

Awakening in Dream: The Pure Land Buddhist Practice of Dream Meditation in Medieval Japan

Eisho Nasu

Introduction

The practice of seeing Amida Buddha and his western Pure Land in a dream is one of the most curious but little studied aspects of medieval-period Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. In this practice, a practitioner intensely contemplates on Amida and recites his Name in the hope that, when the practitioner goes to sleep, Amida will manifest together with a vision of the Pure Land in the practitioner's dream. The experience of this spiritual dream vision becomes a testimonial of practitioners' spiritual accomplishment in this life, and confirms their birth in Pure Land in future. The practice of dream meditation also helped medieval practitioners overcome limitations imposed by the idea of the last Dharma age (*mappō* 末法), such as the belief that visualization of Amida and the Pure Land was a nearly impossible practice even for earnest followers of the Pure Land teaching.

The propagation of the exclusive practice of the recitation of the Name (*senju nembutsu* 専修念佛) by Hōnen (法然 1133–1212) during the late Heian and early Kamakura periods resulted in conflicting views about the interpretation of spiritual visions of the Pure Land and Amida appearing in dreams, especially among the followers of Hōnen. While Hōnen did not recommend that his followers practice visualization of the Pure Land, as literally expounded in the *Sūtra on Contemplation of the Buddha of Infinite Life* (*Foshuo guan Wuliangshoufo jing* 仏説観無量寿仏経 [Jp. *Bussetsu Kan Muryōjubutsu kyō*], hereafter *Contemplation Sūtra*), neither did he intend to stop his contemporary followers from having experiences of seeing Amida in their dreams. Hōnen's followers all agreed that Hōnen's fundamental

teaching is the recitation of the Name (*nembutsu* 念仏). But some followers did not consider their anticipation to see Amida in dream to be contradictory with the master's emphasis of the *nembutsu* practice. Others took noncommittal attitudes to dream visualizations of the Pure Land, and they interpreted these dreams very conservatively.

This essay presents a brief study tracing the origins of dream meditation in the Pure Land tradition and how it was practiced among Pure Land followers in medieval Japan. I particularly focus on the influence of Hōnen's teaching of the exclusive *nembutsu* among his disciples, as well as reactions toward dream meditation by those who were inspired by Hōnen's teaching, such as Renshō (or Rensei 蓮生 1138–1208), Chōgen 重源 (1121–1206), Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), and Ippen 一遍 (1239–1289).

1. Origins of Dream Meditation in the Pure Land Tradition

The doctrinal foundations for the practice of dream meditation in the Pure Land teaching originate in the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* (*Banzhou sanmei jing* 般舟三昧經 [Jp. *Hanju zanmaikyō*]). According to the *sūtra*, if practitioners, whether lay or clerical, contemplate intensely on Amida for a period of one to seven days and nights, they will be able to have a waking vision of Amida Buddha. But if they are still not able to see the Buddha clearly, Amida will manifest himself in their dreams while they are sleeping (*Taishō* 13:905a).¹ The manifestation of Amida in a Pure Land practitioner's dream is also noted in the various Chinese translations of the *Larger Sukhāvātīyūha Sūtra* (hereafter *Larger Sūtra*).² The practice of dream meditation discussed in these *sūtras* is intended to be supplementary to intensive meditative vi-

¹ For an English translation of the *sūtra*, see Harrison (1998). For a translation of the Tibetan text of the *sūtra*, see Harrison 1990. For the translation of the single volume edition (abridged version) of this *sūtra* (*Taishō* 13, no. 417), see Inagaki (1989).

² See *Da Amituo jing* 大阿彌陀經 (Jp. *Dai Amidakyō*) in *Taishō* 12:309c–311a, and *Pingdengjue jing* 平等覺經 (Jp. *Byōdogakukyō*) in *Taishō* 12:291c–293a. Also in the *Da Wuliangshou jing* 大無量壽經 (Jp. *Dai Murōjūkyō*), there is a passage describing birth in the lower grades of aspirants as follows: “When they are about to die, they will see the Buddhas in a dream” (Inagaki 2000:270). See also *Taishō* 12:272c.

sualization practiced while awake. Dream visions are also recommended for lay followers who are unable to pursue the intensive and systematic contemplative practices needed to accomplish waking visions.

Shandao 善導 (613–681) is one of the most prominent Chinese Pure Land masters who established the doctrinal foundation of the popular Pure Land practice of *nianfo* 念佛 centered around the recitation of Amida’s Name (Inagaki 2000:107–110). He is also known to have been an accomplished practitioner of the *pratyutpanna samādhi*, who recognized the significance of dream meditation as a part of Pure Land visualization practices. In his *Guan Wuliangshoujing shu* 觀無量壽經疏 (*Commentary to the Contemplation of the Sūtra on Contemplation of the Buddha of Infinite Life* [jp. *Kan Mur'yōjukyō sho*], hereafter *Guanjing shu*), he refers to dream meditation.

As for [the passage of the *Contemplation Sūtra* that says,] “entering into sentient beings’ mind,” it means that, for sentient beings who aspire to see all buddhas, the buddhas fulfill those aspirations with unhindered wisdom and enter into the contemplating hearts [of the practitioners] to manifest themselves. If practitioners see the buddhas in their contemplating minds, or if they see them in dream *samādhi* (*mengding* 夢定), that is the accomplishment of this [contemplation on the Buddha-image]. (*Guanjing shu*, *Dingshanyi* 定善義 [jp. *Jōzengi*] in *Taishō* 37:267a)³

Here, Shandao explains that the eighth contemplation of the Buddha-image (*xiangxiang guan* 像相觀 [jp. *zōsōkan*]) can also be accomplished in dream, which he terms *mengding* (jp. *mujiō*), or dream *samādhi*.

For Shandao, dream meditation was not simply devotional practice. It also had a practical aspect with a very specific function within his Pure Land teaching. According to the conclusion of the *Guanjing shu*, Shandao determined to write a commentary to the *Contemplation Sūtra* to correct past and present misunderstandings of the *sūtra*. Before he started writing the commentary, he asked for a sign of approval in his dream, saying,

If my aspiration is in accordance with the compassionate vows of all buddhas of the three periods, Śākyamuni, Amida, etc., then please let me see

³ Unless otherwise noted, translations of primary texts are by the author.

the entire realm [of the Pure Land] in my dread as I prayed above. (*Guanjing shu*, *Sanshanyi* 散善義 [jp. *Sanzengi*] in *Taishō* 37:278b)

Thereafter he recited the *Smaller Sūtra* three times and the Name thirty thousand times a day. On the first night, in a dream he saw all the aspects of the Pure Land he had hoped to see (*Taishō* 37:278c).

In the *Guanjing shu*, Shandao further records that a monk appeared in his dream every night while he was writing the commentary to give him instructions. After he completed his commentary on the *Contemplation Sūtra*, he again set a period of seven days to contemplate on Amida and received other spiritual dreams of the Pure Land on the first three nights (*Sanshanyi* in *Taishō* 37:278c). Shandao used dream meditation to receive a sign of approval from Amida to prove the authenticity of his interpretation of the *sūtra*.

2. Japanese Practice of Dream Meditation during the Heian Period (794–1185)

In Japan, the practice of the Pure Land teaching became popular especially with the support of aristocratic families during the Heian period. Dream meditation also seems to have been attractive to Heian courtiers, especially those who considered themselves incapable of visualization practice.

According to a legend popular during the Heian period, Chikō 智光 (ca. 709–780), a renown scholar of the Sanron 三論 school at Gangōji 元興寺, was praying for the welfare of a recently deceased fellow monk named Raikō 賴光 who did not seem to practice diligently. After offering prayer for a few months, Chikō met Raikō in dream in which told him that he is now in the Pure Land by virtue of his practice of visualizing Amida and the Pure Land. Raikō explained that he was not participating any practices because he was so absorbed in the visualization all day. Raikō then told Chikō that his mind was too disordered to attain birth in the Pure Land. When Raikō took lamenting Chikō to Amida Buddha himself, he asked the Buddha how ordinary beings whose mind was not strong enough to hold a vision of the Pure Land and Amida could also attain birth in the

Pure Land. Then Amida compassionately revealed a miniature vision of the Pure Land on his right hand. After waking from his dream, Chikō had an artist paint a picture of the Pure Land based on his dream vision, which is later became known as the Chikō Mandara (智光曼荼羅). By contemplating on this picture the rest of his life, he was able to attain the birth in the Pure Land when he died.⁴

Although this folkloric account Chikō dream does not exactly follow the formal protocol of the practice of the *pratyutpanna samādhi*, it suggests that popularity of this practice among Heian Buddhist monks. More significantly, the story provided a hope for those who are not able to accomplish the *pratyutpanna samādhi* while waking, which might have been very encouraging for the lay practitioners who were not able to devote their lives to visualization practice.

The practice of the dream meditation also became a subject of serious doctrinal discussions during the mid-Heian period. A Tendai master, Genshin 源信 (942–1017) compiled the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (*A Collection of Essential Passages Concerning Birth*) in 985, which instantly became the most influential doctrinal texts among monks and laypersons (Okazaki 1977:98–102; and Inagaki 2000:158–163). In the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin cites the passages of the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* and argues that visions of Amida acquired in dream can be equated with a genuine *samādhi* experience of seeing the Buddha while waking, saying, “If the practitioners cannot see the Buddha while waking, they will see him in their dream” (*Taishō* 84:67a).⁵ Genshin’s endorsement of the practice of dream meditation in the *Ōjōyōshū* seems to resonate with sincere aspirations of his contemporary lay practitioners,

⁴ This story is included in the *Nihon ōjōgokurakuki* 日本往生極樂記 (1974:24–25) by Yoshishige no Yasutane and the *Ōjōjūin* 往生拾因 (*Taishō* 84:98c–99a) by Yōkan 永觀 (1033–1111), both compiled during the Heian Period. Historically, Chikō 智光 (ca. 709–780) of the Sanron 三論 school at Gangōji 元興寺 is one of the leading Buddhist scholar during the Nara Period (710–784), who wrote the earliest known commentary of *Jingtu lun* 淨土論 (Jp. *Jōdoron*) attested to Vasubandhu (ca. 320–400 C.E.) in Japan. Among Heian courtiers, however, Chikō was better known for his Pure Land mandala (Okazaki 1977:37–43). For a brief summary of Chikō’s Pure Land teaching, see also Inagaki (2000:146–147).

⁵ It is noteworthy that Genshin cites this passages of the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* (*Taishō* 13:899a) not directly from the *sūtra* but as a citation in Shandao’s

especially those who considered themselves incapable of visualization practice.

Genshin's approval of dream meditation have influenced the later Pure Land followers, especially lay practitioners: it seems that it became a custom among them to rely on dreams to confirm a Pure Land practitioner's birth in the Pure Land (Nishiguchi 1968). For example, Miyoshi Tameyasu 三善為康 (1049–1139), a middle-class courtier, was known as the person who was inspired most by his own dream visions of Pure Land. In the introduction to *Shūi ōjōden* 拾遺往生伝, he recorded that, while he was a devout aspirant for birth in the Pure Land since he was young,⁶ he was suddenly awoken by a dream vision of his own birth in the Pure Land when he was fifty (*Shūi ōjōden*:279–280). Japanese Pure Land practitioners, especially lay followers, discovered that their dreams could become a legitimate method to accomplish visualization of the Pure Land and Amida, which was generally understood as otherwise beyond the reach of ordinary practitioners living in the age of *mappō*.

The popular practice of spiritual dreaming, though requiring a strong devotional mind and intensive prayers, did not necessitate any particular spiritual qualifications or training and was therefore widely practiced among Heian courtiers.⁷ Lay practitioners who aspired to attain birth in the Pure

Guannianfamen 觀念法門 (Jp. *Kannen bōmon*, *Taishō* 47:24a) perhaps because of the spiritual authority of Shandao who actually accomplished this *samādhi* experience (*Taishō* 13:899a). In the *Ōjōyōshu*, he cites two more passages related to the dream meditation from ;72b–c; and 74a–b. The sources of the other two passages on dream meditation from the different translations of the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* (*Taishō* 84:72b–c; 74a–b). The sources of these two passages are from 1) *Banzhou sanmei jing* (*Taishō* 13:913a); and 2) *Dajijing xianhufen* 大集經賢護分 (Jp. *Daijikyō kengobun*), a translation of the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* in five volumes (*Taishō* 13:875c), respectively.

⁶ Tameyasu practiced intensive recitations of the *nembutsu* (ten thousand times a day), but his practice also included the recitation of names of various buddhas, Shingon mantras, and Mahāyāna *sūtras*. This represents a typical Pure Land practice before Hōnen's time. See Hayami (1978:203–228); Obara (1987:190–238).

⁷ The popular acceptance of Buddhist practice of dream *samādhi* in Japan was perhaps partially due to the pre-existing Japanese practice of receiving oracles and other spiritual revelations in dream. For example, in a practice called *ukei* 祈誓, dreams were used to make decisions or judgements (Nakamura 1981:93; Ōno 1982:153).

Land, even if they lacked Miyoshi Tameyasu's intensity, might without hesitation try dream meditation. Perhaps their wishes for a vision of Amida and the Pure Land were accomplished considerably easier in dream than while awake (Khalil 1990).

3. Hōnen's View on Dream Meditation

Toward the end of the Heian period, the method of Pure Land practice in Japan encountered a drastic transformation when Hōnen established the Pure Land teaching as an independent Buddhist school. Hōnen's Pure Land teaching is characterized by his promotion of the practice of exclusive recitation of the *nembutsu* (*senju nembutsu* 専修念佛). In his *Senchaku hongan nembutsushū* 選択本願念佛集 (*Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow*, hereafter *Senchakushū*), he maintains that "as the act that leads to birth in the Pure Land, the *nembutsu* is taken to be fundamental."⁸ He instructed his followers that other practices are, though meritorious by nature, not true causes of birth in Pure Land for sentient beings because they are not in accordance with Amida's Primal Vow.⁹

Although Hōnen did not discuss dream meditation at length in his writings, it is clear that he recognized the virtues of seeing visions of the Pure Land in dream. For example, in his *Senchakushū*, he quotes Shandao's record of dream visions of Amida and the Pure Land as proof that Shandao's *Guanjing shu* is the authentic "guide to the Western Land (*saihō no shinan* 西方の指南)" and suggests that the monk who gave Shandao instruction how to compose the *Guanjing shu* was "most probably a manifestation of [A]mida himself" (*Senchakushū* 1998:152).

Hōnen did not encourage his followers to practice visualization of Amida, but neither did he negate the virtues of having an experience of seeing Amida

⁸ This is the opening passage of the *Senchakushū*. Citation of the passage is based on the translation in *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereafter CWS), p. 53. Hōnen himself takes this phrase from the *Ōjōyōshū* (*Taishō* 84:67a).

⁹ See, for example, "Kumagai no nyūdō e tsukawasu ohenji," in *Shūi gotōroku* (1941:760–761); and "Kujōdono kitanomandokoro ohenji," in *Saihō shinanshō* (1941:232–234). See also *Senchakushū* (1998:126–136).

in this life. Hōnen himself customarily practiced *betsuji nembutsu* 別時念佛 (*nembutsu* practice for a fixed period of time) and accomplished various levels of visualization of the Pure Land. In a text called *Sanmai hottokuki* 三昧発得記, Hōnen records his own *samādhi* experiences attained during the period 1198–1206, including seeing adornments of the Pure Land and the figures of Amida with his two attending bodhisattva, Kannon and Seishi.¹⁰ It seems, however, that during his lifetime Hōnen did not allow the circulation of the text of his *samādhi* experiences even among his disciples (Kanaoka 1986:208). Perhaps, Hōnen wanted to avoid unnecessary confusion among his followers regarding the meaning of exclusive *nembutsu* practice. As a follower of Shandao's Pure Land teaching, Hōnen did not have any doubt about the possibility that Amida might manifest himself in the dream of an earnest *nembutsu* practitioner; but, as a promoter of the practice of exclusive recitation of the *nembutsu*, he seems to have been very careful not to encourage his followers to recite the Name in order to attain spiritual visions.¹¹

¹⁰ *Sanmai hottokuki* is included in *Saihō shinanshō* 西方指南抄, compiled by Shinran in 1257 (*Sanmai hottokuki* 1941:127–129). See also *Shūi gotōroku* (1941:687–689). Although there is some doubt regarding the authenticity of the accounts of Hōnen's *samādhi* experiences, they are almost unanimously accepted as authentic by his close disciples (Blum 2000).

¹¹ For example, following story demonstrates Hōnen's attitude on striving to achieve visions:

Someone asked, "The *Contemplation Sutra* teaches how one may see Amida Buddha's body and land. Should I do such meditations even if I practice utterance of the Name?" Hōnen answered, "In the beginning I too performed such useless practices, but not any longer. I entrust myself solely to the utterance of the Name." (Hirota 1989:60)

Hōnen's somewhat ambivalent view of dream meditation is perhaps best expressed in the dream of another. After Hōnen's death, one of his follower Jōshinbō seems to have troubled with his views on visualization practice and prayed eagerly in search of answers.

After his attainment of birth, Hōnen appeared to Jūshinbō of Miidera in a dream and answered his question:

Though you ask, Amida Buddha is completely without appearances.
One can only say the Name. (Hirota 1989:58)

4. The Practice of Dream Meditation among Hōnen's Followers

Although Hōnen's followers understood that his most fundamental teaching is the recitation of the Name, some did not consider their anticipation of seeing Amida in dream to be contradictory with the exclusive practice of *nembutsu*. For example, Chōgen (1121–1206), a contemporary and close associate of Hōnen who became famous for his successful fund raising activities in rebuilding Tōdaiji in 1195, wrote in his *Namuamidabutsu sazenshū* 南無阿彌陀仏作善集 (A Collection [Telling How] "Namuamidabutsu" Created Good) about his experience of seeing Amida in his dream at Zenkōji 善光寺 in Nagano prefecture.¹² Chōgen performed various practices and records two separate occasions of dream visions. First he practiced the thirteen-day *hyakumanben nembutsu* 百万遍念佛 (a million-time recitation of *nembutsu*) at Zenkōji and in a dream received golden *śarīra* (*shari* 舍利) from Amida. On the second occasion, he practiced the seven-day *fudan nembutsu* 不断念佛 (continuous recitation of *nembutsu*) at the same temple and encountered Amida face to face in a dream.

Another famous disciple of Hōnen, Renshō (1138–1208), also records seeing a vision of Amida and his birth in the Pure Land in a dream (Khalil 1990:156). In 1204, he vowed to attain birth in the Pure Land in the rank of *jōbon jōshō* 上品上生 (highest level of the highest grade) and prayed that a sign of approval be shown him in a dream. That night in his dream, he saw himself sitting on a golden lotus flower with a very long stem. Amida's direct testimony given to these practitioners in their dreams no doubt provided them with renewed aspiration to attain birth in the Pure Land.¹³

Within a generation after Hōnen, his Pure Land teaching gradually entered into the mainstream of Japanese Buddhist practice. Among the successors of Hōnen's Pure Land School, Shinran, the founder of Jōdo

¹² Chōgen compiled this text in about 1203. For a historical examination of Chōgen's experience at Zenkōji, see Sakai 1969:681). For a study of Chōgen's life and works, see Kobayashi (1965) and (1971). For the edited Japanese text of the *Namuamidabutsu sazenshū*, see *Dainihon shiryō*, vol. 4, no. 9 (1909:57–66). A photographic reproduction is published by Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo (1955).

¹³ For the details of Renshō's dream visions, see Coates and Ishizuka (1949:488–504).

Shinshū 浄土真宗, and Ippen, the founder of Jishū 時宗 are known to have received spiritual visions in their dreams, at the most crucial junctures in their respective religious quests. Shinran's determination to convert to Hōnen's teaching was inspired by his dream at Rokkakudō (Dobbins 2002:23–24). His name "Shakkū" was also changed "in accordance with a revelation in a dream" (*Kyōgyōshinshō*, in CWS:290). Ippen called his teaching "the oral transmission bestowed in dream by the Kumano Manifestation (*gongen*)" (Hirota 1997:111). However, their approaches to dream meditation to receive visions of the Pure Land and Amida were more cautious and critical. They never recommended their followers to practice dream meditation. On the other hand, they did not completely dismiss the possibility of having experiences of dream visions of the Pure Land received spontaneously in their dreams.

Dreams in fact played an important role throughout Shinran's career. Shinran records that the opening verse of the *Shōzōmatsu Wasan* 正像末和讃 was received in dream.¹⁴ He was also particularly interested in gathering records of Hōnen's spiritual dreams on the Pure Land and Amida. In *Saihōshinanshō* 西方指南抄 compiled in 1257, Shinran collected numerous accounts of spiritual dreams about Hōnen seen by his followers after he died.¹⁵ This work also includes Hōnen's *Sanmai hottokuki*¹⁶ as well as a record of one of Hōnen's dreams titled "Hōnen Shōnin gomusōki" 法然聖人御夢想記.¹⁷

Shinran, however, remains silent about his own dream experiences, except for two brief accounts of *mukoku* 夢告 (dream revelation) in his own

¹⁴In the opening Hymn of the *Shōzōmatsu Wasan*, Shinran wrote,

In 1257 (Kōgen 2), on the night of the ninth day of the second month, during the hour of the tiger, I was told in a dream:
Entrust yourself to Amida's Primal Vow,
Through the benefit of being grasped, never to be abandoned,
All who entrust themselves to the Primal Vow
Attain the supreme enlightenment. (CWS:397)

¹⁵See "Kōin no mukoku" 公胤の夢告, in *Saihō shinanshō*:125; and "Shōnin reimuki" 諸人靈夢記, in *Saihō shinanshō* (1941:141–152).

¹⁶See *Sanmai hottokuki* in *Saihō shinanshō* (1941:127–129).

¹⁷See *Saihō shinanshō* (1941:129–131).

writings.¹⁸ On the other hand, privately, Shinran and his wife Eshinni 恵信尼 (1182–?) openly discussed their spiritual visions of Kannon 觀音 and of Hōnen as an incarnation of Seishi 勢至 in their dreams (Dobbins 2004:26–27).¹⁹ Eshinni, however, seems to have been aware of Shinran’s critical approach to dream vision. Eshinni, in her dream, also saw Shinran appear as an incarnation of Kannon, but did not disclose it to anyone until after Shinran died (Dobbins 2004:122).

As for Ippen, he seems to have been much more critical about the indiscreet practice of dream meditation. For example, it is recorded that he admonished one of his followers who made a record of a dream identifying Ippen as an incarnation of Seishi, saying, “It is *nembutsu* that is crucial. If I am not Seishi, will you be unable to entrust yourself to it?” (Hirota 1997:122) Another of Ippen’s sayings further elucidates his attitude toward visions, both waking and sleeping.

Do not seek a vision of Buddha apart from the saying of the Name. The Name itself is the true and genuine seeing of Buddha. Buddha seen with the physical eye is not true Buddha. Buddha seen with the eyes we now possess, we must realize that it is a demon. In dreams, however, seeing that is authentic may occur, for with dreams, the six forms of consciousness die away, and we have them while in a state of nondiscrimination. Thus, the *Commentary* [of Shandao] speaks of “dream meditation [*mujiō*].” (Hirota 1997:87)²⁰

Ippen recognizes the possibility of seeing Amida in dream as a genuine

¹⁸ *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in CWS:290; and *Shōzōmatsu Wasan*, in CWS:397. In addition, there are two texts called *Shinran muki*. Although these manuscripts recording Shinran’s dreams are not by Shinran himself, the content of these texts are generally agreed to be an authentic account by Shinran. See Hiramatsu (1998:39–42, 59–74) and Hiramatsu (1988:161–169).

¹⁹ See also *Eshinni shōsoku* (1941:106).

²⁰ The *Commentary* mentioned in this passage is Shandao’s *Guanjing shu*. According to Shandao’s commentary, the experience of seeing Amida in dream happens not because of the practitioner’s contemplation, but rather Amida realizing the practitioner’s aspiration to see him enters into the person’s mind in dream. See *Guanjing shu*, *Dingshanyi* (*Taishō* 37:267a).

samādhi experience, although he did not encourage his followers to practice visualizing Amida and the Pure Land even in dream.

Ippen and Shinran both recognized the significance of spiritual visions received in their own dream, yet both remained cautious about the practice of dream meditation. It is also noteworthy that both of them only talked about the vision of bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi who are attendants of Amida Buddha. They never mentioned Amida himself or the visions of his Pure Land, although it is highly possible that they might have such visions. It is, perhaps, not that they did not believe people were capable of receiving visions. Rather, it seems they were afraid that, without proper guidance and doctrinal understanding of what they had seen, these spiritual experiences might mislead them into a wrong view of entrusting the visions rather than Amida's Primal Vow. Ippen and Shinran did not want to see Hōnen's emphasis on the exclusive *nembutsu* practice become obfuscated by sensationalistic—but in the end soteriologically impotent—experiences.

Conclusion

Hōnen's promotion of the exclusive practice of recitation of the Name had a great impact, setting a new direction in the development of Japanese Pure Land practice during the medieval period. Hōnen's followers, who eventually became the majority of Japanese Pure Land practitioners, did not promote the practice of visualizing images of the Pure Land or Amida, since they did not believe they were capable of practicing such visualizations by their own power during the time of *mappō*.

As for the practice of dream meditation, however, Hōnen could not rule out the possibility of practitioners having visions of Amida and the Pure Land in dreams as a result of their intense *nembutsu* practice. As a result, Hōnen's followers cautiously continued to affirm dream experiences of seeing Amida and the Pure Land. The practice of dream meditation helped them overcome limitations imposed by the idea of *mappō*, such as the belief that visualization of Amida and Pure Land were hardly attainable even by the most earnest follower. Perhaps it was the only doctrinally legitimate way to see Amida and the Pure Land in this life without digressing from Hōnen's teaching of *senju nembutsu* practice.

Within the Jōdo Shinshū tradition, regardless of Shinran's cautious and critical attitudes toward the dream meditation, his followers' interests in having of dream visions did not apparently disappear. The *Godenshō* 御伝鈔, an official biography compiled by Kakunyo 覺如 (1270–1351), the third abbot of Hongwanji, records various accounts of dream meditation by Shinran and his followers and maintains that Shinran was a manifestation of Amida Buddha based on such dream visions.²¹ For example, in section four of volume one, we find the following account.

On the ninth day of the second month in the eighth year of Kenchō (1256 A.D.), at the Tiger's hour at night, Shaku Rennin had a vision in which he was told of the Imperial Heir, Shōtoku, who, prostrating himself before the Shōnin Shinran, said, "I must reverently bow to the Great Merciful Buddha Amida, who has revealed himself on earth in order to propagate the doctrine full of spiritual meaning; for it is through him that I, born in a world of evils and at the age of the five defilements, was enabled most assuredly to attain the highest wisdom." According to this, it is evident that the Shōnin, the founder of the True Sect, was no other personage than an incarnation of Amida Tathāgata. (Suzuki 1973:171)

This story was recorded a few generations after Rennin 蓮位 died and may not reflect a historically accurate account. Though legendary, however, this story, incorporated into Shinran's official biography, accurately reflect the popularity of the practice of dream meditation and the importance of dream visions among medieval Japanese Pure Land practitioners.

²¹ Kakunyo also recorded Shinran's dream vision at Rokkakudō (1-3), a dream of an artist who was asked to paint a portrait of Shinran in 1242 (1-8), a man's dream of seeing *kami* of the Hakone shrine (2-5), and Heitarō's dream at the Kumano shrine (2-6). For an English translation of the *Godenshō*, see Suzuki (1973).

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