

Behind the Sensationalism: Images of a Decaying Corpse in Japanese Buddhist Art

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One of the most provocative images in Japanese art is the *kusōzu*, a graphic depiction of a corpse in the process of decay and decomposition. The *kusōzu*, “painting of the nine stages of a decaying corpse” (hereafter, painting of the nine stages), was executed in Japan from approximately the thirteenth through the nineteenth centuries in various formats, including handscrolls, hanging scrolls, and printed books. The subject itself is derived from a traditional Buddhist doctrine that urges contemplation on the nine stages of a decaying corpse (*kusōkan*, hereafter, contemplation on the nine stages). The teaching dates to the early fifth century and promotes a systematic meditation on the impurity of a decaying corpse as an aid to ardent devotees who wish to liberate themselves from sensual desires and affections.¹

This paper explores unrecognized features of the paintings of the nine stages as they appear through almost half a millennium of Japanese art. We will see that these narrative paintings functioned as distinct visual agents for audiences in different eras. The functionality of the image shifted from a meditative focus for pietistic catharsis, to a didactic incentive for the pursuit of paradise, to an intercessory offering for the dead at merit transferal rites, to a popularized platform for politically manipulated precepts on feminine morality. After giving the textual and theological background for the nine stages of a decaying corpse, I will examine four images of the nine stages from different centuries, which I term the Nakamura, Raigōji, Dainenbutsuji, and Akagi versions. Finally, some remarks are offered on the enduring vitality of this sensational subject.

Religious and Literary Background

A proper understanding of these images relies on a conversance with the doctrinal sources treating the decaying corpse as a subject for devotional practice. The contemplation on the nine stages, while found in many Buddhist sutras, first appeared in the *Sutra on the Samādhi Contemplation of the Oceanlike Buddha* (Japanese: *Kanbutsu zanmai kaikyō*; Chinese: *Guanfo sanmei hai jing*, translated by Buddhahadra [359–429], ca. 400) or the *Discourse on the Great Wisdom* (Japanese: *Dai chidoron*; Sanskrit: *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sāstra*, translated by Kumārajīva [344–413], 402–5).² The practice is a type of contemplation on impurity (Japanese: *fujōkan*) that allows devotees to overcome hindrances to enlightenment and to conquer carnal desires, especially the sexual appetite.³ In the *Discourse on the Great Wisdom* and other texts, such as the *Chapters on the True Meaning of Mahayana Teachings* (Japanese: *Daijō gishō*, Chinese: *Dacheng yizhang*), by the Chinese monk Hui Yuan (523–592), the love for another’s body is subdivided into multiple types, and instruction is given as to which phase of the decaying process is effective as a focus of meditation for conquering each lust.⁴

The *Discourse on the Great Wisdom* is especially significant in

that this text contributed to the development of the contemplation on the nine stages and its pictorialization in Japan. This text provided the canonical sequence of corporeal decay used in paintings of the genre (see App. 1): (1) distension (*chōsō*); (2) rupture (*kaisō*); (3) exudation of blood (*ketsuzusō*); (4) putrefaction (*nōransō*); (5) discoloration and desiccation (*seiosō*); (6) consumption by animals and birds (*tansō*); (7) dismemberment (*sansō*); (8) bones (*kossō*); and (9) parched to dust (*shōsō*). The order stated in the *Discourse on the Great Wisdom* probably entered Japanese paintings of the subject by means of the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation* (Japanese: *Maka shikan*, Chinese: *Mohe zhiguan*), recorded and edited by a disciple of the Chinese Tiantai (Japanese: Tendai) master Zhiyi (538–597) based on his lecture in 594. The *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, which preserved the order of decay given in the *Discourse on the Great Wisdom*, had a substantial impact on Pure Land Buddhist belief, including the content of the *Essentials of Salvation* (Japanese: *Ōjōyōshū*), a seminal work of Pure Land belief written by the Japanese monk Genshin (942–1017) of the Tendai school in 985.⁵ The description of the stages of a decaying corpse in the *Essentials of Salvation* includes direct quotations from the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, although the order of the stages differs (see App. 1).

The nine stages of decay appear also in medieval literature, and a review of these passages can further illuminate the development of the subject. The theme is found in a verse form termed “poem of the contemplations on the nine stages of a decaying corpse” (Japanese: *kusōkanshi*). Such poems have survived in China as well as in Japan,⁶ where two versions existed. The Japanese poems were written in Chinese characters and are attributed to the luminaries Kūkai (774–835) and Su Tongpo (1063–1101).⁷ The two poems (which can be termed the Kūkai and Su Tongpo versions) derive their authority from the stature of their supposed authors: Kūkai, the famed Japanese monk who brought esoteric Buddhism from China to Japan and founded the Shingon school, and Su Tongpo, who was a Northern Song scholar-bureaucrat as well as a renowned poet and calligrapher. Both poems detail the nine stages of a decaying corpse, but in different formats and orders, and with some variation in the designations assigned to each stage (see App. 1). The Kūkai version has a short preface followed by twelve five-character verses for each stage, while the Su Tongpo version has a preface followed by eight seven-character verses for each stage.⁸ The Su Tongpo poem is included in woodblock-printed books dated between 1380 and 1384⁹ and in depictions of the nine stages that were widely circulated during the Edo period (1603–1867), with examples found in printed books, hanging scrolls, and handscrolls. (Because of its importance to the depictions of the nine stages, the poem is translated in Appendix 2.) The

oldest surviving illustrated handscroll inscribed with the Su Tongpo poem is dated to 1527 (at Dainenbutsuji in Osaka). As early as 1380, the poem began to be consistently accompanied by *waka* poetry, a verse form characterized by thirty-one syllables in five strophes. For each of the nine stages, the relevant verses of the Su Tongpo poem were followed by two *waka*, yielding a total of eighteen *waka* for the image. The author and date of these *waka* are unknown. The Kūkai version, by contrast, never appeared in conjunction with the images of corporeal decay.

As it was frequently mentioned in Buddhist sutras, the practice of contemplating on a decaying corpse was adopted widely by monks regardless of their sectarian affiliations. Some medieval tales give accounts of contemplation on a decaying corpse and reveal how monks may have performed the practice with visual aids. For example, a tale in *A Companion in Solitude* (*Kankyo no tomo*, 1216), written by Keisen (d. 1296), describes an anonymous monk at Mount Hiei, headquarters of the Tendai school, who disappeared every night until morning.¹⁰ It was thought that he might be having relations with a woman, because he always looked sad on his return. One evening the monk was followed, and it was discovered that he was going down to Rendaino, a region renowned for its cemeteries, to meditate on a decomposing corpse.¹¹ At this time, corpses were typically left exposed in cemeteries or in fields, since the practice of interment did not become widespread in Japan until after the fourteenth century.¹² The medieval account provides anecdotal confirmation that Buddhist monks exercised the method of contemplation on the nine stages as taught in the *Discourse on the Great Annotations of Abhidharma* (Japanese: *Abi daruma dai bibasharon*, Sanskrit: *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣā-sāstra*, translated by Xuanzang, 656–59). The procedure is outlined in this sutra as follows:

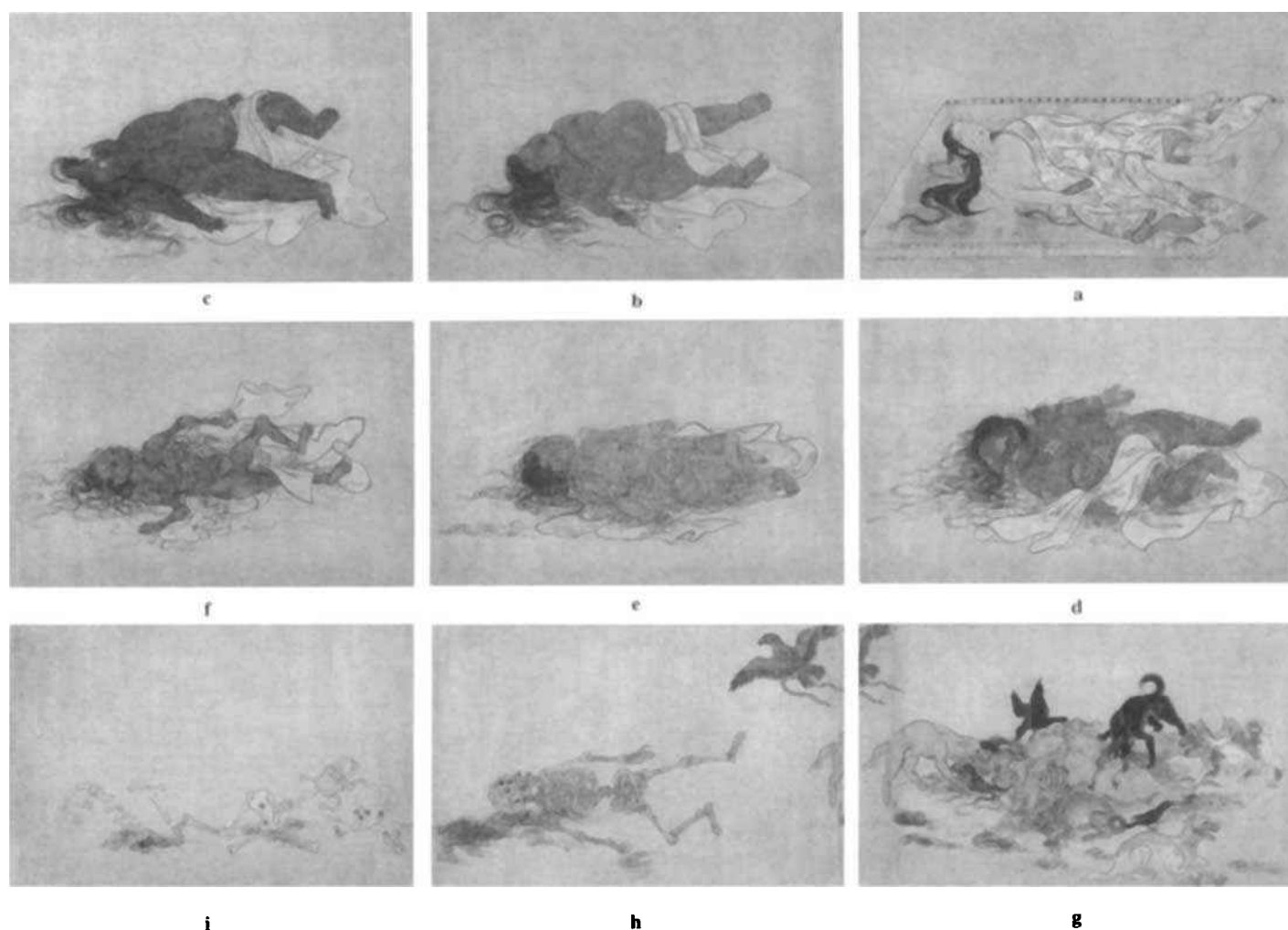
Practitioner, first go to a mound to observe the stages of a decaying corpse, such as the stage of turning bluish black; for a deeper contemplation, step back and sit at a place and contemplate the image again. If the concentration is distracted and the image is unclear, and you wish to attain a better contemplation, again go to the mound to see it as before.¹³

Another literary example of a pious monk curbing his sensual desires through contemplation on an impure decaying body is found in *A Collection of Religious Awakenings* (*Hosshinshū*), written by Kamo no Chōmei (d. 1216). It tells the story of the monk Genpin, who fell in love with the wife of a chief councillor at first sight and confessed this to the councillor. Since the chief councillor greatly respected Genpin, he arranged a rendezvous for the monk and his wife. Genpin appeared in formal clerical attire for their meeting. He never attempted to approach the woman but only gazed on her for about two hours and then left. The chief councillor's reverence for Genpin deepened, seeing that the pious monk overcame his sensual desires by contemplating on the process of decay of the impure body of a beautiful woman. As a result of his contemplation, Genpin achieved an enlightenment in which he realized that people incapable of such self-control who indulge in transitory sensual desires lose

their critical faculties, for attachment to the body is akin to relishing the droppings of maggots in a toilet.¹⁴ The narrative highlights how meditation on the decay of a corpse proved successful in eliminating a monk's sensual desire for the female body through a realization of the transitory qualities of the human "shell." The story also suggests that the trained monk had refined the skill of acquiring the mental image of a decaying corpse without the employment of a putrescent body. Accounts such as these show that contemplations on the corpse were a valued monastic practice in the pursuit of the pious life and that the decaying corpse served as a visual aid to the discipline, at least until the mental image of decay was attained and available for devotional practice.¹⁵ No Japanese medieval tales mention the use of pictorial images of the decaying corpse for meditation. Yet Chinese documents recount that such images accompanied the contemplation on the nine stages, and the practice likely was known among Japanese monks as well. For example, Zhiyi's commentary on the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Essential Meanings of the Lotus Sutra* (Japanese: *Myōhō rengekyō gengi*, Chinese: *Miaofa lianhuajing xuan-yi*, 593), remarks that "[the high rank of] *jōyūgi* [Chinese: *chang youxi*] was given [after death] to those who have built a meditation hall for *zen* [meditation] practitioners and have painted the image of a corpse for contemplation."¹⁶ Another example is that of the Chinese poet Baoji (active about Gensō Tenpō [Chinese: Xuanzong Tianbao] 6 [747]) of the Tang dynasty (618–907), who composed a work entitled "Contemplation on the Mural of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse."¹⁷ The mural has not survived, but the title reveals that the practice of meditating on corporeal decay also existed in China. It is worth noting that Baoji composed a farewell poem for a Japanese envoy to Tang China, which means that the method of employing these paintings for devotional contemplation could have been transmitted to Japan along with the treasured poem.¹⁸

The Painting of the Nine Stages in the Nakamura Collection

I begin our examination of this genre and its remarkable transformation in Japanese culture with what I believe is the earliest type of the image. The handscroll of the nine stages in the Nakamura private collection, dated to the early fourteenth century (Fig. 1a–i, 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ by 195 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches, or 32 by 495.5 centimeters), is generally called the *Kusōshi emaki* (*Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*; hereafter, the Nakamura version). The handscroll includes ten narrative illustrations, arranged from right to left. Before the depiction of the nine stages of decay, the sequence is prefaced by a portrait of a seated woman with long hair, in aristocratic attire, clearly a rendering of the painting's subject before death (Fig. 2). Between her red lips, the white teeth covered by black pigment—a custom among aristocratic women—are visible.¹⁹ The predeath portrait suggests that the subject relished her beauty and wealth, a characterization expressed as well in the subsequent first stage of the newly deceased (Fig. 1a).²⁰ In this stage, she lies with her head supported by a pillow on a raised tatami mat with ornamental trimmings. Her leaf-patterned undergarment covers most of her naked white body but leaves her right breast exposed, a distinctive feature of the Nakamura version.²¹ The first two



1 *Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*, 14th century. Kanagawa, Nakamura Collection (photo: Tokyo National Museum). Stages one through nine, arranged right to left: (a) newly deceased; (b) distension; (c) rupture; (d) exudation of blood; (e) putrefaction; (f) discoloration and desiccation; (g) consumption by birds and animals; (h) skeleton; (i) disjoining.

illustrations seem to emphasize a sensual attractiveness springing from the woman's voluptuous figure and noble background. In arousing an interest in the young beauty before delivering its lesson on taming desire, the image amplifies its cathartic value.

In the third through tenth illustrations, a highly realistic process of decay unfolds in the scroll. The realism is cruelly accentuated in several ways. Each corpse looms large in its frame of 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ by 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (32 by 50 centimeters), leaving little background, aggressively confronting the viewer with its image of corporeal decay. Given the scroll's precise anatomical depictions, it has been suggested that this scroll follows the decomposition process of an actual, observed corpse.²² I agree with this view, and the illustrations in the sixth (Fig. 1f) and eighth stages (Fig. 1h) provide especially compelling visual evidence that there had been a model for these images. The painting of the sixth stage captures the network of sinews and muscles that appear under the parched skin. The complete skeleton in the eighth stage was drawn with a precise, confident brush. It is likely that the artist availed himself of the unburied corpses that were prevalent in Japan at this time.

The relation of the order of the nine stages in the Nakamura version to textual sources has been interpreted various-

ly.²³ The order of the stages of decay in the handscroll is as follows (see App. 1): (0) predeath portrait; (1) newly deceased; (2) distension; (3) rupture; (4) exudation of blood; (5) putrefaction; (6) discoloration and desiccation; (7) consumption by birds and animals; (8) skeleton; and (9) disjoining. The closest match of the order of decay in the Nakamura version is to the description of the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, but with a few differences. An image of the newly deceased was inserted as the first stage of the Nakamura version, and to limit the total number to nine, the ninth stage of bones being parched to dust was omitted.²⁴ Another, more significant, difference is found in the eighth stage. According to the text, in the stage of dismemberment, "the head and hands are located in different places, and five organs are detached from the body and shrunk."²⁵ The Nakamura version does not show the stage of dismemberment. Instead, it displays two different forms of bones in the eighth (Fig. 1h) and ninth stages (Fig. 1i): a whole skeleton and a disjoining of the bones. Thus, the key to interpreting the divergent order of decay in the Nakamura version lies in the reason for articulating two forms of the skeleton and omitting the stage of dismemberment.

As we have noted, descriptions of the nine stages of a decaying corpse are found in many Buddhist sources. The



2 Predeath portrait of an aristocrat woman, from *Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*, 14th century

texts vary in their ordering and description of the decomposition process, but three share an identical sequence: the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, the *Discourse on the Great Wisdom*, and the *Explanations of the Doctrines on Meditation for Enlightenment* (Japanese: *Shakuzen haramitsu shidai hōmon*, Chinese: *Shichan bolomi cidi famen*, by Zhiyi, 568–75). The lack of consistency among the surviving documents may indicate that the order itself was not critical. While the subtitles given to each of the nine stages vary among the sources, the designations share similar meanings for each of the relevant stages, with one obvious exception. Some sources specify one stage relating to bones, and others include two such stages: a whole skeleton and disjointed bones. For sources mentioning a single stage of bones, the texts refer to either a whole skeleton or disjointed bones. For sources that give contemplations on two stages of bones, the whole skeleton and the disjointed bones are designated as distinct objects for meditation in two sequential stages. In these sources, the stage of dismemberment is omitted to allow for the inclusion of two contemplations on different forms of bones. What could have motivated the distinct contemplations on a whole skeleton and the separated bones?

Sequential contemplations on the whole skeleton and on the disjointed bones are found in six Buddhist textual sources: the *Sutra of the Secrets for the Essential Way of Meditation* (Japanese: *Zenpiyōhōkyō*, Chinese: *Chan miyaofa jing*, translated by Kumārajīva, ca. 400), the *Sutra of the Essentials of Meditation* (Japanese: *Zenyōgyō*, Chinese: *Chan yao jing*, translated before 220), the *Chapters on the True Meaning of Mahayana Teachings*, the Su Tongpo and Kūkai versions of the poems on a decaying corpse, and the *Essentials of Salvation*.²⁶ None of these six texts includes a stage of dismemberment. Among them, the *Sutra of the Secrets for the Essential Way of Meditation* and the *Sutra of the Essentials of Meditation* are the oldest meditation manuals characterized by meticulous instructions in zen (Sanskrit: *dhyāna*) practice.²⁷ This zen meditation entails a

specific sequence of concentrations on particular objects that help the practitioner to achieve a state of inner bliss. One of the methods for acquiring the transcendental state was contemplation on a decaying body.²⁸

The *Sutra of the Secrets for the Essential Way of Meditation* is one of the oldest texts for zen practice, and it no doubt influenced later meditative practices. In fact, the content of the sutra was incorporated into actual zen practices. Inside Caves 20 and 42 of the Toyuk Caves, Turfan, Xinjiang Province, China, mural paintings dated to between the mid-fifth and the seventh century²⁹ show the substantial impact of the sutra.³⁰ Both caves have extant images of monks contemplating on a decaying body and on a skeleton (Fig. 3).³¹ Thus, it is clear that from early times monks meditated on bones and (especially) on the whole skeleton as part of zen practice. The significance of the practice is reinforced by the emphasis given to the contemplation of the whole skeleton in other meditation manuals.³²

The two stages of skeletal bones also owe their provenance to the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*. The skeleton in the handscroll is depicted in pink, as if it had just lost its fleshy tissue. The pink hue (Fig. 1h) is clearly distinguished from the pure white color of the disjointed bones in the following stage (Fig. 1i). The distinction in color between the two stages closely resembles the description of the eighth stage found in the text: “Contemplate on the two kinds of bones: the one kind that is still covered by pus, and the other kind that is completely pure white. Or meditate on a set of bones, or their changing into disjointed fragments.”³³

Further evidence that attests to the central role of the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation* in the creation of the images in the Nakamura version is found in the zen practices as outlined in the text itself. Two different levels of contemplation on the nine stages are described. The lower level is contemplation on all stages up through the ninth, when the bones are parched to dust. The text notes,



3 A monk contemplating on a skeleton, Cave 42, Toyuk Caves, Turfan, ca. mid-5th–7th century (photo: courtesy of H. Sudō)

The practitioners who meditate in this way just seek to curtail their sufferings by trying to make the skeleton burn and disappear. They are in a rush to reach the fruit of arhatship [state of liberation], and are no longer enjoying the meditation on the phenomenal aspect of reality. Since they do not continue to contemplate the skeleton, they have no way to reach concentration, transcendental faculty, transformation, vows, wisdom, and the highest level of zen.³⁴

The upper level of contemplation, by contrast, ends before the stage of bones parched to dust. The reason for this enigmatic truncation is now obvious, as contemplation on bones allows the practitioner to attain a transcendental level of meditation that brings the ultimate inner bliss. The Nakamura version follows the upper level of contemplation outlined in the discourse, as it ends with emphasis on the stage of the disjointed bones and does not depict the stage of bones parched to dust.³⁵ Instead, a long blank space (13¾ inches, or 35 centimeters) is left at the end of the scroll after the last illustration, as if indicating that there is another stage in the text. Thus, we see that while the Nakamura version carefully follows the content of the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, it was adjusted specifically to follow the upper level of contemplation for the utilitarian purpose of zen practice. No records have survived to verify the use of the Nakamura version itself, yet the scroll retains the pictorial elements of a prototype employed by monks in their ascetic meditative practices for overcoming sensual desires and, ultimately, for achieving a transcendental state. Let us consider the functions of the Nakamura version in detail.

The Nakamura version's traditional title, *Kusōshi emaki (Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse)*, is not original but was given to the work in 1977 based

on scholarship that viewed the handscroll as an illustration of the Su Tongpo poem on the nine stages.³⁶ Yet no texts of the poem are attached to the illustrations, and no companion handscroll containing the poem has survived, if it existed at all. I argue against this traditional view of the connection between the image and the poem because of the scroll's transparent connection with the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*. In fact, on the lid of the wooden case for the Nakamura version, the inscription reads, "*Kusōzu* (painting of the nine stages of a decaying corpse) painted by Tosa Mitsunobu [active ca. 1469–1523] at Saitō [Western Pagoda], Jakkōin." Jakkōin is a subsidiary temple of Enryakuji, the main temple of the Tendai school on Mount Hiei, in Shiga Prefecture,³⁷ which early on placed an emphasis on the zen contemplative practice.

It is likely that the Tendai school's early and deep association with zen meditation led to the creation of an image at Mount Hiei for ascetic practices that predated the fourteenth-century Nakamura version.³⁸ This supposition is corroborated by an entry in the historical chronicle *Mirror of the Eastern Court (Azuma kagami)* for the eighth day of the eleventh month of 1212 (Kenryaku 2).³⁹ The document recounts that a painting entitled the *Flourish and Decay of the Life of Ono no Komachi (Ono no Komachi ichigo jōsui no koto)* was shown at a picture competition held at the residence of the shogun Minamoto no Sanetomo, and it received the first-place prize. The painting of the ninth-century poet and legendary beauty is believed to have been an image of the nine stages of a decaying corpse. In fact, the Nakamura version was once identified as this work in a Tokyo National Museum exhibition catalog of 1974.⁴⁰ A lack of strong evidence in support of the identification, however, resulted in the removal of this title for the painting. Nonetheless, the account suggests the

existence of the earlier graphic depiction of the decaying corpse of a beauty, which could have been the model for the Nakamura version.

Later, the contemplation on the nine stages became associated with the Zen sect that focused on meditation practice. The biography of Musō Soseki (1275–1351), a prominent Zen monk, tells us that he used a painting of the nine stages at age fourteen in 1288.⁴¹ Thus, the image was known as a pictorial aid within the Zen monastic community. In addition, the two successive contemplations on the skeletal bones, an essential practice in the Zen texts, are mentioned in the two apocryphal Kūkai and Su Tongpo versions of the poems on the nine stages. Nakamura Hajime has suggested that the poems were composed by monks at the primary Zen temples in Kyoto called the Five Mountains.⁴² If true, the practice of two discrete contemplations on skeletal bones had been absorbed by the Zen monastic community. From its locus of origin in the Tendai school, the image of the nine stages began to spread beyond sectarian boundaries throughout medieval Japan.

After its involvement with Zen, the Tendai school at Mount Hiei went on to introduce Pure Land Buddhist belief to Japan. The first exponent of the new belief, which flourished from the late tenth century, was the Tendai monk Genshin, who wrote a seminal work on the Pure Land faith entitled the *Essentials of Salvation*. This treatise, which became the major work for the promulgation of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, provided a new doctrinal and functional context for the image of the decaying corpse.

The Painting of the Nine Stages at Shōju Raigōji

Another early painting of the nine stages, dated to the late thirteenth century, is from a set of fifteen paintings entitled *Six Realms of Reincarnation (Rokudōe)* at Shōju Raigōji in Shiga Prefecture. Although this image is the earliest surviving work of the subject, I believe it represents an interpretation that postdates the type seen in the Nakamura version. A careful study of this work elucidates the entry of the theme into Pure Land Buddhist imagery and clarifies the functions of this example of the genre.

In order to understand the image, we need to take a brief plunge into Pure Land Buddhist cosmology. After death, living beings are thought to be reincarnated into one of six realms—hell, hungry ghosts, animals, titans, human beings, and divine beings—and they remain trapped in these realms if they fail to attain their rebirth in the Western Pure Land, the otherworldly place where the deceased reside with Amida Buddha. To give guidance to those who wish to be emancipated from the cycle of reincarnation, one chapter of Genshin's *Essentials of Salvation* promotes a practice of contemplation on the horrifying aspects of the six realms. It is in the context of devotional contemplation on horror that our present image will find its locus of visual agency. The six realms of existence are treated in a set of paintings at the Shōju Raigōji, a Tendai Buddhist temple. The images complemented the agenda of the *Essentials of Salvation*, and in fact the scrolls have had a long association with the Pure Land Buddhist belief within the Tendai school. They have been housed in the Tendai temples at Reisan'in (from 1313 to 1538) and at Shōju Raigōji (from 1566 to the present).⁴³ This

version is found in a set of fifteen hanging scrolls with paintings that show selected scenes of pain, suffering, and torment from the six realms of reincarnation. Four of the fifteen scrolls treat the human realm and illustrate the aspects of existence: corporeal impurity, the suffering of birth and death, the suffering of war, and life's transience. The scroll illustrating corporeal impurity is entitled *Painting of the Impure Aspect of the Human Realm (jindō fujōzu)*, Fig. 4, 61¼ by 25½ inches, or 155.5 by 65 centimeters) and will be referenced hereafter as the Raigōji version.

It should be noted that the concept of the six realms of reincarnation was at first doctrinally independent from the contemplation on the nine stages. Nonetheless, the pictorialization of the stages of a decaying corpse was selected in the Raigōji version because it expressed the impurity of the human realm. The connection between the contemplation on the nine stages and the six realms of existence stems from the *Essentials of Salvation*,⁴⁴ and while Genshin does not enumerate the nine stages themselves, the awful scenes of the six realms of existence in the Raigōji version refer to the content of this text. In fact, the inscriptions in the cartouches at the top of each scroll were taken from Genshin's treatise.

In this image, which has suffered some fading over the last seven hundred years, the nine stages of a decaying female corpse are arranged in a zigzag fashion from the first illustration (newly deceased, Fig. 5) at upper right to the ninth illustration (bones, Fig. 6) in the lower right corner, in the following order (see App. 1): (1) newly deceased; (2) distension; (3) rupture; (4) exudation of blood; (5) putrefaction; (6) discoloration and desiccation; (7) consumption by birds and animals; (8) dismemberment; and (9) bones. The order of decay after distension follows that of the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, which influenced the *Essentials of Salvation*.⁴⁵ The subject of the decaying corpse is itself lurid, and the images in this painting are rendered in a realistic and unabashed manner. Yet the pictorial details of the Raigōji painting fail to match either the natural process of human decomposition or the descriptions in the sutras. For example, it makes only a minimal visual distinction between the second stage of rupturing to the third of exuding blood, with a nearly identical body differentiated only by the casual application of red pigment in the third stage. The fifth stage of putrefaction (Fig. 7), according to the sutras, should depict the deformed corpse as if it were "wax melted by fire."⁴⁶ But in this image the corpse shows a desiccated state that is closer to the sixth stage (Fig. 8), when the color changes to bluish black through exposure to the wind and sun. In addition, the images of both the fourth and fifth stages, executed in sketchy brushstrokes, have a cartoonlike quality. The seventh stage, of consumption by birds and animals (Fig. 9), is marked by full, white flesh that mimics the illustration of the newly deceased, with no apparent recollection of the bluish black skin and desiccation of the previous stage.⁴⁷ Thus, the Raigōji version captures the outline of the nine stages of a decaying female corpse and delivers a voyeuristic sensationalism derived from the pictorialization of the shocking motif, but it ignores textual and biological accuracy in the portrayal of the process of decay as described in doctrine, including the influential *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*.



4 *Painting of the Impure Aspect of the Human Realm*, late 13th century. Shiga, Shōju Raigōji (photo: Nara National Museum)



5 Detail of Fig. 4: newly deceased



6 Detail of Fig. 4: bones



7 Detail of Fig. 4: putrefaction

The painting has a rectangular cartouche at the upper right corner with an inscription derived from Genshin's *Essentials of Salvation* (Fig. 10):

The human realm has three aspects. One is the impure aspect. The body is largely filled with impurity. It is wrapped by seven layers of skin and nurtured by six tastes. But it is entirely odorous and defiled, and eventually putrefies from its attributes. If it is discarded between mounds, after one to seven days the body is swollen, the color is changed, and the skin is peeled. Before this aspect is seen, the attachment to affections is strong. But, if it is seen, all desires [for the body] cease.⁴⁸

This inscription is not a verbatim quotation of the stages of a decaying corpse as they are described in the text; rather, it



8 Detail of Fig. 4: discoloration and desiccation



9 Detail of Fig. 4: consumption by birds and animals

summarizes the entire section on the impure aspect of the human realm. The summary suggests that the painting was created not to focus on a step-by-step contemplation of the decomposition process but to convey the impurity of the human realm. A deeper knowledge of human defilement led to greater faith in Amida, as devotees sought escape from this world through rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Hence, the execution of the Raigōji version was in accord with the devotional purpose of the companion section of the *Essentials of Salvation*, and both works were created to inspire faith in Amida by describing the foulness of human existence.

The Raigōji version has a significant pictorial element—the landscape—that cannot be explained by religious texts. The hilly terrain in the Raigōji version is characterized by two noteworthy features. First, the soft contours of low hills are delineated with a minimum of textured strokes executed with a flat brush, the hallmarks of an archaic style of traditional Japanese painting called *yamato-e*, which attained its fullest development in the last quarter of the twelfth century. However, the attempt to create a sense of depth dates the painting to sometime about 1300. The landscape was colored mainly in dark ocher, with occasional areas in malachite green. Color tones between ocher and black (often with sparks of red), employed in a majority of the paintings of the six realms of transmigration, serve to convey the gloomy atmosphere of these defiled domains tainted by violence, illness, torture, misery, and a zoo of evils. The dark ocher in the Raigōji version provides a backdrop of barren, desolate ground on which the solitary corpse has been discarded, heightening the sense of man's transitory existence. The second significant aspect of the landscape is the depiction of three trees, each a conventional emblem of its season, overhanging the



10 Detail of Fig. 4: cartouche

corpse: cherry (spring), pine (summer), and maple (autumn). The cherry tree stands over the second stage of the distended corpse, the pine over the third of the ruptured corpse, and the maple over the fourth of the corpse exuding blood. The trees symbolize the passage of time and provide a metaphoric correspondence to the stages of the corpse's decomposition.

The salient features of the landscape in the Raigōji version, desolation and seasonal trees, appear to be derived from Su Tongpo's poem of the contemplations on the nine stages of a decaying corpse (see App. 2).⁴⁹ Although the poem was not written on the scroll, the painting seems to refer to its verses for the landscapes, probably because the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation* gives no topographical descriptions.⁵⁰ Consider, for example, the association between the seasonal trees and the Su Tongpo verses. The verse for the first stage eulogizes the complexion of the newly deceased:

Usual complexion paled during sickness. Fragrant body is as if sleeping. Beloved old friends still stay. The spirit has already departed. *A beautiful face quickly fades as flowers in the third month.* Life is brief like falling autumn leaves. No difference between youth and old age. No escape later or sooner, faster or slower.⁵¹

Here, the poem focuses on the appearance of the corpse, which has just started to discolor, likening it to "flowers in the third month [that is, early spring]." The painting itself shows cherry blossoms, the harbinger of spring, falling over the newly deceased body. No clear allusion to summer follows in the verses for the subsequent stages of decay, but the verses



11 Detail of Fig. 4: grave marker

for the fifth and ninth stages contain terms related to autumn: *shūrin* (long autumn rains) and *akikaze* (autumn wind). The painting shows the maple tree arranged directly over the fifth stage of the decaying corpse. The close correspondence evidences that the Raigōji painting was created by referring specifically to the Su Tongpo poem rather than the Kūkai version, which includes no linear progression of seasonal changes during the process of decay.⁵²

The other noteworthy feature of the landscape in the Raigōji painting, the desolate hills rendered mainly in ocher and some green, is also described in the Su Tongpo poem. For example, the verse for the second stage (distension) reads,

The distension of the newly deceased is hard to identify. After only seven days, mere vestiges of the [original] appearance remain. The rosy face has turned dark and lost its elegance. The raven hair, first withered, is now *tangled with grass roots*. Six organs are putrefied and the corpse pushes out beyond the coffin. The limbs have hardened and *lie on the deserted field*. *The field is desolate*, and no one is present. The spirit has gone to the other world in solitude.⁵³

The motif of the desolate field or of green grasses beneath the corpse is repeated in every stanza of the poem, sometimes in the description of the accretion of tomb mounds.⁵⁴ The Raigōji version follows the poem in its landscapes by placing each stage of the corpse's decay in a barren, undulating field rendered in ocher with traces of green. At the fourth stage, the poem mentions the intermingling of old and new corpses beside the grave; indeed, the Raigōji version places the abandoned corpse beside the grave marker (Fig. 11) in the fourth image.

Thus, a correspondence emerges between the poetic descriptions of the Su Tongpo verses and the painted depictions of the Raigōji version. The correspondence is compelling in light of the fact that the companion Buddhist sutras offer no information about the landscape of this bleak scene. But the resonance of the poem in the painting goes beyond descriptive details. The Su Tongpo poem laments the transitory aspect (*mujō*) of this world and human life. The evocation of the changing seasons and the solitary corpse on the desolate field, integral elements of this theme, are employed in the painting as well. The notion of transience stems from Buddhism, but the sutras on the contemplation of the decaying corpse and human impurity make no explicit reference to the transitory nature of this world.⁵⁵ Yet the concept of impermanence is suitable for a consideration of the cycle of life, death, and decay, and it infuses the exposition of the scenes in the Su Tongpo poem. In its landscape and portrayal of decay, the Raigōji version conveys the allusions in the Su Tongpo poem both to human impurity and to the impermanence of everything in the earthly realm.⁵⁶ Thus, the Raigōji version may allow us to date the Su Tongpo poem to as early as 1300.

We now move to an exploration of the functions of this provocative image. The Raigōji version of the stages of a decaying corpse was one of a set of fifteen hanging scrolls whose content and inscriptions treat the six realms of reincarnation through reference to the *Essentials of Salvation*. Given this source, the significance of the image of the nine stages of a decaying corpse was substantially transformed by its treatment within the ambit of the six realms of existence. As we have noted, this text, authored by the Tendai monk Genshin, became the major work for the promulgation of Pure Land Buddhist belief. Genshin sought to inculcate Pure Land Buddhist belief by juxtaposing the blissful Western Pure Land with the pain and suffering of the six realms of existence, including the human realm and its characteristic impurity (represented by the nine stages of a decaying corpse). Furthermore, the Raigōji version encapsulated the descriptions of the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, the framework of the *Essentials of Salvation*, and the pathos of the Su Tong poem. The devotional message was presented in a form suitable for public edification.

The inclusion of the nine stages of a decaying corpse in this visual juxtaposition seems to have begun about 1200. A medieval temple document, the *New Essential Records of the Daigoji* (*Daigoji shinyōroku*), records that the Enma Hall at Daigoji (Enma was the lord of the realm of the dead), commissioned by Senyōmon'in (1181–1252), the sixth daughter of Emperor Goshirakawa, and completed in the twelfth month of 1223 (Teiō 2), displayed an image of the nine stages in its murals, which were lost when the building was destroyed in 1336.⁵⁷ This textual record provides our earliest evidence for a depiction of the nine stages of a decaying corpse in the framework of the six realms of existence. Senyōmon'in also commissioned an Amida Hall in the twelfth month of 1219 (Shōkyū 1), and this structure was completed within the precincts of the same temple.⁵⁸ Thus, Senyōmon'in practiced her Pure Land Buddhist faith in the opposing (yet closely connected) spatial and spiritual domains of renunciation of the human realm in the Enma Hall and yearning for the

paradise of the Western Pure Land in the Amida Hall, all in accord with the method employed by the *Essentials of Salvation* for deepening faith in the Buddha Amida.

The hanging scrolls portraying the six realms of reincarnation at Shōju Raigōji served as powerful visual agents for the exposition of Genshin's doctrine. The practice of explaining religious beliefs through pictorial devices, called *etoki* (verbal explanation of pictures), began around the end of the twelfth century. While no documents have survived to verify that the set at Shōju Raigōji was employed in a didactic context, a record of the conservation dates of the paintings documents eight restorations between 1313 and 1683.⁵⁹ The frequent restoration of the set may point to its use in public for *etoki* teaching. From the early twentieth century, the paintings have been displayed annually between the thirteenth and fifteenth days of the seventh lunar month as part of the annual ritual held to deliver ancestral spirits from the realms of suffering after death (*urabon*). In addition, the temple houses a script for *etoki* entitled the *Abbreviated History of the Six Realms of Existence* (*Rokudōe sōryaku engi*) that explains the doctrines of the six realms with the use of paintings.⁶⁰ The script was copied in 1897 at the request of a leading member of the temple, and while the date of the original is uncertain, it was likely transmitted at the temple for generations.

The earliest function of the image of the nine stages was for the pious contemplation on human impurity by Buddhist monks who wished to expunge the sensual desires that disturbed their lives of spiritual devotion. Therefore, the selection of a woman of exquisite beauty in the Nakamura version served to enhance the image's original cathartic function of aiding male monks in their taming of sexual desire through viewing the stark opposition between comely beauty and repugnant decay. In fact, a major reference for early paintings of the nine stages of a decaying corpse, the *Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation*, comments on the delusion caused by the beautiful appearance of an elegant woman and the effect of the contemplations on the nine stages for expelling sensual desires. The text admonishes,

Even a woman with graceful eyebrows, jadelike eyes, white teeth, and red lips is as if covered by a mixture of feces with fat powder, or as if a putrefied corpse were clothed with silk and twill. . . . a contemplation like this [on the impurity of a decaying corpse] is a golden remedy for sensual desire.⁶¹

Other earlier Buddhist sutras mention that the contemplation on a corpse is effective for curbing sensual desires, but they make no reference to the gender or appearance of the corpse.⁶²

The selection of a beautiful, aristocratic woman was linked to the expression of transience in the Raigōji version. Such an association is supported by the aforementioned entry in the historical chronicle *Mirror of the Eastern Court* for the eighth day of the eleventh month of 1212 (Kenryaku 2).⁶³ This document recounted that a painting entitled the *Flourish and Decay of the Life of Ono no Komachi* was shown at a picture competition held at the residence of the shogun Minamoto no Sanetomo.⁶⁴ The title assigned to the painting of the nine stages of a decaying corpse, "the flourish and decay," stems

from a deep-seated medieval notion of transience, in particular as experienced in the lives and fortunes of women. The transient aspects of women's lives form a theme in the medieval literary works of female authors (including the legendary Ono no Komachi), a theme fundamentally rooted in their tragic love affairs in the polygamous society.⁶⁵ According to Buddhist doctrine, five obstacles to enlightenment and three kinds of required obedience (to parents, husband, and children, after the husband's death) shaped the woman's lamentable lot.⁶⁶ The characterization of the decaying corpse as a beautiful, aristocratic female—an image that conveyed the epitome of human transience—was important to the new function of the nine stages in the Raigōji version. In the painting, the two Buddhist notions of human impurity and transience were subtly and overtly integrated for didactic impact in the exhortation of Pure Land Buddhist belief.

I should point out here that the reference in the *Mirror of the Eastern Court* to a painting of Ono no Komachi has led to frequent misidentifications of the female corpse in paintings of the nine stages, including the Raigōji version, as the ninth-century figure herself. Ono no Komachi was celebrated for her poetic talent, her stunning beauty during her youth, her trifling with amorous men, and her suffering from decrepitude and destitution in old age. The earliest tale mythologizing the poet is found in the *Flourish and Decay of the Life of Tamatsukuri no Komachi* (*Tamatsukuri no Komachi sōsuisho*), dated perhaps about 1200. Later, the popularity of Ono no Komachi increased as she became the central subject of five Noh plays, among which *Sotoba Komachi* (written by Kan'ami [1333–1384] or Zeami [1363–1443]) captures her hardship in her old age.⁶⁷ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some paintings of the nine stages of a decaying corpse were given the title *The Nine Stages of Ono no Komachi's Decaying Corpse*. After this identification of the female corpse as Ono no Komachi became established in the Edo period, the cadaver in antecedent versions of the painting of the nine stages, including the Raigōji version, has been incorrectly and anachronistically regarded by some as a biographical image of the ninth-century poet.⁶⁸ Yet it is unlikely that a Buddhist devotional image would center on a specific poet and that the tragic, secular female figure Ono no Komachi could have been portrayed in a painting produced by a temple. It is more reasonable to posit that the corpse was an anonymous paragon of beauty and decay. The inaccurate appellation probably arose from a desire among general audiences to establish an identity for the woman in the startling image. Indeed, over the centuries, the beautiful aristocrat of the Raigōji version has also been connected with other legendary beauties. For example, some later paintings of the nine stages were thought to represent Empress Danrin (Emperor Saga's wife, 786–850). The *Abbreviated History of the Six Realms of Existence*, dated to the nineteenth century, comments on the female corpse of the Raigōji version:

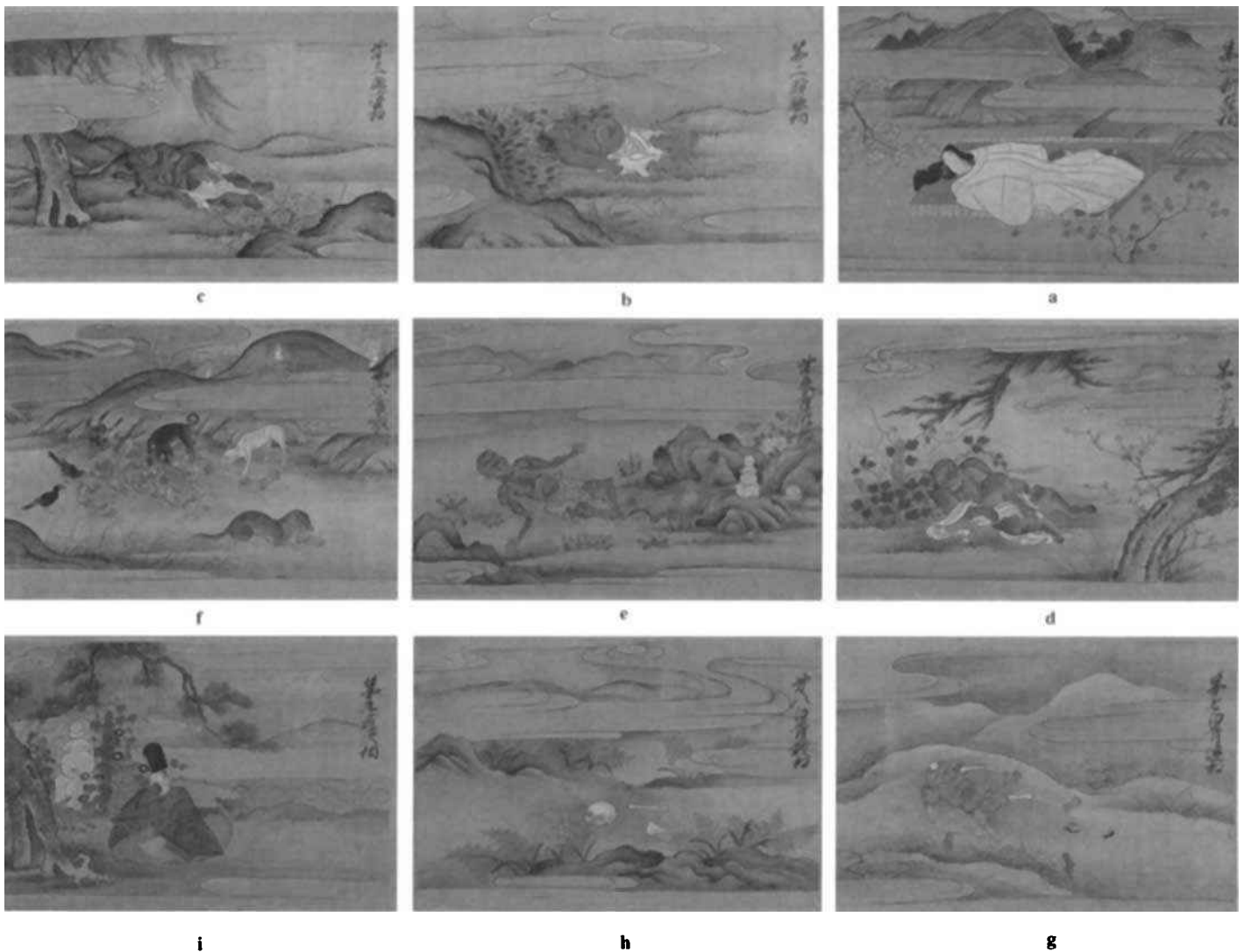
The woman in this [Raigōji] painting is either Empress Kōmyō or Empress Danrin. These two empresses were exceptionally beautiful during their lifetimes, and every man adored them at first sight. They stipulated in their wills that after the moment of death, their bodies should be discarded on the field of the Western Hill. Everybody,

rich and poor, man and woman, crowded at the market in order to see their corpses. What they saw was the gradual process of the corpses' decay to white bones. These two empresses exposed their corpses to the public with the hope that, since all will be equally impure after death, sentient beings in the Latter Days of the Buddhist Law should be awakened through exposure to the impure human condition.⁶⁹

There is no historical evidence to substantiate this anecdote, but it seems to be another instance in which the identity of the female corpse was misrepresented in order to connect the image with a legendary beauty. Such attempts to associate the corpse with historical figures peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They arose from a popular literary genre teaching the ideal way of female life that thrived between the mid-sixteenth and the late seventeenth centuries.⁷⁰ (This issue will be examined presently.)

It may be observed that the portrayal of a woman in the Raigōji version had an ancillary benefit for the promulgation of Pure Land Buddhism. In traditional Buddhist teaching, women were viewed as impure and inferior to men. Women rarely attained salvation, even with extreme devotion, unless they were transformed into men at the moment of death. But Pure Land Buddhist doctrine, remarkably, promises that women could gain salvation as women. While the doctrinal innovation is already evident in a significant Pure Land Buddhist text, the *Larger Sutra* (Japanese: *Muryōjūkyō*, Sanskrit: *Sukhāvati-vyūha*, translated by Buddhahadra and Baoyun [375?–449], 421), its full import had to await Hōnen's (1133–1212) commentary on the sutra, dated 1190.⁷¹ Allowing the salvation of women made it possible for Pure Land Buddhism to attract devotees of both sexes. The Raigōji version, which was created just after the completion of Hōnen's highly influential commentary, might also have inspired women to pursue rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Since this version of the nine stages was intended as an image for public instruction, its audience included both men and women. The doctrinal openness of the image to both genders signaled a marked shift from the exclusively male audience of Buddhist monks targeted by the earlier type of the Nakamura version.

At this juncture we can consider the way in which Pure Land Buddhism encouraged the spread of this provocative image of decay. Although the prototype of the Nakamura version probably existed earlier, there are no textual records mentioning images of the nine stages of a decaying corpse in Japan before about 1200. The dearth of references to the images indicates that the nine stages of a decaying corpse were not subject to popular use before the absorption of Pure Land Buddhism. What may have hindered broader interest in this theme? In medieval Japan, there were deep-seated beliefs about defilement from particular objects, incidents, and conditions. We know from medieval records and diaries that such threats to purity were carefully categorized and rules given for their expurgation. In these regulations, death and the dead body figured among the sources of defilement cited most frequently.⁷² Not only was the corpse seen as unclean, but the defilement was also considered contagious. It is unclear how a painting of a corpse would have been treated in light of these beliefs, but without an overriding religious

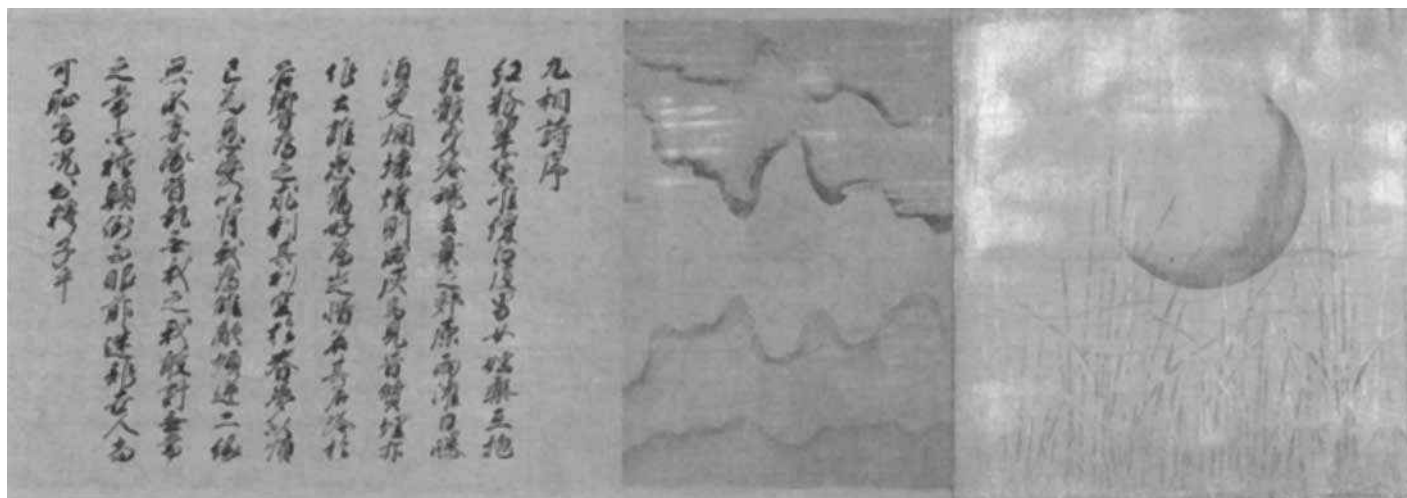


12 *Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*, 1527. Osaka, Dainenbutsuji (photo: Osaka Museum of History). Stages one through nine, arranged right to left, with intervening poems excised: (a) newly deceased; (b) distension; (c) exudation of blood; (d) putrefaction; (e) discoloration and desiccation; (f) consumption by birds and animals; (g) whole skeleton; (h) disjuncting; (i) parched to dust.

motivation, such an image would not have been produced in Japan. Breaking the indigenous taboos and encouraging people to face a corpse for the sake of devotion required a new theological foundation. In this sense, Pure Land Buddhist belief provided the basis that made possible a focused contemplation on death and the corpse.⁷³ Unlike earlier schools of Buddhism that restricted a blissful afterlife to the few of the religious elite who succeeded in achieving liberation from vicious transmigratory cycles, Pure Land Buddhism presented a new manner of devotion to Buddha Amida that could be managed by even lay devotees, thus opening salvation to any who practiced simple *nenbutsu* (to think of the Buddha).⁷⁴ In other words, devotees could now encounter death and corpses, previously untouchable, knowing that their proper devotion to Buddha Amida would assure them of rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Consequently, the image of the nine stages of a decaying corpse was created and circulated contemporaneously with the culmination of Pure Land Buddhism in medieval Japan.

The Painting of the Nine Stages at Dainenbutsuji

Images of the nine stages of a decaying corpse were produced through the nineteenth century. While these retained the sensational subject, they had entirely different functions from those of the early paintings. The examination of two later works will elucidate the transformation of the image within distinct religious and cultural contexts. We turn first to the image of the nine stages at Dainenbutsuji, Osaka (Fig. 12a–i, 12¼ by 184½ inches, or 30.8 by 468.6 centimeters; hereafter, the Dainenbutsuji version). The Dainenbutsuji is the head temple of the Yūzū (all-inclusive) Nenbutsu school, founded by the priest Ryōnin (1072–1132). According to an inscription at the end of the handscroll, the Dainenbutsuji version was created in 1527 (Daiei 7).⁷⁵ The scroll begins with a picture of the crescent moon and autumn grasses painted in silver and gold pigments.⁷⁶ Next is inserted a section containing the wavy watermark decoration that often accompanies calligraphic verses, followed by the preface to the Su Tongpo poem (Fig. 13). Each stage of decay is then presented, with



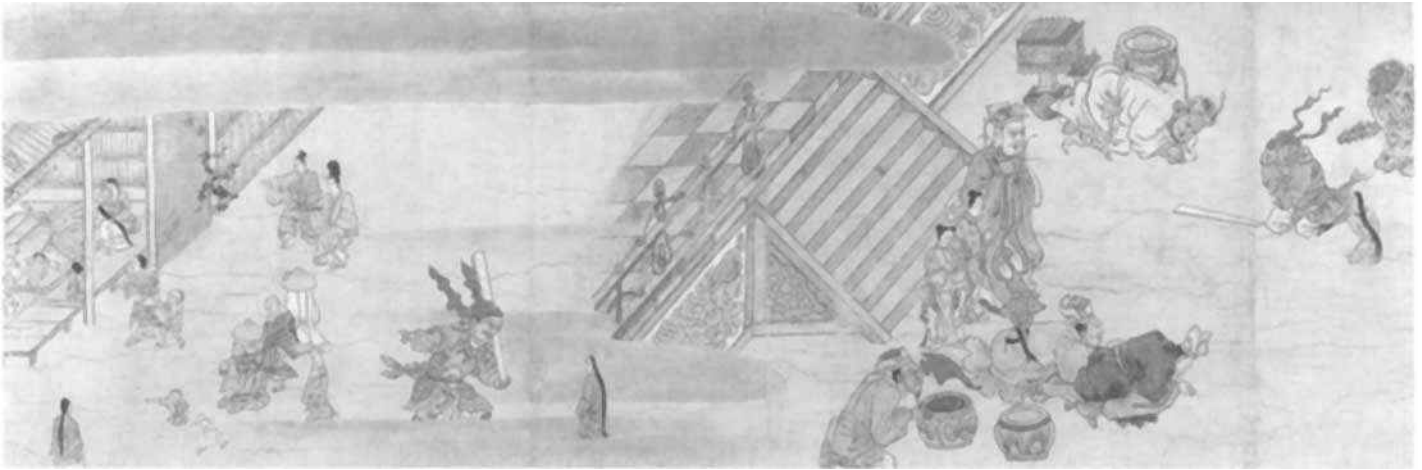
13 Initial scene and preface of the Su Tongpo poem, from *Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*, 1527 (photo: Osaka Museum of History)

the relevant stanza of the poem, written in Chinese characters, and the usual two *waka*, inscribed in a mixture of Chinese characters and Japanese kana syllabary. The calligraphy of the preface and poems is executed with gilt decorations that include seasonal plants, landscape, and birds. The Dainenbutsuji version is the earliest surviving painting of the nine stages to be accompanied by both the Su Tongpo poem and the *waka* verses. Through a graphological analysis of the poems, the writer has been identified as a prominent aristocratic monk, Jōhōji Kōjo (1453–1538), who was renowned for his skillful calligraphy.⁷⁷ No records regarding the provenance of the handscroll have survived, but the painting is likely to have been located at Dainenbutsuji since the early sixteenth century. The calligrapher Jōhōji Kōjo was once an abbot of the Kuramadera temple, which had a long association with the Dainenbutsuji's founder, Ryōnin, and it is likely that Jōhōji would have joined the project at the Dainenbutsuji. The painter is unknown, but the work is attributed to the studio of Kanō Motonobu (1476–1558), the second-generation head of the famed Kanō school of painters. As prominent artists were involved in the creation of the Dainenbutsuji version, we may assume that an affluent patron must have commissioned the work.

Each stage in this version is placed after the relevant subtitle from right to left (see App. 1): (1) newly deceased (*shinshisō*); (2) distension (*hōchōsō*); (3) exudation of blood (*ketsuzusō*); (4) putrefaction (*hōransō*); (5) discoloration and desiccation (*seiosō*); (6) consumption by birds and animals (*shokutansō*); (7) whole skeleton (*hakkotsurenō*); (8) disjointing (*hakkotsusansō*); (9) parched to dust (*jōkesō*). One distinctive feature of the Dainenbutsuji version is its visual correspondence to the accompanying Su Tongpo poem. The nine images have landscapes delineating the graveyard where the dead body has been discarded, and some of the landscape motifs are derived from the poem. For example, in the first stage of the newly deceased (Fig. 12a), both the seasonal cherry and maple trees are painted near the corpse in an echo of the verse: "A beautiful face quickly fades as flowers in the third month. Life is brief like falling autumn leaves." In the fifth stage (Fig. 12e), the painting follows the poem by

showing the morning sun drying out the corpse. The weeds and the pine tree in the eighth (Fig. 12h) and ninth (Fig. 12i) stages echo the poem as well. Yet visual elements that impede the flow of the narration as well as the poem's conveyance of seasonal change preclude a close coordination of the pictorial images and poetic motifs. The first stage, with cherry and maple, simultaneously connotes spring and fall. The autumnal scenes, in the second through fifth stages, and the wintry scenes, in the six through eighth stages, are concluded with summer scenery (denoted by the morning glories) in the last frame. In addition, the particular area of the graveyard rendered in the painting does not remain constant throughout the nine scenes, altered by the casual addition of motifs corresponding to the poem and by changes in major landmarks (such as mountains, trees, and rocks) that convey different locations. Because of the inconsistency of the landscapes throughout the sequence, the process of the corpse's decay plays the primary narrative role. As we have noted, later renderings of the nine stages, including the Dainenbutsuji version, were often attended by both the Su Tongpo poem and the *waka*.⁷⁸ The two *waka* written near each of the nine stages of the Dainenbutsuji version rarely pertain to the stage of the corpse that they accompany.⁷⁹ The poems capture only the general atmosphere of the pathos of transience underlying the decay of the corpse. The authorship and date of the *waka* are uncertain, but we do know that the verses were circulated in the late fourteenth century.

The artistic style of this version warrants special attention. The depiction of the corpse lacks both anatomical precision and a meticulous observation of the process of decay. The eight corpses lying in changing settings look like dolls propped up to mark only the essential plot. The sensational subject is softened further by the *yamato-e* landscapes with the skillful use of hovering fog (*suyari gasumi*), a traditional pictorial device of this style that unifies the scenes of the sequence over the passage of time.⁸⁰ The visual depiction of the Dainenbutsuji version concludes by showing a male aristocrat weeping in front of four stupas (*sotoba*, containers for relics or symbolic sacred objects)—an addition unique to this handscroll (Fig. 12i).⁸¹



14 Pious wife of a lower-ranked monk being returned from the realm of dead to this world, from *Legends of the Yūzū Nenbutsu: Yūzū Nenbutsu Engi*, handscroll, ink, color, and gold on paper, 35 × 485 in. (89.7 × 1232.4 cm), 14th century. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, John L. Severance Fund, Edward L. Whittemore Fund (photo: © The Cleveland Museum of Art)

The early images of the nine stages of a decaying corpse are powerfully didactic in their graphic impact. Their visual effectiveness stems from their exposition of human impurity or their connection to the concept of the six realms of reincarnation. In the *Dainenbutsuji* version, in contrast, the shocking details are no longer articulated. The illustrations have been sanitized from the grotesque instructive descriptions of the decaying corpse in a preference for reflecting the atmosphere and selected elements of the accompanying poems. The simplified illustrations of the corpses in the *Dainenbutsuji* version even seem to laugh rather than howl in death, perhaps out of an intention to deliver the subject of the decaying corpse in a less hortative manner.

Let us now consider the substantial transformation of the image of the nine stages between about 1300 and 1527 from the standpoint of its functions and historical background. The function of the *Dainenbutsuji* version is illuminated by a genre of Buddhist narrative found at the same temple. As the seat of the *Yūzū Nenbutsu* school, the *Dainenbutsuji* temple emphasized the idea of *yūzū*, melding different substances together, their union bringing perfection through synergism. The coalescence of faith resulting from chanting *nenbutsu* with other devotees was thought to eventually bring the practitioners to rebirth in the Western Pure Land. It was said that the school's founder, Ryōnin, in order to amplify the synergistic effect encouraged all devotees to recite *nenbutsu* ten times every morning facing west as a mass thaumaturgic practice. The faith was popular among Buddhists regardless of sectarian affiliation, but it was not until 1661 that the *yūzū nenbutsu* belief became an official Buddhist school.⁸²

Art historically, the school is best known for the *Yūzū nenbutsu engi emaki* (*Illustrated Handscrolls of the Legends of Yūzū Nenbutsu*; hereafter, the *Yūzū emaki*). Since the production of the first two volumes of the handscroll in 1314, the same format and subject have been painted repeatedly.⁸³ In illustrations and calligraphic texts, the first volume narrates the life of Ryōnin, while the second volume depicts the auspicious and miraculous events that befell the practitioners of *yūzū nenbutsu* (Fig. 14). Twenty-eight versions of the hand-

scroll have survived, most of them dated between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, except for several nineteenth-century copies of the earlier versions. The creation of so many versions of an illustrated handscroll having the same subject is exceptional in Japanese art history, and their extensive production reveals the distinct function of the handscrolls within *yūzū nenbutsu* belief.

The characteristic teaching of the school was that the spiritual practice of a single person results in merit for all, and therefore the devotional actions of a multitude increase the salvific benefit exponentially. The religious duties of *yūzū nenbutsu* included the offering of oblations to itinerant monks who preached the belief. Since *yūzū nenbutsu* practice was nonsectarian, the solicitation of offerings was not confined to monks of Ryōnin's lineage. However, the creation of the *Yūzū emaki* for the purposes of outreach and solicitation was undertaken largely by Ryōnin's successors. The illustrated handscrolls that explained the miraculous events of Ryōnin's life and of the *yūzū nenbutsu* practitioners served as a way of legitimizing the spiritual efficacy of the belief and attracting new devotees.⁸⁴ The *Yūzū emaki* became visual aids for the aggressive exposition of the sect's teachings to broad strata of society, from which it could collect contributions and donations. Such a missionary scheme was typically utilized for the illustrated handscrolls at Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples that were widely produced from the thirteenth century on; indeed, the handscroll became a significant medium for garnering capital, particularly under the Ashikaga military government (1336–1571), when Buddhist temples, which had prospered under the estate system of landholding backed by the authority of the central government, could expect little financial support from the weakened court.

A representative preface of one *Yūzū emaki* reveals this aim:

The monks and laity, who heard about the miraculous power and the fortunate examples, wished for the same. If they make bonds [through *yūzū nenbutsu* teaching] by practicing *nenbutsu* and writing their names, they will be

free from all misfortune during this life, and they will attain their desire for salvation in the next life. . . . The intention for painting the teaching of the *yūzū nenbutsu* is to foster belief among the male and female laity.⁸⁵

We see here that the goal of the handscrolls, from the standpoint of the temple, was to create and strengthen ties between the temple and its financially supportive devotees. The content of the *Yūzū emaki* centered on two kinds of stories. One type recounts how the *yūzū nenbutsu* was expounded to many people, rich and poor, male and female, clergy and laity, all of whom attained salvation through *nenbutsu* practice. Stories of the other type tell how practitioners were protected by Buddhist deities, such as Amida and Bishamonten (Sanskrit: Vaiśravaṇa), and they relate the ways in which the power of *yūzū nenbutsu* wrought miracles, such as the revival of a monk's wife from the realm of the dead (Fig. 14) and the recovery of a cowherd's wife from a difficult delivery. It is worth noting that this latter type of story emphasized the miracles that befell female devotees, and such a predilection reflected the school's desire to broadcast the new faith to all.

The compact format of the *Yūzū emaki* handscrolls was handy for the itinerant priests who urged people to perform meritorious acts, including making donations to temples.⁸⁶ In their travels, these priests would preach the content of the scrolls in their solicitation of funds. Documents detail the activities of the itinerant priests through the seventeenth century. For example, the *Diary of Sanjōnishi Sanetaka (Sanetaka kōki)*, in entries for the eighth month of 1510 (Eisho 7), reports, "The monk Ryōen brought the *Yūzū emaki* [to the Sanjōnishi residence], and it was returned on the following day, and each devotee was listed in the record."⁸⁷ Solicitations that utilized paintings of miracles and spiritual efficacy were successful, and in fact the *yūzū nenbutsu* belief attracted not only commoners but also many courtiers and aristocrats. The names of wealthy patrons were inscribed in the various *Yūzū emaki*.⁸⁸

Recent scholarship has revealed that several versions of the *Yūzū emaki* were created for memorial rites, and these were commissioned, along with prayers for the salvation of the deceased, by renowned patrons.⁸⁹ Thus, from the early goals of propagation and solicitation, the functionality of the *Yūzū emaki* evolved to a later objective of prayer for the salvation of a particular deceased practitioner. The development can be readily understood within the thaumaturgic paradigm of the *yūzū nenbutsu* belief, and the salvation of the dead through merit transfer is highlighted in the *Statement Urging People to Perform Meritorious Acts (Yūzū nenbutsu kanjinjō)*, probably written in the late thirteenth century.⁹⁰ The document states, "The devotees who want to perform memorial services for parents, teachers, elders, wives, and children can write their names in this record and recite *nenbutsu*. The merit will then be given to the dead, a merit that is profound and equal to the karma through self-practice." The passage not only describes how the miraculous power of the all-inclusive *nenbutsu* can extend to the deceased, but it also offers further motivation to the readers. They are encouraged to perform memorial services for the rebirth of the deceased in the Western Pure Land. The salvific effect is derived from the phenome-

nal power of *nenbutsu*, which is able to save the deceased from the suffering of the six realms of existence.⁹¹

Several versions of *Yūzū emaki* have survived at the headquarters of the *Yūzū Nenbutsu* school at Dainenbutsuji. The scrolls point to the significance of the medium in expounding *nenbutsu* practice and in attracting supporters, and some versions also attest to their use by wealthy patrons as prayers for the deceased. One print version at the temple dated 1391 was commissioned by a military governor named Minomori Sukekage, who ordered the copy as a prayer for the salvation of his parents. A later version, dated before 1489, believed to have been copied by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshinao (r. 1473–89), likely served as his prayer for some deceased kin.

In light of this background, the function of the painting of the nine stages at Dainenbutsuji can be understood correctly. The handscroll depicts one of the six realms of reincarnation (the human realm), as well as the unique scene of a male aristocrat praying before the stupas in the ninth stage (Fig. 15). While the accompanying poem mentions that unspecified individuals may be mourning at the tomb, the illustration shows a male aristocrat who must be conducting a memorial service for the deceased, perhaps a mother or wife, in order to save her from the realm of suffering. The illustrations of human decay from the first through eighth stages emphasize the consequences of the vicious cycle of human life and death deriving from karmic effect. The last illustration suggests the merits of constructing stupas and offering prayers (*nenbutsu*) for the deceased and, more broadly, connotes the performance of a memorial service for the salvation of the dead. With the shift in function from frightening viewers with the impure state of flesh to performing the memorial service, the realistic, grotesque images seen in earlier versions of the nine stages became unnecessary. As the subject of corporeal decay was executed by a painter in a leading artistic studio, the theme was absorbed into the religious fashions of the early-sixteenth-century illustrated handscrolls. In the Dainenbutsuji version, the illustrations, with their elegant calligraphy and decorative gold motifs, satisfied the wealthy commissioner who wished to save the deceased by performing the *yūzū nenbutsu* practice.

Paintings of the Nine Stages in Edo Printed Books

The image of the nine stages continued to be created through the nineteenth century. The *General Index of Japanese Books (Kokusho sōmoku-roku)* records seven surviving versions of woodblock-printed books on the subject.⁹² Among the seven versions, five are dated between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and two are undated. The numerous survivals indicate that the image was made in this different format for popular consumption, and also that the notion of the nine stages was actively circulated during the Edo period.⁹³ The woodblock-printed books on the subject may be divided into two groups. The first group includes those books offering serious Buddhist interpretations of the nine stages from the perspective of contemplations on impurity and transience. In these works, the nine stages are treated with full-page illustrations, followed by the Su Tongpo verses and the usual two *waka*. The stages are preceded and followed by extensive explanations of the pertinent doctrinal and literary sources. The books are entitled *Kusōshi genkai (Colloquial*



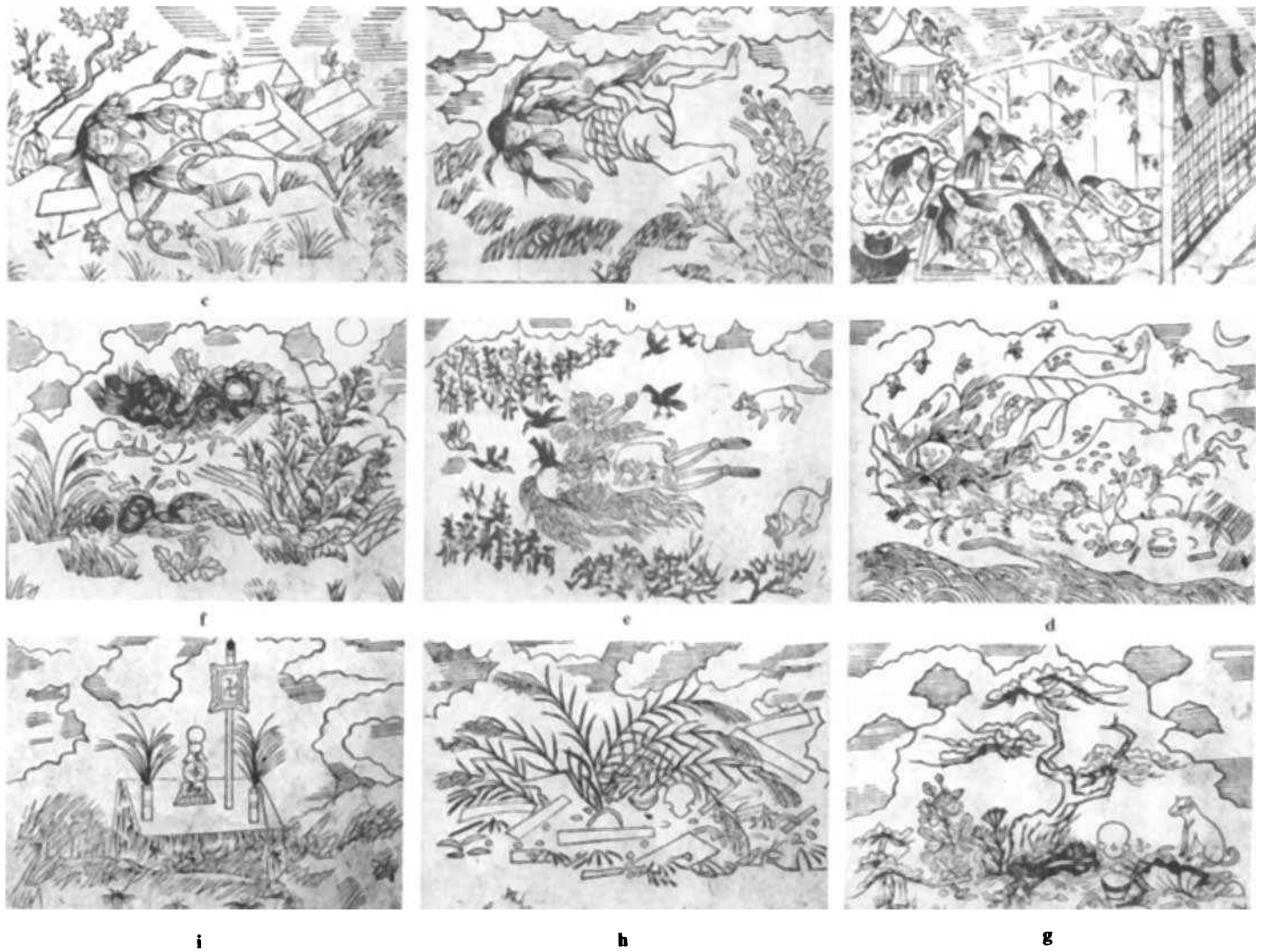
15 A male aristocrat mourning in front of four stupas at the ninth stage, from *Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*, 1527

Explanation of the Poems on the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse) and *Kusōshi eshō* (*Illustrations of the Poems on the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*). The latter, dated to 1810 (Bunka 7), is a revision of the former, dated to 1694 (Genroku 7), and authored by the monk San'unshi. These volumes were serious texts for lay believers, and this purpose is reinforced by the preface to the *Kusōshi genkai*, in which San'unshi transliterated the Su Tongpo poem into the Japanese syllabary and supplemented it with illustrations to facilitate comprehension. Both versions were sold in front of the Chion'in, a temple in Kyoto, at a bookstore that specialized in Buddhist sutras and commentaries.⁹⁴

The second group of Edo woodblock-printed books includes all books entitled only *Kusōshi* (*Poems on the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*)⁹⁵ and comprises the earliest surviving woodblock-printed books on the nine stages. These volumes simply provide the nine illustrations with relevant stanzas of the Su Tongpo poem and the *waka*, offering no supplemental commentary. The poems are printed in large, clear characters, accompanied by sketchy but humorous illustrations. Such qualities reveal a completely different audience and objective as the target for these volumes. We will examine one book from this group in the former Akagi Bunko Collection (Fig. 16a–i; hereafter, the Akagi version) dated to the Keian era (1648–52).⁹⁶ Our study will illuminate the further development of the genre in the early modern period.

We begin by noting the distinct features of the Akagi version.⁹⁷ The title *Kusōshi* suggests that the prime focus of the work is the poem rather than the image. The term *kusōshi*

occurs in the various titles of all surviving printed versions from the Edo period, which may be considered anthologies with inserted illustrations. The Akagi version devotes its first two pages to the preface of the Su Tongpo poem and then moves to the stanzas and images for the nine stages (see App. 1): (1) newly deceased (*shinshisō*); (2) distension (*hōchōsō*); (3) exudation of blood (*ketsutosō*); (4) putrefaction (*hōransō*); (5) consumption by birds and animals (*tanshokusō*); (6) discoloration and desiccation (*seiosō*); (7) whole skeleton (*hakkotsu rensō*); (8) disjointing (*kotsusansō*); and (9) tumulus (*kofunsō*). Its order differs with that of the Dainenbutsuji version, which also follows the Su Tongpo poem, in that the fifth and sixth stages are interchanged, and the ninth stage (parched to dust) has been replaced by the tumulus.⁹⁸ This order is the same as that found in all other Edo books on the subject. Each Su Tongpo verse fills its page, and on the adjacent pages we find the two *waka* in the upper half with the relevant illustration below (Fig. 17). The Su Tongpo poetry of the *Kusōshi* is printed in clear, blockish characters, while the *waka* verses appear in a mixture of cursive characters and kana syllables. Most of the Chinese characters of the Su Tongpo verses are glossed by kana. Hence, the Akagi version is categorized as an example of the contemporary literary genre of kana booklets (*kana zōshi*), which consisted of popular novels and essays for pleasure reading printed with the comprehensible kana syllabary.⁹⁹ The counterpart to scholarly literature and classics written in Chinese characters, this popular literary genre emerged at the same time that a new economy brought opportunities for widespread elementary education



16 Illustrations from the woodblock-printed book *Kusōshi* (*Poems on the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*), 1648–52. Tokyo, Former Akagi Bunko Collection (from Kinsei Bungaku Shoshi Kenkyūkai, *Kinsei bungaku shiryō ruijū*, vol. 10, 505–28. Stages one through nine, arranged right to left: (a) newly deceased; (b) distension; (c) exudation of blood; (d) putrefaction; (e) consumption by birds and animals; (f) discoloration and desiccation; (g) whole skeleton; (h) disjointing; (i) tumulus.

and a consequent increase of literacy and leisure reading. The contemporaneous development of efficient woodblock-printing techniques led to an explosion of reading material for the populace, including the kana booklets, produced between about 1600 and 1680. In the first half century of their production, the kana booklets, usually didactic in nature, were typically authored by educated people, among them courtiers, lesser samurai, scholars, and Buddhist priests.

The monochrome prints accompanying the Akagi version's text provide coarse sketches of the nine stages of the decomposition process. The rough portrayal of both human anatomy and the landscape indicates not the artist's incompetence but rather the intention to fashion the images in the way the book was to be enjoyed.¹⁰⁰ The precursor of kana booklets, *otogi zōshi* (companion books), were typically viewed by a community of listeners, and the elaborate, colorful images played a significant didactic role for audiences that may have been illiterate. In contrast, mass-produced kana booklets were read by the growing group of literate individuals. The illustrations served as supplements to the texts, as the figures became subordinate to the poems. Two specific fea-

tures of this subordinate role of the images are seen in the Akagi version.

First, the illustrations in the Edo texts on the nine stages show an artistic attempt to reflect both the Su Tongpo poem and the *waka*. This dual reference is not seen in the Dainen-butsumi version, in which the illustrations ignore the content of the *waka* verses. In the Akagi version, five of the nine illustrations (the first, second, sixth, eighth, and ninth stages) incorporate at least one element from both the Su Tongpo and *waka* poems. For example, the illustration of the sixth stage (Fig. 16f) depicts the morning sun (*chōtan*) as it shines on the corpse lying on the still-green spring grasses mentioned in the Su Tongpo poem (stanza 5, line 3, see App. 2). The illustration includes a mass of black hair that is the main theme of the first *waka*. The illustration of the eighth stage (Fig. 16h) includes the “decomposed head” from the Su Tongpo poem (stanza 8, line 2) and the cattail (*obana*) from the first *waka*. The remaining three stages, of patently simple depiction, accommodate the content of the Su Tongpo or *waka* poems. Thus, the largely simple and abstract treatment of the corpse's decay—a treatment that nonetheless incorpo-



17 Pages of the stage of exudation of blood, from *Kusōshi*, 1648–52

rates specific images from the poems—was demanded by the subordinate role of the illustrations to the text.

Second, the Akagi version offers only a loose portrayal of human anatomy. Its cursory depiction of the body eliminates the sense of the grotesque and offers a risible treatment of the process of corporeal decay. The second stage (Fig. 16b) depicts the panels of a wooden coffin exploded by the swollen corpse. Although the illustration recalls the Su Tongpo verse, “six organs are putrefied and the corpse pushes out beyond the coffin” (stanza 2, line 3), the bursting of the coffin by the bloated body of the cartoonlike figure seems to have aimed for a humorous response. No other extant version of the nine stages depicts the broken coffin. The fifth stage (Fig. 16e) reveals the artist’s playful intent more clearly. In this stage of consumption by birds and animals, the artist has replaced the corpse with a scarecrow, complete with stalks for legs and feet. In the sixth stage (Fig. 16f), although the gaunt corpse consists of only bones and skin, it is covered by a sudden excess of black hair. These comical treatments of the decomposition process also stemmed from the diminution of the role of visual imagery, which earlier had been necessary to inspire viewers to embrace Buddhist convictions.¹⁰¹

What, then, is the functionality of this Edo-period rendering of the nine stages? The Akagi version belongs to the kana-booklet genre, so we may begin our investigation by identifying the target audience of the booklets. In this genre of the Edo period, many books were produced for the moral education of women. The instructional texts in feminine morality can be divided into two types. One group was designed to guide girls and women toward proper conduct and etiquette, often referring to Chinese and Japanese female exemplars. The other type of text utilized a dialogue format

to instruct women in the ways of proper conduct on the basis of Buddhist teaching. This type was prevalent through the second half of the seventeenth century, when women’s education became more informed by Confucian teachings. Examples of such didactic works include the *Two Nuns* (*Ninin bikuni*, written by Suzuki Shōsan, 1664), the *Seven Nuns* (*Shichinin bikuni*, 1635), and the *Tale in Ogura* (*Ogura monogatari*, 1661). In these stories, the main female characters undergo an experience that enlightens readers about the transitory nature of human existence, and in the end, many of the protagonists become nuns. Thus, these stories, after questioning life in the human realm, focus on women’s enlightenment.

Developed out of the growing education of women, the stories are characterized by a pervasive undercurrent stressing the potential for female enlightenment. Their didactic import encompasses salient aspects of Buddhist doctrine, especially the traditional notion of human transience. In this context, the subject of the nine stages of a decaying corpse was likely considered a story that could lead to enlightenment for the large number of female readers of kana booklets. In fact, the tale entitled *Two Nuns* employs the nine stages of a decaying corpse in its plot as a life-changing experience for the main female character, the wife of Suda Yahei.¹⁰² After her husband’s death on the battlefield, the wife lives with a woman who has also lost her husband to war. When her housemate becomes sick and dies and the villagers throw the corpse into a field without holding a burial service, she witnesses the process of the corpse’s decay. The experience becomes the turning point of her life, leading her to become a mendicant. She then visits an old, virtuous nun in the mountains and, after a series of religious dialogues with her, the wife of Suda Yahei becomes enlightened and dies with the

promise of salvation. In the *Two Nuns*, the nine stages serve as the crucial experience that provides the opportunity for enlightenment and future salvation to the female protagonist. Since such stories emphasized the enlightenment of women with regard to the nature of life in the human realm, their ultimate goal appears to have been turning female readers into good Buddhist practitioners.

Indeed, the Edo period saw the emergence of written precepts for the proper conduct of women. In the interest of social harmony, the shogunal military administration wanted to strengthen the hierarchical nature of the household. They therefore encouraged the production and the circulation of moral instructions that guided women to become ideal wives. A national canon of social morality developed. The tactic of these moral tracts until the mid-seventeenth century was transparent: they indoctrinated morals by referring to the innate inferiority of women as presented in Buddhist teachings. For example, the view that women faced five obstacles for attaining salvation and had to submit to three kinds of obedience was reasserted. The encumbrance of these barriers to salvation provided the rationale for women to adopt a high level of feminine morality.

The new direction of moral education for women is nicely exemplified by the change in a literary genre called stories of the attainment of rebirth in the Pure Land (*ōjōden*, hereafter, stories of rebirth) between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. In the twelfth century the stories of rebirth showed how women could attain rebirth in the Pure Land by sincere and devoted Buddhist practices.¹⁰³ By comparison, in the stories of rebirth of the seventeenth century, such as the *Stories of Clergy and Laity Who Attained Their Rebirth in the Pure Land* (*Shūbyaku ōjōden*, 1688, by Ryōchi) and the *Modern Stories of the Attainment of Rebirth in the Pure Land* (*Kinsei ōjōden*, 1694, by Myōshun), women could not be reborn in the Pure Land solely by Buddhist practices.¹⁰⁴ In order to attain their salvation, they also had to be honest, gentle, obedient, merciful, filially pietistic, and patient—all attributes of the perfect wife and mother.¹⁰⁵ Although the stories of rebirth were written to attract women to Buddhism with the promise of salvation, we see that Buddhist teaching merged with the broader political agenda of the Tokugawa regime for developing an entrenched patriarchy.

The new mode of religious and moral instruction is represented by the Zen monk Suzuki Shōsan, author of the tale of the *Two Nuns* mentioned earlier.¹⁰⁶ He taught Buddhism to women within a new dynamic of belief and behavior with a central message: women were to observe the moral precepts or they would be unable to reside in the Western Pure Land. Salvation came only after women reached a level of enlight-

enment in which they realized they were foolish, corrected their mistakes, behaved moderately, and practiced *nenbutsu*. In the *Two Nuns* and his sermons, Suzuki Shōsan utilized the story of a decaying corpse to make women aware of their innate defiled body and inferior status and to turn them toward enlightenment, which would lead them to liberation.¹⁰⁷

I propose, then, that the Akagi version of the decaying corpse was mainly directed at female readers. In fact, one of the surviving books at the Waseda University Library has the woodcut-printed name of a woman added to the inside of the back cover, clearly the seal of the book's owner. The name reads *ganshu* (prayer for) Chiyoi or Tomoyoi. These women readers signal a marked change in audience from the previous versions of the nine stages of a decaying corpse.

Our study of images of the nine stages from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries has revealed their transformative functionality at the nexus of religion, literature, and politics. In the chronological panorama of Japanese art history, this image represents a rare case of a single, narrative Buddhist subject being painted and distributed beyond the sects and monasteries for a variety of uses. While the image was realized in different contexts with distinct purposes, two features recur: the visual sensationalism of depicting a decaying corpse and the fundamental Buddhist concept of human transience. These two elements motivated the consistent production of the image over the centuries. Since the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the sixth century, the notion of human transience became deeply ingrained in the cultural consciousness, and the idea found its most striking and direct manifestation in the images of the nine stages. The depictions of corporeal decay delineate the destiny of the physical body and portray the mysterious transitional state between this and the other worlds. At each juncture of the theme's function over the centuries, the images played a redeeming role as viewers sought to bridge the gap between ephemeral human existence and a restful afterlife. Although the nine stages are treated in many Buddhist sutras, no other pictorial examples illustrating the complete sequence of the decaying corpse have survived in other Asian countries. This remarkable distribution attests to a visual agency that was conceived and nurtured in the idiosyncratic matrix of Japanese culture.

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Appendix 1 Synopsis of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse as Found in Images and Texts

Work	Stage 1	2	6	4	6	6	7	8	9
<i>Images</i>									
Nakamura version (early 14th century)	newly deceased*	distension	putrefaction	exudation of blood	putrefaction	discoloration and desiccation	consumption by birds and animals	disjointing	disjointing
Raigōji version (ca. 1300)	newly deceased*	distension	putrefaction	exudation of blood	putrefaction	discoloration and desiccation	consumption by birds and animals	disjointing	bones
Dainenbutsuji version (1527)	newly deceased*	distension	exudation of blood	putrefaction	discoloration and desiccation	consumption by birds and animals	skeleton	disjointing	parched to dust
Akagi version (ca. 1650)	newly deceased*	distension	exudation of blood	putrefaction	consumption by birds and animals	discoloration and desiccation	skeleton	disjointing	tumulus
<i>Poems</i>									
Kūkai poem of the nine stages (ca. 825?)	newly deceased (shinshisō)	distension (hōhōsō)	discoloration and desiccation (seisō)	suppuration (hōjinsō)	putrefaction (hōransō)	integrity of the skeleton's clavicle (sakotsu nao tsurawaritsō)	skeleton (hakkotsu renisō)	disjointing (hakkotsurisō)	reduced to dust (jōkesō)
Su Tongpo poem of the nine stages (ca. 1075?)	newly deceased (shinshisō)	distension (hōhōsō)	exudation of blood (ketsuzumansō)	suppuration (hōjinsō)	discoloration and desiccation (seisō)	consumption by birds and animals (tanshokusō)	skeleton (hakkotsu renisō)	disjointing (hakkotsurisō)	tumulus (hōfunisō)
<i>Texts</i>									
<i>Chapters on the True Meaning of Mahayana Teachings</i> (Daijō gshō, before 592)	distension (hōhōsō)	distension (hōhōsō)	discoloration and desiccation (seisō)	suppuration (hōjinsō)	rupture (kaisō)	exudation of blood (ketsuzumansō)	consumption by worms (chūshokusō)	skeleton (kotsusasō)	disjointing (bunrisō)
<i>Discourse on the Great Wisdom</i> (Dai chidōron, ca. 402); <i>Discourse on Mahayana Meditation and Contemplation</i> (Maha shikan, after 594); <i>Explanations of the Doctrines on Enlightenment</i> (Shakuzen haramitsu shidai hōmon, before 597)	rupture (kaisō)	rupture (kaisō)	consumption by animals and birds (tansō)	putrefaction (hōransō)	consumption by animals and birds (tansō)	consumption by animals and birds (tansō)	bones (kōsisō)	bones (kōsisō)	parched to dust (shōsō)

Appendix 1 Continued

Texts	Stage 1	2	6	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Discourse on the Way of Purity</i> (<i>Seijōdōron</i> , mid-5th century)***	distension (<i>hōchōsō</i>)	discoloration and desiccation (<i>seisō</i>)	mess (<i>sanransō</i>)	rupture (<i>dankaisō</i>)	remains after consumption by birds and animals (<i>shokuzansō</i>)	mess (<i>sanransō</i>)	detaching (<i>zanshaku risansō</i>)	exudation of blood (<i>ketsuzumansō</i>)	9) consumption by worms (<i>chūshūshō</i>) 10) skeleton (<i>kōisugaisō</i>)
<i>Entry Gate to the Realm of Ultimate Reality</i> (<i>Hōkkai shidai hatsumon</i> , 6th century)	distension (<i>hōchōsō</i>)	discoloration and desiccation (<i>seisō</i>)	mess (<i>sanransō</i>)	exudation of blood (<i>ketsuzumansō</i>)	mess (<i>sanransō</i>)	mess (<i>sanransō</i>)	dismemberment (<i>sansō</i>)	bones (<i>kossō</i>)	parched to dust (<i>shōsō</i>)
<i>Essential Meanings of the Lotus Sutra</i> (<i>Myōhō rengyō gengi</i> , 6th century)	distension (<i>chōsō</i>)	distension (<i>chōsō</i>)	rupture (<i>kaisō</i>)	consumption by birds and animals (<i>tansō</i>)	exudation of blood (<i>ketsuzumansō</i>)	rupture (<i>kaisō</i>)	putrefaction (<i>nōransō</i>)	bones (<i>kossō</i>)	parched to dust (<i>shōsō</i>)
<i>Essentials of Salvation</i> (<i>Ōjōyōshū</i> , 985)**	distension (<i>chōsō</i>)	discoloration and desiccation (<i>seisō</i>)	putrefaction (<i>nōransō</i>)	exudation of blood (<i>nōketsusō</i>)	consumption by birds and animals (<i>tanshokusō</i>)	putrefaction (<i>nōransō</i>)	putrefaction (<i>nōransō</i>)	disjointing (<i>shisetsu bunrisō</i>)	decay into dust (<i>fūkyū saimatsusō</i>)
<i>Great Wisdom Sutra</i> (<i>Dai hannya karamittakyō</i> , 7th century)	distension and discoloration (<i>hōchōseisō</i>)	consumption by birds and animals (<i>shakutansō</i>)	mess (<i>sanransō</i>)	bones exposed after rupture (<i>nikuri kotsugensō</i>)	ridges of bones and sinews (<i>kotsusa kinrensō</i>)	mess (<i>sanransō</i>)	disjointing of bones (<i>hakkotsu bunsansō</i>)	skeleton exposed to wind and rain (<i>gaihotsu hōfūsō</i>)	decay into dust (<i>fūkyū saimatsusō</i>)
<i>Sutra on the Samādhi Contemplation of the Oceanlike Buddha</i> (<i>Busssetsu Kanbutsu zanmai kaityō</i> , ca. 400)	newly deceased (<i>shinshisō</i>)	discoloration and desiccation (<i>seisō</i>)	exudation of blood (<i>nōketsusō</i>)	putrefaction (<i>hōjōsō</i>)	consumption by birds and animals (<i>shoku fushōsō</i>)	exudation of blood (<i>nōketsusō</i>)	dismemberment (<i>kossatsu bunrisō</i>)	burning (<i>shōshō kaakusō</i>)	dry bones (<i>kokokusō</i>)
<i>Sutra of the Essentials of Meditation</i> (<i>Zen'yōgyō</i> , before 220)***	distension and desiccation (<i>seisō</i>)	distension (<i>hōchōsō</i>)	putrefaction (<i>nōransō</i>)	rupture (<i>hokaisō</i>)	exudation of blood (<i>ketsuzusō</i>)	putrefaction (<i>nōransō</i>)	consumption by worms (<i>chūshūtsusō</i>)	skeleton (<i>kokusasō</i>)	9) disjointing (<i>bunrisō</i>) 10) rotten (<i>fuhaisō</i>)

*The Nakamura version begins its sequence with a pre-death portrait.

**Genshin does not number the order of the process of decay in nine stages, but for expediency, I have enumerated his sequence. See *Ōjōyōshū*, in Takakusa Junjiro and Watanabe Kaigyoku, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, 85 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–34), vol. 84, 38b–c.

***This text exceptionally includes ten stages.

Appendix 2

Contemplation on the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse Attributed to Su Tongpo (translated by the author)

(1) Newly Deceased

Usual complexion paled during sickness. Fragrant body is as if sleeping.
Beloved old friends still stay. The spirit has already departed.
A beautiful face quickly fades as flowers in the third month. Life is brief like falling autumn leaves.
No difference between youth and old age. No escape later or sooner, faster or slower.

(2) Distension

The distension makes the newly deceased hard to identify. After only seven days, mere vestiges of the [original] appearance remain.
The rosy face has turned dark and lost its elegance. The raven hair, first withered, is now tangled with grass roots.
Six organs are putrefied and the corpse pushes out beyond the coffin. The limbs have hardened and lie on the deserted field.
The field is desolate, and no one is present. The spirit has gone to the other world in solitude.

(3) Exudation of Blood

Bones are broken, and sinews have ruptured. Now, the corpse is in a north province. The appearance has changed, and it is beyond any thoughts.
The rotten skin has destroyed the face with beautiful eyebrows. The blood exudes suddenly from the putrefied inner organs.
Transience in this world appears with time. Impurity of the body emerges at this moment.
At this time, close friends abandon the body and leave it in vain. It is as if the sad, cold wind is mourning.

(4) Putrefaction

Even if the ocean can cleanse, at the stage of putrefaction, how can it?
White maggots are crawling inside. Countless green flies are active on the corpse.
Wind transmits the smell to far distances. The moon lights the naked corpse in the long night.
How sad are the old and new bones beside the grave. They have accumulated, but nobody knows their names.

(5) Discoloration and Desiccation

What a pity, beside the accreted tomb mounds. The countenance has finally disappeared, and the ridges of the sinews and joints are shown.

The remaining flesh lies on still half-green spring grasses. The remnants of skin become bluish black before the evening wind.

As autumn rains wash the skin away, the bones finally appear. When the morning sun rises, the rays are about to pierce the head.

Unwillingly it is becoming another object in the field with this appearance. How painfully will it circulate in the world after death for a long time!

(6) Consumption by Birds and Animals

Despite rare visitors in the field, there is life; the beasts competing for the corpse cannot be forbidden.
The corpse is swollen and the putrefied organs are apparent in the morning. The sounds of tigers and wolves eating are heard in the evening.
Hungry dogs are barking in the cemetery. Greedy birds are gathering in the abandoned grove.
The desire that flourishes in this world is a dream of dreams. But how can we blame desire?

(7) Skeleton

Even though a single stone has yet to be set up, the corpse continues to rot. Five parts are still connected to the body.
A drinking cup, broken, sits at the side of the pillow. Tatters of the robe barely cover the body; the rest is transformed into dust.
The corpse used to be a courtly beauty, but is now a skeleton in the desolate field.
The moon over the field is misty in the clouds and rain. Through the night it is a spirit protecting the corpse that cries aloud.

(8) Disjointing

The scarce ivy finally covers the bones. Since some are scattered and others are spread apart, their origin cannot be traced.
The nails and hair are strewn all over, filling the field. The decomposed head is in the weeds.
Year by year, rainy evenings at the western canyon have decayed the corpse. The storm at Mount Tai scattered it everywhere.
Immediately the corpse was transformed into dust in the field of Longmen. Who knows if [the person] thrived or withered, or whose coffin this is.

(9) Tumulus

All five principles [Sanskrit: *skandha*] are originally valueless. What causes us to love the present body?
The spirits that were protecting the hill have flown away to the evening moon. The incapable spirits, having lost their bodies, whistle in the autumn wind.
At the pine hill, the name is inscribed, but the human form is gone. The bones are transformed into dust in the grassy field.

The inscription on the stone stele is weathered and illegible. Above all, wailing must accompany the tomb mound.

Notes

I would like to thank the audience of the Japan Forum at Harvard University, November 21, 2003, and the anonymous readers of *The Art Bulletin* for their helpful comments on this study. I am also grateful to Nakamura Atsuko, Ōsawa Kenichi, and Tsuji Yasuhiko for their help in obtaining access to the artifacts and for arranging the photo permissions. This article is dedicated to the memory of the late Professor Nakamura Tanio, the former owner of the scroll that now bears his name. Professor Nakamura purchased the *Illustrated Handscroll of the Poem of the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse* from a gallery just after being drafted into military service during World War II, and he was the first scholar to publish a study of this subject.

Unless indicated otherwise, translations are mine.

- The subject of the nine stages of a decaying corpse is found in eleven Buddhist works. They are listed here by their Japanese titles, along with the Sanskrit original, when known, or with the corresponding Chinese title: *Kanbutsu zanmai kaikyō* (Chinese: *Guanfo sanmei hai jing*, trans. Buddhahadra [359–429], ca. 400); *Dai chidoron* (Sanskrit: *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, trans. Kumārajīva [344–413]); *Maka shikan* (Chin.: *Mohe zhiguan*, by Zhiyi [538–597]); *Shakuzen haramitsu shidai hōmon* (Chin.: *Shichan bolomi cidī famen*, by Zhiyi); *Myōhō reugekyō gengi* (Chin.: *Miaofa lianhuajing xuanyi*, by Zhiyi); *Hokkai shidai hatsumon* (Chin.: *Fajie cidī chumen*, by Zhiyi); *Daijō gishō* (Chin.: *Dacheng yizhang*, by Hui Yuan [523–592]); *Dai hannya haramittakyo* (Skt.: *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, trans. Xuanzang [600–664]); *Ōjōyōshū* (by Genshin, 985); *Poem of the Contemplation on the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse* (attributed to Su Tongpo [1063–1101]); *Poem of the Contemplation on the Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse* (attributed to Kūkai [774–835]). The account in the *Ōjōyōshū* does not give a numbered sequence, but nine stages of decay are related. In addition to the aforementioned works, two sutras describe the decay of a corpse in ten stages: the *Zenyōgyō* (Chin.: *Chan yao jing*, trans. before 220) and the *Seijōdōron* (Skt.: *Visuddhimagga*, trans. Buddhaghosa [b. ca. 400]). Further, the *Zenpiyōhōkyō* (Chin.: *Chan miyaofo jing*, trans. Kumārajīva [344–413]) includes a contemplation on the decay in thirty complex steps. See App. 1 for the ordering of the stages of decay in these sources. In addition, the contemplations on a decaying corpse and the contemplation on white bones are included in other meditation manuals dated about 400, such as the *Darumatarā zenkyō* (Chin.: *Damo duoluo chanjing*, trans. Buddhahadra), the *Zazen sanmaikyō* (Chin.: *Zuochan sanmei jing*, trans. Kumārajīva), the *Zenbō Yōge* (Chin.: *Chanfa yaojie*, trans. Kumārajīva), the *Shiyūi ryakuyōhō* (Chin.: *Siwēi lüeyao fa*, trans. Kumārajīva), and the *Gomon zengyō yōyūhō* (Chin.: *Wumen chanjing yaoyong fa*, trans. Dharmamitra [fifth century]).
- Bussetsu kanbutsu zanmai kaikyō*, in Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, 85 vols. (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kanōkai, 1924–34), vol. 15, 652b; and *Dai chidoron*, in *ibid.*, vol. 25, 218a.
- See *Daijō gishō* (Chin.: *Dacheng yizhang*), in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 44, 697c, 735c.
- Ibid.*; and *Dai chidoron*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 25, 218a.
- In its section on the impure aspects of the human realm, which includes a description of the stages of a decaying corpse, the *Ōjōyōshū*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, vol. 84, 33–90, refers largely to the *Maka shikan*, in *ibid.*, vol. 46, 1–140.
- In China, four different versions of the poem of the nine stages of a decaying corpse have survived at the Dunhuang Caves. These versions differ greatly from the textual sources. The first through fifth stages cover the human aging process, from birth, to adolescence, maturity, old age, and pain of sickness. The sixth stage is death. The decay of the corpse begins only in the seventh stage, with distension, continues in the eighth (putrefaction and bloating), and concludes with the ninth (bones). For details, see Kawaguchi Hisao, “Tonkōbon tanhyakusaishi, kusōkanshi to Nihon bungaku ni tsuite,” in *Uchino hakase kanreki hinen iōyōgaku ronshū* (Tokyo: Kangi Bunka Kenkyūkai, 1964), 406–11.
- It should be noted that the authenticity of the Kūkai version has been challenged. The poem may have been composed by Kūkai himself at the beginning of the ninth century; it may have been added by Saisen (1025–1115) to his *Zoku henjō hokki shōryōshū hoketsushū* (1079), a restoration of the lost volumes of Kūkai’s work that includes the poem; or it may have been added by a later copier of Saisen’s work at Daigoji in 1223. While the authenticity of the Kūkai version is questionable, the stylistic similarity of the poem to Kūkai’s known works has been acknowledged; see Nakamura Tanio, “Kusōshi emaki no seiritsu,” in *Gaki zōshi, jigoku zōshi, Yamai no sōshi, Kusōshi emaki*, ed. Akiyama Ken et al., *Nihon emaki taisei*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1977), 167. In contrast, Kawaguchi Hisao believes that this work is authentic; see Kawaguchi Hisao, *Etoki no sekai: Tonkō karano kage* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1981), 217. The provenance of Su Tongpo’s poetry has also been problematic. Aoki Kiyohiko conjectures that the Su Tongpo version is likely a revision of the Kūkai version, given their similar phraseology and the decreased sophistication of the latter. Yet the Kūkai version itself has been considered suspicious, because it was included in the *Zoku henjō hokki shōryōshū hoketsushū*, which was compiled in 1079 as a replacement for the three original lost volumes of Kūkai’s ten-volume *Shōryōshū*. See Aoki Kiyohiko, “Kusōkan no bungaku,” *Musashino joshi daigaku kiyō*, no. 11 (1966): 58–59; and Nakamura, “Kusōshi emaki no seiritsu,” 167.
- For the Kūkai poem in the *Zoku henjō hokki shōryōshū hoketsushū*, see *Sankyō shiki and Shōryōshū*, *Nihon koten bungaku taikai*, vol. 71 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965), 460–68. For the Su Tongpo version of the poem, see Akiyama et al., *Gaki zōshi*, 110–19. See also my translation in Appendix 2.
- See Aoki Kiyohiko, “Hanpon kusōshi seiritsukō,” *Bukkyō bungaku*, no. 2 (1978): 66.
- “Ayashi no otoko miyazukae no hima ni fujōkan wo korasu koto” (A suspicious monk contemplated on impurity in his spare time), in *Kankyō no tomo*, ed. Minobe Shigekatsu (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 1974), 111–19.
- The area of Rendaino (southwest of Mount Funaoka in Kyoto) was well known at that time for its cemeteries.
- The condition of the medieval cemeteries is graphically captured by a scene of the late-twelfth-century illustrated handscroll the *Hungry Ghost*, in the Tokyo National Museum. Tales of abandoned corpses appear in the story collections *Konjaku monogatari* (1077), *Shasekishū* (1279), and *Hachiman gūdōkun* (1302).
- Abi daruma dai bisharon*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 27, 205b. This sutra does not list the nine stages of corporeal decay but rather a method for contemplating on the impurity of a decaying corpse.
- Hosshinshū*, *Dai nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 147, ed. Zaidan hōjin Suzuki gakujutsu zaidan (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1972), 214b–216a.
- Senjūshō* (vol. 6, chap. 8) also tells the story of a monk’s intense contemplation on the impurity of a decaying corpse. See *Senjūshō*, *Dai nihon bukkyō zensho*, vol. 91, ed. Zaidan hōjin Suzuki gakujutsu zaidan (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1972).
- Zhiyi, *Myōhō reugekyō gengi*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 33, 727a.
- For the poem by Baoji, see Kawaguchi, *Etoki no sekai*, 213–14.
- Baoji’s farewell poem has survived, but it has not been confirmed whether it was given to the Japanese official Abe no Nakamaro (698–770) or Kibi no Makibi (693?–775). See Sugimoto Naōjirō, *Abe no Nakamaro den kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ikuhōsha, 1940), 201–9.
- The blackened teeth are seen clearly in the next stage of the newly deceased.
- Since no Buddhist work containing a description of the nine stages makes mention of the appearance before death, I follow the usual ordering and designate the newly deceased as the first stage.
- Unfortunately, the chest area of the corpse in the Raigōji version is weathered and cannot be examined in detail. A later version of the nine stages at Jūrenzan Anrakuji, however, is likely based on the images in the Raigōji painting, and this shows the corpse covering her right breast with a raised right hand. This posture accords with the surviving faint black contours at the breast of the corpse in the Raigōji version.
- Yamamoto Satomi, “Kusōzu ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu: Nakamurake bon Kusōshi emaki wo chūshin to shite,” *Waseda daigaku daigakuin bungaku kenkyūka kiyō* 42, no. 3 (1997): 176–77.
- Nakamura Tanio, “Kusōshi emaki no seiritsu,” 165–70, established the traditional view in 1977 when he attributed the sequence of the Nakamura illustrations to the Su Tongpo version of the poem on the nine stages of decay. Yet this interpretation is problematic, because the order of decay in the illustrations differs from that of the poems. The order in the Su Tongpo version is (1) newly deceased; (2) distension; (3) exudation of blood; (4) putrefaction; (5) discoloration and desiccation; (6) consumption by birds and animals; (7) skeleton; (8) dis-jointing; and (9) tumulus. In contrast, the Nakamura version shows the discoloration and desiccation in the sixth stage, with three stages between distension and discoloration rather than the two stages speci-

- fied in the poem. To resolve the discrepancy, Nakamura Tanio speculates that two illustrations were depicted in the description of the fourth stage (putrefaction) in the Su Tongpo poem. This explanation is weakened by the lack of evidence suggesting that two illustrations existed for a single stage of the careful contemplation on nine discrete stages of decay. See also the views of Yamamoto, "Kusōzu ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu," where she noted the relation of the *Maka shikan* to this painting.
24. The first stage of newly deceased may owe its origin to the connection between the Nakamura version and the meditation manuals. The *Zenpiyōhōkyō* refers to the newly deceased, albeit as the eighth meditation. A contemporary sutra, *Kanbutsu zanmai kaikyō*, mentions the newly deceased as the first stage.
 25. *Maka shikan*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 46, 121c.
 26. The *Great Wisdom Sutra* includes various forms of bones without emphasis on the whole skeleton, so the sutra is not given in the listing of sources describing sequential contemplations. In the *Zenpiyōhōkyō*, which has thirty contemplations, the consideration of bones is emphasized, with three different contemplations on bones given in the second, tenth, and eleventh stages.
 27. I should note that by the meditation practice I refer not to an antecedent of Zen Buddhism but instead to the essential core practice of Buddhism.
 28. In this paper, zen denotes the Buddhist practice of reaching a transcendental state through meditation, as distinguished from Zen, a sect of Buddhism.
 29. The most recent arguments are delineated in Yamabe Nobuaki, "The Sūtra on the Ocean-Like Samādhi of the Visualization of the Buddha: The Interfusion of the Chinese and Indian Cultures in Central Asia as Reflected in a Fifth Century Apocryphal Sūtra" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1999).
 30. See Miyaji Akira, "Turfan Toyuk sekikutsu no zenkankutsu hekiga ni tsuite: Jōdozu, Jōdo kansōzu, fujō kansōzu jō ge," *Bukkyō grujutsu* 223 (December 1995): 15–35; 226 (May 1996): 38–83. Miyaji links these murals to the zen meditative sutras, including *Zenpiyōhōkyō*, because the themes of the murals at the caves largely overlapped with the contents of the sutras.
 31. Images of the contemplation on the skull have been found in other caves, including Caves 77, 110, and 212 at the Kizil Caves, Xinjiang Province. In the same grottoes, no image of the contemplation on a decaying corpse has been discovered, so the contemplation on the bones might have been more essential from the fifth through eighth centuries than the meditation on a decaying corpse.
 32. The meditation manuals dated about 400, such as the *Zazen sanmaikyō*, the *Zenbō yōkai*, the *Shiyū ryakuyōhō*, and the *Gomon zengyō yōyūhō*, stress the contemplation on the whole, white skeleton.
 33. *Maka shikan*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 46, 121b.
 34. *Ibid.*, 121b–122a.
 35. The Raigōji painting also does not show the stage of bones parched to dust. As in the Nakamura version, the absence of this stage is attributable to its adherence to the upper level of contemplation as expounded in the *Maka shikan*. See the discussion in Yamamoto, "Kusōzu ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu," 173. The significant difference between the Raigōji and Nakamura versions is the degree of faithfulness to the content of the *Maka shikan*, with the Nakamura version following more closely, despite an adjustment in the order of decay.
 36. See Nakamura Tanio, "Kusōshi emaki no seiritsu," 165–70.
 37. *Ibid.*, 169. Despite the inscription's mention of Tosa Mitsunobu, the painter of the Nakamura version is unknown. The fourteenth-century work could not have been painted by a fifteenth-century artist. Nakamura Tanio mentions that the box is too large for the handscroll and that it may not be the original container for the painting. When I viewed this work, the size of the box did not seem inappropriate for the handscroll.
 38. The founder of the Tendai school, Saichō (767–822), studied zen practice in the Tiantai (Tendai) and Chan (Zen) schools in China, in an attempt to integrate the *Dainichikyō* (Skt.: *Mahāvairocana sutra*, or *Great Illumination Sutra*) and the *Lotus Sutra*. He divided the incoming students each year at his new Tendai school into two specialty practices: one group studied four important meditative practices (*shikangō*), while the other concentrated on esoteric practices (*shanaqō*). The four important practices, derived from the *Maka shikan*, were profoundly connected with *dhyāna* practice. Funaoka Makoto has observed that Zhiyi developed the *Maka shikan* from his earlier compilation, *Zenmon shūshō* (Chin.: *Chanmen xiuzheng*, or *Practice and Result of Meditation*), which treated the practices of *chan* (zen, meditation). Funaoka Makoto, "Heian jidai no Hieizan ni okeru zensō," in Ishikawa Rikizan and Hirose Ryōkō, eds., *Zen to Nihon bunka*, vol. 10, *Zen to sono rekishi* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1999), 35.
 39. *Azuma hagami*, vol. 32 of *Shintei zōho kokushi taikai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1932), *zenpen*, 667.
 40. See *Tokubetsuten emaki* (Tokyo: Tokyo National Museum, 1974), n.p. The Nakamura version was displayed at an exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum in 1974 with the title *Ono no Komachi jōsui emaki* (*Illustrated Handscroll of the Flourish and Decay of the Life of Ono no Komachi*). Since the Nakamura painting is dated to the early fourteenth century, the painting in the account may have been an earlier version of the surviving scroll. Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine that a version existed as early as the ninth century, when Ono no Komachi lived. With no strong evidence to connect the text and the painting, the painting was renamed *Kusōshi emaki* by Nakamura Tanio in his 1977 study.
 41. Musō Soseki's close disciple Shun'oku Myōha wrote this biography. See Myōha, *Tenryū kaizan Musō Shōgaku Shinshū Fusai kokushi nenpu*, *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 203 (Tokyo: Keizai zasshisha, 1897), 497b.
 42. Nakamura Hajime, "Kusōkan," in *Iwanami bukkyō jiten*, ed. Nakamura Hajime et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 208.
 43. The history of the paintings was learned through inscriptions discovered during restoration of the scrolls in 1889. Previously, it was believed that the original set included thirty paintings. A more convincing recent theory holds that the original set comprised only fifteen paintings. See Kasuya Makoto, "Edo wo meguru: Shōju Raigōji rokudōe," in *Kokuhō to rekishi no tabi: jigoku to gokuraku imeiji to shiteno takai* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2000), 20–21.
 44. For Genshin's descriptions of the process of a corpse's decay and the six realms of existence, see *Ōjōyōshū*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 84, 33a–41b.
 45. The Raigōji version departs from the *Maka shikan* and resembles the Nakamura version in the insertion of the newly deceased and the omission of the bones parched to dust.
 46. The metaphor is taken from the *Maka shikan*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 46, 122a.
 47. The Nakamura version shares this strange depiction of white flesh in the seventh stage, which is contrary to the natural process of decay, indicating that these two versions were based on the same model. In the Edo versions, the sixth and seventh stages were interchanged.
 48. Compare *Ōjōyōshū*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daizōkyō*, vol. 84, 38b.
 49. The inclusion of seasonal trees is a recognized convention of traditional Japanese paintings. However, the explicit and pervasive connection between the pictorial elements and the poem argues against the inclusion of seasonal trees in the Raigōji version simply because of artistic convention. Moreover, the fact that the three trees are situated near one another suggests that they derive their significance and symbolism from the poem, rather than a conventional idiom for the three seasons.
 50. The order and names of the nine stages of a decaying corpse in the Su Tongpo poem differ from those of the Raigōji version in the third through ninth stages. The relation between the Raigōji painting and the poem of the nine stages was first noticed by Yoshitani Haruna, "Kusōzukan saikō: Sono tenkyō ni tsuite," *Bijutsushigaku* 17 (1996): 27–50; and "Shōju Raigōji rokudōe nindō fujōsō no kōsatsu," *Bijutsushigaku* 21 (2000): 1–17. I make clear here my observations, which largely differ from hers.
 51. Akiyama et al., *Gaki zōshi*, 111. Emphasis mine.
 52. The Kūkai poem dwells on autumn and winter symbolism, although a spring motif appears in the verse for the sixth stage. See *Sankyō shiki* and *Shōryōshū*, 460–68.
 53. Akiyama et al., *Gaki zōshi*, 112. Emphasis mine.
 54. The "accreted tomb mounds [*ruruitaru kofun*]" appear in the fifth stage. The ninth stage includes the terms "mound [*tsuka*]," "pine hill [*shōgaku*]," and "grassy field [*sōtaku*]."
 55. The terms *shogyō mujō* (everything is transient) and *mujō* appear in Buddhist sutras, including the *Daihatu nehangyō*, *Kongōkyō*, *Shutsuyōkyō*, and others.
 56. The set of paintings at Shōju Raigōji treats the transitory aspect of the human realm (*nindō mujōzō*). One painting depicts six scenes that are derived from the stories of human transience in the Buddhist sutras.
 57. *Daigoji shin yōroku*, vol. 12 (Kyoto: Kyotofu Kyōiku linkai, 1953), 856–60. See also the article by Takei Akio, "Daigoji Enmadō to sono shūhen: Senyōmon'in kusōzu hekiga Sōtatsu," *Bukkyō grujutsu*, no. 134 (January 1981): 57–68. Unfortunately, the mural did not survive, but it may have resembled the Raigōji painting in composition and content.
 58. *Daigoji shin yōroku*, 720.
 59. See Kasuya Makoto, "Edo wo meguru," 20–21.

60. Hayashi Masahiko, ed., *Rokudōe sōryaku engi*, Denshō bungaku shiryōshū, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 1983), 290–323.
61. *Maka shikan*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daitōkyō*, vol. 46, 122a.
62. The selection of a woman as a model for enticement likely stemmed from the predominance of men in the monastic societies of medieval Japan.
63. *Azuma kagami*, Kaitei zōho kokushi taikai, vol. 32 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1932), *zenpen*, 667.
64. Tokue Mototada speculates that this image was the painting of the nine stages of a decaying corpse, currently in the Nakamura private collection, examined in this paper. See Tokue Mototada, *Miyai sensho*, vol. 2, *Geinō, Nōgei* (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 1976), 104.
65. An example from Ono no Komachi: “Hana no iro wa/utsurini ke-rina/itazurani/waga yo ni furu/nagame seshima ni.” As translated by Joshua Mostow, “The color of the flowers/has faded indeed/in vain/have I passed through the world/while gazing at the falling rain.” Joshua S. Mostow, *Pictures of the Heart: The “Hyakunin Isshu” in Word and Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), 168.
66. *Myōhō renyōkyō*, in Takakusu and Watanabe, *Daitōkyō*, vol. 9, 35c. The five obstacles that impede women’s enlightenment: inability to perform pure practices, greed, weakness, narrow-mindedness, and worldly desires. The three types of obedience required of women are obedience to father, husband, and children (after the husband’s death).
67. For the relation between Ono no Komachi’s character and the five Noh plays, see Sarah M. Strong, “The Making of a Femme Fatale: Ono no Komachi in the Early Medieval Commentaries,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 49, no. 1 (spring 1994): 391–412.
68. Hosokawa Ryōichi, *Onna no chūsei: Ono no Komachi, Tomoe, sonota* (Tokyo: Nihon Editor School, 1989), 247–50; and Gail Chin, “The Gender of Buddhist Truth: The Female Corpse in a Group of Japanese Paintings,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25, nos. 3–4 (1998): 296–303.
69. Hayashi Masahiko, *Rokudōe sōryaku engi*, 310.
70. During this period, in addition to paintings entitled *The Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse*, other works have survived with the titles *Ono no Komachi kusōzu* (*The Nine Stages of Ono no Komachi’s Decaying Corpse*) and *Danrin kōgō kusōzue* (*The Nine Stages of Empress Danrin’s Decaying Corpse*).
71. In the *Larger Sutra*, the Amida’s thirty-fifth vow states, “May I not gain possession of perfect awakening if, once I have attained buddhahood, any woman in the measureless, inconceivable world systems of all the buddhas in the ten regions of the universe, hears my name in this life and single-mindedly, with joy, with confidence and gladness resolves to attain awakening, and despises her female body, and still, when her present life comes to an end, she is again reborn as a woman”; Luis O. Gómez, trans., *Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1966), 170. In the *Muryōjūkyōshaku* (*Commentary on the Larger Sutra*), Hōnen refers to a woman’s potential for rebirth in the Western Pure Land on the basis of the thirty-fifth vow of Amida. However, he still believed that women could be reborn by transforming their female into a male body immediately after death.
72. For the traditional conceptions of the corpse, see Yamamoto Kōji, *Kegare to Ooharae* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1999), 10–94. See also Katsuda Itaru, *Shishatachi no chūsei* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003).
73. In a presentation at the Japanese Art Graduate Student Workshop, Princeton, 1998, Yamamoto Satomi, “Realistic Depictions of the Dead Body in the Kamakura Period,” briefly noted on the basis of pictorial and literary evidence the spread of the nine stages along with the growing popularity of Pure Land Buddhism.
74. The original meaning of *nenbutsu* is “to think of Buddha.” There are two main types of *nenbutsu*, contemplative *nenbutsu* and invocational *nenbutsu*. The contemplative *nenbutsu* involves meditating on Amida. The invocational *nenbutsu* consists of vocally reciting “Namu Amida Butsu” (homage to Amida Buddha).
75. The Dainenbutsuji version has appeared in the following exhibition catalogs: Shiga kenritsu biwako bunkakan, *Jōdokyō no sekai: Kunō suru seishinshi* (Shiga: Shiga kenritsu biwako bunkakan, 1992), 63; Ōsaka shiritsu hakubutsukan, *Yūzū nenbutsushū: Sono rekishi to ihō* (Ōsaka: Ōsaka shiritsu hakubutsukan, 1991), 78–79; and Hyōgo kenritsu rekishi hakubutsukan, *Figoku: Oni to Enma no sekai* (Hyōgo: Hyōgo kenritsu rekishi hakubutsukan, 1990), 59.
76. The silver pigment used for the moon, unfortunately, has oxidized to a dark gray.
77. Aizawa Masahiko identified the calligrapher in his article “Daiei nananenmei Kusōshi emaki ni tsuite: Shoki Kanōha yōshiki no emaki,” *Museum*, no. 516 (March 1994): 4–21. He also attributed the painting to the studio of Kanō Motonobu.
78. Most of the surviving representations of the nine stages in printed books have both the Su Tongpo and *waka* poems.
79. An exception is in the illustration of the first stage, where the *waka* mentions the sound of a bell at dusk (“iriai no kane”), and a correspondence may be seen in the bell tower in the background of the scene.
80. The Kanō Motonobu studio also utilized techniques that drew from the Chinese painting style, seen, for example, in the distant mountain in the first stage, the cedar tree in the fourth stage, the rocks in the fifth stage, the willow tree in the third stage, and the pine tree in the ninth stage, with their detailing of texture and three-dimensional representation. However, these technical details seem to have been subordinated to the hallmarks of the traditional Japanese-style painting, such as round, flat mountains, hovering fog, and a less detailed depiction of figures.
81. The portrayal of a mourning aristocratic man is a pictorial convention of the Kanō Motonobu studio, and in fact a similar figure is found in a contemporary work from the same studio, entitled *Illustrated Handscroll of Drunken Boy* (*Shuten dōji emaki*), dated 1522. Nevertheless, the use of such a figure in this painting is a marked departure from the conventional renderings of the subject.
82. The history of the belief’s development into a school is examined by Ōsawa Kenichi, “Kinsei yūzū nenbutsushū ni okeru Shunkūki no igi,” in *Yūzū nenbutsu shinkō no rekishi to bijutsu*, ed. Itō Yuishin (Tokyo: Tokyo Bijutsu, 2000), 104–5.
83. For basic background information on the *Yūzū nenbutsu engi emaki*, see Komatsu Shigemi, ed., *Yūzū nenbutsu engi*, Zoku Nihon emaki tai-sei, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1983), 94–146; idem, ed., *Yūzū nenbutsu engi*, Zoku Nihon no emaki, vol. 21 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1992), 94–107; and Tashiro Naomitsu, *Zōtei Yūzū nenbutsu engi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Meicho Shuppan, 1976).
84. The use of miraculous events to emphasize spiritual efficacy and attract new devotees was not a unique feature of the *Yūzū emaki*. Religious institutions employed the strategy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and as a result, a substantial number of illustrated handscrolls portray the miraculous origin and history of temples and shrines. Tokuda Kazuo, *Otogi zōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 1990), 130–200, treats the background to the emergence of the illustrated temple histories. The *Yūzū emaki* can be distinguished from other illustrated handscrolls depicting miraculous stories by an obvious intent to solicit funds through their prefaces and the bizarre content, including an unexpectedly large number of stories treating women (to attract female devotees) and accounts showing Amida’s light embracing monks in different schools and laity from all social classes.
85. This inscription is found on the *Yūzū nenbutsu engi emaki* in the Cleveland Museum of Art.
86. The *kanjin* originally meant “encouraging people to believe Buddhism and to accumulate good merits.” The semantic scope of the term later extended to requesting donations and support for building and renovating Buddhist halls and towers, creating statues, copying sutras, and improving streets.
87. *Sanetaka hōki*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1957), 399b.
88. The connection between the *Yūzū emaki* and the courtly patrons is studied by Tashiro Naomitsu. See his *Zōtei Yūzū nenbutsu engi no kenkyū*, 45–48.
89. See Uchida Keiichi, “Yūzū nenbutsu engi meitokuhanpon no seiritsu haikai to sono ito,” *Bukkyō geijutsu* 231 (March 1997): 39–60; and Takagishi Akira, “Seiryōjibon Yūzū nenbutsu engi to Ashikaga Yoshimitsu nanakaiki tsuizen,” *Bukkyō geijutsu* 264 (September 2002): 50–70.
90. See *Yūzū nenbutsu kanjinjō*, in Tashiro Naomitsu, *Zōtei Yūzū nenbutsu engi no kenkyū*, 93–98. Tashiro regards this citation as the textual source for the *Yūzū emaki*.
91. As mentioned above, chapter nine of the second volume of the *Yūzū emaki* recounts how the wife of a low-ranking monk was delivered from the gate of hell by the merit of *yūzū nenbutsu*. The accretion of merit on behalf of the dead was emphasized in the teaching of the *yūzū nenbutsu*. In this particular story, the deceased was rescued from hell by zealous thaumaturgy. But the usual merit of the *yūzū nenbutsu* for the dead was deliverance from the suffering of the six realms of existence and the attainment of salvation.
92. *Kokusho sōmokuroku*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1964), 661–62. Although the *Kokusho sōmokuroku* lists only seven extant books, at least ten sets of books on the subject exist in the collections of Waseda University Library, Tokyo University Library, and the Akagi Bunko Collection. These include five books entitled *Kusōshi*, two sets (four volumes each) entitled *Kusōshi eshō*, and three sets (two volumes each) entitled *Kusōshi genkai*. One of the *Kusōshi* books has the later

- title *Kusōshi ekai*, but the content is the same as the other *Kusōshi*; the *Kusōshi ekai* volume is located in Tokyo University Library. The other four *Kusōshi* volumes are in the Akagi Bunko Collection (one) and Waseda University Library (three).
93. Handscrolls and hanging scrolls as well as books depicting the nine stages of a decaying corpse were also produced during the Edo period. Several have survived, and they are connected with the legendary beauties Ono no Komachi and Empress Danrin.
 94. The bookstore, Kōrin Shoin, was owned by Sawada Kichizaemon. An advertisement listing other books sold at the store is found in the last few pages of each of the two extant editions.
 95. One of these books at Tokyo University Library has the later title *Kusōshi ekai*, and one at Waseda University Library has the subtitle *Waka oyobi eiri* (including *waka* poems and illustrations).
 96. For the Akagi version, see Kinsei Bungaku Shoshi Kenkyūkai, ed., *Kinsei bungaku shiryō ruijū*, vol. 10, *Kana zōshi hen* (Tokyo: Benseisha, 1983), 505–28.
 97. No literary or art historian has completed a comprehensive study of the nine stages in the Edo era. I recently found a literary historian's study on the nine stages of Empress Danrin's corpse. Although her views overlap with mine regarding the function of the Edo printed books on the subject of the nine stages, her study focuses mainly on the legend of Empress Danrin; Nishijama Mika, "Danrin kōgō no sei to shi wo meguru setsuwa: Zen no Nihon hatsudentan nyōnin kaigotan to shite," *Bukkyō bungaku*, no. 25 (2000): 98–113. Because of its lack of religious and art historical context, I have concerns about Nishijama's treatment.
 98. The reversal of the stages consumption by birds and animals and discoloration and desiccation indicates that the author was aware of some earlier paintings of the nine stages—perhaps the Raigōji version. In the latter, the illustration of consumption by birds and animals in the seventh stage shows white, plump flesh that should be antecedent to the dried skin and flesh of the sixth stage.
 99. For definitions and histories of *kana zōshi*, see *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983), 670–71; *Iwanami kōza Nihon bungaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1931), 3–35; Teruoka Yasutaka, "Kana zōshi," in *Iwanami kōza Nihon bungakushi*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958), 3–44; Ichiko Teiji, *Kana zōshi ni tsuite*, Bunka kōza, vol. 1, pt. 3 (Tokyo: Daitōkyū Kinen Bunko, 1962), 1–14; Matsubara Hidee, *Usuyuki monogatari to otagi zōshi, kana zōshi* (Osaka: Izumi Shoin, 1997), 205–36; Aoyama Tadakazu, *Kana zōshi jokun bungei no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1982), 5–101; Tanaka Shin, *Kana zōshi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1974), 158–245; and Richard Lane, "The Beginnings of the Modern Japanese Novel: *Kana-Zōshi*, 1600–1682," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20, nos. 3–4 (December 1957): 644–701. Although definitions of *kana zōshi* have been imprecise, three criteria permit categorization as *kana zōshi*: the use of kana syllables, books of a literary rather than a practical nature, and the period of production (1600–1680).
 100. According to Lane, "Beginnings of the Modern Japanese Novel," 649, mass woodblock printing reached a peak in quality in the 1650s.
 101. Suggestions by some scholars of a continuing Buddhist purpose for the illustrations are untenable. Tanaka Shin, *Kana zōshi no kenkyū*, 166, points out the tendency in literary scholarship to connect the nine stages with *etoki*.
 102. Suzuki Shōsan, *Ninin bikuni*, in *Kinsei bungaku shiryō ruijū*, vol. 10, *Kana zōshi hen* (Tokyo: Benseisha, 1983), 351–432.
 103. The five *ōjōden* in the twelfth century are as follows: *Zoku honchō ōjōden*, by Ōe no Masafusa, not long after 1102, *Shūi ōjōden*, by Miyoshi no Tameyasu, completed about 1111, *Goshūi ōjōden*, by Miyoshi no Tameyasu, completed between 1137 and 1139, *Sange ōjōki*, by Renzen, after 1139, and *Honchō shinshū ōjōden*, by Fujiwara no Munetomo, 1151.
 104. *Shibyaku ōjōden*, in Kasahara Kazuo, Oguri Junko et al., eds., *Kinsei ōjōden shūsei* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1978), vol. 1, 4–82; and *Kinsei ōjōden* in *ibid.*, vol. 2, 4–30.
 105. Oguri Junko surveyed the characteristics of those who attained their rebirth in *Shibyaku ōjōden* and *Kinsei ōjōden* in *ibid.*, vol. 1, 484–85, and vol. 2, 603–4.
 106. For Suzuki Shōsan, see Suzuki Teshin, *Suzuki Shōsan dōjin zenshū* (Tokyo: Saikibō Busshorin, 1962); and Royal Tyler, "Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655): A Fighting Man of Zen" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1977).
 107. Suzuki Shōsan's teaching to women can be found in his *Mōanjō* and *Roankyō*, in Suzuki Teshin, *Suzuki Shōsan dōjin zenshū*, 57–58, 188.