land. In the story of Rikō (17), the term 西方之業, “practices of the Western direction”, is used, while, in the stories about Kakuson (28) and Otsugi (37), there is 淨土之業, “practices of the Pure Land”. In the story of Ōe-no Takachika (34), it is said: 作一堂修迎接, “He built a pavilion and practiced the rite of greeting.”⁵ The biography of Ryōhan (19) tells that, after his death, Buddhist images and sutras covered in blood were found in his secret stash, and then it became apparent that he had secretly performed practices for future rebirth.⁶

Nevertheless, as Genshin and his followers did not believe the *nenbutsu* practice (and other practices of the Pure Land) to be uniquely

³ One of the Buddha’s bodies: the essential body.

⁴ Here and later, the translation is given by the edition [Zoku Honchō ōjōden 1980].

⁵ It is probably a reference to the ritual of *mukaekō* 迎講, “Welcoming Ceremony”, during which a sort of a “rehearsal” of posthumous arrival of Bodhisattvas who come to take the dying person to the Pure Land is conducted (see [Horton 2008]).

⁶ Hereinafter, “rebirth” refers to rebirth in the Pure Land.

possible for gaining rebirth, so did Ōe-no Masafusa not consider it such, and his texts mentions other ascetic practices. These are, for example, sitting meditation *zazen* 坐禪 (29), the practice of *tosō* 斗藪 (28),⁷ the practice of repentance *zange* 懺悔 (15)⁸, contemplation *gachirinkan* (10).⁹ Two stories tell about contemplating the dead body of a deceased relative, the outcome of which was enlightenment (29 and 33). Substantial attention in the collection is paid to reading sacred texts. For example, the biography of Akimoto (5) says that he 修念佛讀經, “practiced *nenbutsu* and reading sutras” (Kōmyō in biography 23 does the same), with the former and the latter obviously perceived as actions of the same nature, equally useful for future rebirth. Reading¹⁰ and copying sutras, pronouncing various mantras (*dharani*) is frequently mentioned in other stories as well. For example, Genshin’s biography provides a whole list of his lifetime “merits”:

“Recited *nenbutsu* 20 *kochi*¹¹ times. Read: the Lotus Sutra – 1,000 times, the Sutra of Perfect Wisdom (Prajnaparamita Sutra) – more than 3,000 times, the Amitabha Sutra – 10,000 scrolls. Recited: the Larger Amida Mantra – 1,000,000 times, the Spell of the Thousand-Handed One – 70,000,000 times, Vijaya Dharani – 300,000 times. Also, the mantra of Amida, Fudō, Luminous Light, Buddha Lochana – the number of this is not known. Besides, making Buddhist statues, as well as copying sutras, giving alms – all [good deeds] cannot be counted.”¹²

⁷ A practice aimed at abandoning the “three desires”: the need for clothes, food, and shelter.

⁸ See [Marran 2013]

⁹ “Concentration on the moon circle.”

¹⁰ Obviously, in most cases, what is meant is not only reading, but also reciting the text.

¹¹ 俱胝, a number (Sanskrit: *Koṭī*): 10,000,000, sometimes also 100,000 or 1,000,000.

¹² In the beginning of Genshin’s biography, there is another list, somewhat different from the one quoted here, which is, it seems, a later addition.

In other stories one can also find the names of various sacred texts, but the most frequently mentioned is the Lotus Sutra,¹³ 法華經 (literally “the Sutra of the [Lotus] Flower of the [Wonderful] Law”), which is sometimes referred to just as 法華 (literally “Flower of the Law”). It is mentioned in 10 biographies, which is comparable with *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, where it is also very important and where it is mentioned in 9 stories. Both texts clearly show that reading the Lotus Sutra is directly linked to good rebirth – this action, obviously, is thought of as one of the lifetime merits facilitating it. As the most vivid examples, one can name the story of Eijitsu (14), which says: 一生誦法華。唯求後世。 – “For his whole life, he was reading the Lotus Sutra and was striving only for future rebirth,” and the story of Kakushin (26), which ends with the words 每日誦法華三十餘年也。已及萬餘部。臨終之刻。猶誦此經。西向入滅。 – “For more than 30 years, every day he was reading the Lotus Sutra: [the number] exceeded ten thousand times. In his death hour, he was only reading this sutra and died, turning to the west.” In this respect one should also note the biography of Reverend Shin’en (16), who passionately desired to see the Buddha in his physical body and, for this purpose, diligently and for many years read and revered the Lotus Sutra. Finally, due to a miraculous dream, his prayer came true – and this led the biographer to draw the following conclusion from the story: 眞緣已奉見生身之佛。豈非往生人乎。 – “Shin’en beheld the Buddha in his physical body. So, did he not obtain rebirth?”

The quoted biography contains a quote from the Lotus Sutra – and this is notable, as the text of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* contains few direct quotations from sacred texts, which, as a rule, are only named, but not “elaborated”. The author was, of course, absolutely confident that the texts mentioned by him were well known to the potential reader, and so no clarifications were necessary, while simply naming them was enough. In the biography of Shin’en, however, the quotation was necessary, as it

¹³ The full name is 妙法蓮華經, the “Sutra of the White Lotus of the Supreme Teaching” – a Mahayana sutra, one of the most revered and well-known in East Asia.

was the driving force of the plot. This is a quote from the 26th chapter: “Constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak and in various other places.”¹⁴ Guided by these words, Shin’en concludes that “various other places” must include Japan as well and, consequently, he must be able to see the Buddha in his physical body.

Such great attention to the Lotus Sutra is far from surprising, as it is the foundational text for the Tendai school, and Masafusa’s connection to it has already been mentioned before. Since the times of Ryōgen, in the Enryaku-ji temple, it became a custom to combine the *nenbutsu* practice with the repentance ritual of *hokke senbō* 法華懺法, which included reciting the Lotus Sutra and repentance actions aimed at purifying the six sensing organs (this ritual was conducted four times a year). Eventually, such combination of the two practices spread to other temples and was adopted by private persons [Stone 2016, p. 40–41]. Accordingly, it is only natural that, for *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, as well as other *ōjōden* collections, *nenbutsu* and the Lotus Sutra go hand in hand, pointing the way to good rebirth.

The biographies in the *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* often emphasize conscious deep striving of the heroes towards the Pure Land and future rebirth. Let us give several examples:

Minister of the Right Horikawa (3): 生前之間唯修後世之業。學天台之教門。 – “During his life, [the Minister of the Right] only performed practices for future rebirth and studied the teaching of Tendai.”

Community elder Jinin (7): 偏期託生淨土耳。 – “He only wholeheartedly hoped to gain refuge in the Pure Land.”

Temporary junior community head Kakuun (8): 早求菩提。 – “From his younger years was striving for enlightenment.”

Monk Zoga (12): 早以發心。唯慕後世。 – “From his younger years gave an oath and only devoted himself to future rebirth.”

Monk Ninga (13): 深恐後世全棄名聞一。 – “Was deeply worried about future life, completely abandoned [striving] for [worldly] fame.”

¹⁴ Translation by B. Watson.

Ajari Eijitsu (14): 唯求後世。 – “He was only striving for future rebirth.”

Monk Ryohan (19): 志求極樂。 – “His soul was striving for the Land of Supreme Joy.”

Monk Anshu (25): 偏拋人世唯期淨土。 – “He completely abandoned the world of the people and was only hoping for the Pure Land.”

Ōe-no Takachika (34): 生前之間。唯慕往生。每見佛像。必不覺之淚。 – “For his whole life, he only devoted himself to rebirth. Every time, looking at a Buddhist statue, he was always unwillingly shedding tears.”

Yoshishige-no Yasutane (31) and the spouse of Minamoto-no Mototada (42) are described as people who had compassion (*jishi* 慈悲).

Ajari Hankyū (20) was exceptionally zealous in venerating the Pure Land: “For his whole life, he devoted himself to the Land of Supreme Joy. Whether he was walking or standing, sitting or lying – he did not turn his back to the west. When he was spitting or defecating, he did not do it in the western direction. From his yearly years, he did not expose his back to the rays of evening sun.”

This is contrasted by the biography of Minamoto-no Yoriyoshi (36), about whom it is said that he came from a warrior family and therefore was killing people all his life. However, “after that, he built a pavilion and [a statue of] the Buddha, deeply repented his sins, read *nenbutsu* for many years and, finally, “left his home.” After his demise, there were many dreams about rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy (其後建堂造佛。深海罪障。多年念佛遂以出家。瞑目之後。多有往生極樂之夢。) Ōe-no Masafusa concludes that 定知。十惡五逆。猶被許迎攝。何況其餘哉。 – “It is known that even ten crimes and five sins can be forgiven and [the one who committed them] will be accepted [in the Pure Land], all the more in such a case.”

The quoted concluding words of the biography of Minamoto-no Yoriyoshi refer not only to it, but also to the previous story (35): its hero, Minamoto-no Noritau, is described as a talented, wealthy, but exceptionally greedy person. Nevertheless, 而臨終正念得極樂迎。 – “But, in his death hour, he obtained the right state of mind and reached

the Land of Supreme Joy.” These words are followed by an important conclusion: 爰知。往生不必依今生業。可謂宿善。 – “It is known that rebirth is defined not necessarily only by the merits of the present life, but also by the merits of the previous life.” This quote makes it clear that, from the author’s point of view, striving towards rebirth during one’s lifetime and performing appropriate actions for this purpose are very good, but, under certain conditions (gaining merit in previous lives), are not necessary. Here, one can also see the reflection of ideas expressed by Genshin in *Ōjōyōshū*.

Generally speaking, it is clear that the author of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* (as well as his predecessor, Yoshishige-no Yasutane) has no intention to single out the Pure Land practices and specifically separate them from the practices of other schools: all practices mentioned in the text are perceived as “links” of a single system, together helping to achieve the goal – obtaining rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy (and it is no accident that the heroes of many biographies are described as possessing extensive knowledge in the field of Buddhist texts).¹⁵ Nevertheless, frequent mentions of the term *nenbutsu* show that this practice is still perceived as the most important one – but, first of all, it is critically important at the moment of one’s death, rather than during one’s lifetime.

Death-Bed Practices

In his work, Genshin emphasizes the crucial importance of death-bed practices: recollection of Amida in the last moments of one’s life can, allegedly, make incomparably more for salvation than performing

¹⁵ All the above-said is linked to the approach to Amidism characteristic of recent research. According to this approach, during most of the Japanese medieval period, Amidism was not a separate movement or school, but, rather, Amidist symbols, rhetoric, and practices crossed all borders, combining with practices and rhetoric of various schools, with rebirth in the Pure Land being the “common goal” (see, for example, [Stone 2016, p. 36]).

similar actions during one's lifetime. The last thought of a dying person must focus on the hope that Amida will lead them into his Pure Land, and they must not divert their attention to anything else, with the actions described by Genshin assisting them in it [Stone 2016, p. 51–53]. *Ōjōyōshū* says:

“This single reflection [on the Buddha] at death outweighs the karmic acts of a hundred years. It this instant should pass you by, rebirth [in samsara] will be unavoidable.” [Stone 2016, p. 81]¹⁶

At this time, these ideas and practices started to spread among aristocrats (see [Horton 2004; Avdyushenkova 2015]). Their importance is clearly seen in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* as well: every biography is necessarily concluded by the description of the hero's death hour. As a rule, the description includes the actions of the person at the death hour and the evidence of this person really reaching rebirth. The biography of Ichijō (1) textually emphasizes the power of 最後念佛, the “last recollections”: 聖運有限。非力之所及。但有生前之約。必可令唱最後念仏。此事相違。此恨綿々。 – “The destiny of an emperor has a limit; this is beyond our power. But there are ties that formed during one's lifetime. One must necessarily read the last recollections. If one does not do it, there will be no end to sorrow.”

Further stories show the importance of the last recollections implicitly, “by default.” The text often mentions the firmness of the dying person's spirit, their determination in reciting the “recollection”: *nenbutsu* is read “without turmoil” (不亂), “intently” (專心), “unceasingly” (不斷), “without rest” (不懈), “wholeheartedly, single-mindedly” (一心), “hundreds of times” (數百遍). But, most often, the narration of the hero's death-bed minutes features the term *shōnen* 正念, which describes the “right state of mind” at the moment of one's death. All these words, emphasizing the ability of the dying person to take their mind under control, reflect the ideas expressed in the *Ōjōyōshū*. In this case, of key importance is the word *shōnen* 正念, as a state without which gaining rebirth in the Pure Land is simply impossible. Let us note that it is this

¹⁶ For the Russian translation of this passage, see [Avdyushenkova 2015, p. 86].

term which is used in the above-quoted biography of Minamoto-no Noritau (35): the fact that, on his deathbed, he remains in the “right state of mind” ultimately defines his successful rebirth. Interestingly, *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* does not use this term, even though its heroes are also diligent in their practice.

Besides *nenbutsu*, the heroes do the following actions in their death hour: perform ablution (沐浴), hold colored ropes in their hands (綵纒),¹⁷ fast (潔齋), burn incense (捧香爐), practice sitting meditation (禪坐), read sutras (讀經), turn to the west (西向; there is also another variant described in Genshin’s biography (9): 北首右脇, “turned his neck to the north, and his sides to the right”), fold their hands into various sacred *mudra* signs (for example, Zoga (12) folds the Diamond *Mudra* 金剛合掌 when dying; and about the Minister of the Right Horikawa (3) the text says that, after his death, his hands were folded into 彌陀迎接之印, the greeting “seal” of Buddha Amida,¹⁸ with the added remark that 平生不知密教。自然如此。 – “As he did not know the secret teaching, it probably became so on its own”), sing *kassatsu* (合殺).¹⁹ All these practices (except for direct references to *kassatsu* and *zazen*) are also mentioned in *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*.

Among the above-named practices, the most frequently mentioned are turning to the west (in 10 stories) and ablution (in 5 biographies), while other actions deserved only few mentions. Eight stories (16, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 38, 41) do not describe death-hour practices at all (but, evidently, imply them). For example, the biography of *bikuni* Enmyo (41) tells about her death hour simply: 臨終之時瑞相自多。 – “During her death hour, there were many good omens,” or, in the biography of Nichien (30): 臨終之相。往生無疑。 – “According to the omens of his

¹⁷ Five-colored ropes bound to the hands of a Buddhist statue, so that it helps the dying person to concentrate. Genshin writes about them in *Ōjōyōshū*, but it is surprising that, in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, they are only mentioned twice.

¹⁸ Right hand raised, left hand lowered.

¹⁹ On *kassatsu*, or *gassatsu*, see [Takeuchi 1996].

death hour, there is no doubt that he gained rebirth.” As one can see from the quoted passages, in the event of lack of information about the heroes performing the necessary actions at the moment of their demise, the author puts an emphasis on “good omens”, i.e., proofs of rebirth (this is also the case with other six stories, where “good omens” are described in more detail).

Often, the heroes of the biographies know about their death beforehand and gather people around them in these days (this probably relates to Genshin’s ideas that, on their deathbed, a person must be supported by an assistant or assistants). Interestingly, while *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* often describes end-of-life visions of the dying person (in particular, it tells about the arrival of miraculous “guests”, visible only to the hero of the biography, who are to guide them into the Pure Land), in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, such descriptions are much less numerous (as an example, one can name the description of the visions of Genshin (9), or the saints who came to meet Henjō (6));²⁰ other biographies contain a couple of mentions of beautiful music (for example, biography 37), or wonderful fragrance (for example, story 42) which the dying person feels.²¹

Comparing *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* with *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, M. Nakao finds two important differences. First, he notes that, compared to the latter text, the former one pays much less attention to the proof that the heroes have, in fact, been reborn. Second, in his opinion, unlike *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, the description of lifetime practices assisting in rebirth is often presented as a secondary,

²⁰ The biography of Henjō contains one of the mentions of term *raigō* 來迎, which is very important for Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū* and which means the arrival of a host of saints to meet the dying person. The text of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* mentions this word two times (for the second time – in the story of Ōe-no Sadamoto (33), where it is featured in a poem composed by the biography’s hero before his death).

²¹ Much more often, the fragrance or music (or other miraculous phenomena) are observed by other people after the biography hero’s death.

“superficial” topic. Instead, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* places much greater emphasis on the right actions of the heroes at the moment of their demise. M. Nakao believes that Ōe-no Masafusa has a lighter, more optimistic view of the problem of rebirth in the Pure Land, which, it seems, reflects the views popular among the aristocrats of that time [Nakao 1980].

In our opinion, one should speak about a certain shift of accent, rather than “lightness” or “optimism”. Indeed, Yoshishige-no Yasutane pays much more attention to lifetime practices and proof of rebirth. But, for Ōe-no Masafusa as well the piety of his heroes is important (and, as we believe, the mentions of their talents and, especially, their miraculous abilities are supposed to strengthen this impression). As has already been said before, in the only case where this is not obvious (the biography of Minamoto-no Noritau (35)), the author mentions the merits from the previous life. At the same time, for Ōe-no Masafusa, the death-bed practices are of special importance: his work takes up and illustrates with examples the idea from *Ōjōyōshū* that the final moments of one’s life are the decisive ones (essentially, at this moment, one can wipe out all the merit earned during one’s lifetime), and this is why it places such emphasis on the right state of mind and firmness of spirit at the hour of one’s death.

Conclusion

Zoku Honchō Ōjōden mentions life-time and death-bed practices the goal of which is to obtain rebirth in the Pure Land. First of all, this is *nenbutsu* recollection; reading the Lotus Sutra is also mentioned frequently, but, episodically, many other practices are mentioned as well. The text pays substantial attention to death-bed practices, often emphasizing the firmness of spirit of the dying person and their “right state of mind”.

Like Yoshishige-no Yasutane in *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, Ōe-no Masafusa in his text does not elaborate the contents of the practices described (generally limiting himself to only mentioning them), even

though, without any doubt, he is well-versed in them and wants to show the reader their importance and value. This is not surprising given that, obviously, teaching *how* to obtain rebirth was not the goal of this text (there were other sources for this, for example, Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*). It was created to demonstrate the “living” examples showing that it was indeed possible and to perpetuate the names of those who, from the point of view of the collection's author, were worthy of it.

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