

## A NEWLY FOUND NARRATIVE COLLECTION OF BUDDHIST STORIES COMPILED DURING THE 12<sup>th</sup> CENTURY IN JAPAN

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a unique narrative collection of Buddhist stories compiled in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, which has recently been discovered at the Kongō-ji, a monastery of the Shingon Sect. This collection contains a series of stories whose main protagonists are Indian characters who lost their parents while still very young. These stories are presented as tales of the previous lives of Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples and so on.

The most interesting aspect is that although the prototype of the stories might originate in the *Jātaka Tales* or other Buddhist scriptures referred to in the collection, the stories cannot be found in any scripture composed in India or China. It is also unique in that all of the stories promote filial piety in a *Jātaka* narrative style.

This newly found collection shows us the religious ethos which the Japanese people of that age expected from Buddhism.

**Key Words:** Narrative collection, lost Buddhist scriptures, Buddhist apocrypha.

### INTRODUCTION

Recently a lot of Japanese researchers of Buddhism and literature have noticed the importance of the old Buddhist manuscripts preserved in Buddhist temples in Japan, one of which is the Kongō-ji, a monastery of the Shingon Sect located in Osaka. This temple owns a whole manuscript cannon and about 8,000 sacred texts<sup>1</sup>. Some of those sacred texts are important copies of some famous literary treatises, such as the *You xian ku* (遊仙窟), the *San bao gan ying yao lue lu* (三寶感應要略錄) and the *Chūkōsen*(注好選). In this paper, I am going to introduce a unique narrative collection of Buddhist stories found in the Kongō-ji sacred texts, which was copied in the late 12th century<sup>2</sup>.

This narrative collection consists of a series of stories of Indian children who suffered from their parents' death. This work is unique in its Jātaka-like

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<sup>1</sup> Ochiai (2007) is the latest research report of the Kongō-ji temple.

<sup>2</sup> For the bibliography of this narrative collection, see Minoura (2007).

narrative style, in which the previous lives of Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples are presented. But what interests us most is that, although the prototype of the stories might originate in the Jātaka Tales or other Buddhist scriptures referred to in the collection, the stories cannot be found in any scripture composed in India or China. It is likely that this collection was compiled based on a series of scriptures composed in Japan. If we allow for this likeliness, then this newly found collection would be more important than we expect, for it may show us the religious ethos of the Japanese people of that age.

## **I. An Introduction to the Narrative Story Collection**

### **I. 1 Contents of the Collection**

The text of the narrative collection, written totally on twelve pages of paper, is composed of about 4,000 Chinese characters mixed with some Japanese *katakana* (phonetic characters). We cannot identify its original title and author, because the beginning portion of the manuscript is missing. The content of this narrative collection is as follows:

#### **Story No. 1 (Vol. 1, Episode number unknown)**

Title is Unable to identify because the first half of this story is not existent.

#### **Story No. 2 (Vol. 1, Episode No. 4)**

The Story of Kōke-nyo: a girl who suffered great grief from her mother's death (好花女遲母謁悲傳)

#### **Story No. 3 (Vol. 1, Episode No. 7)**

The Story of Yōba and Ninba: two girls who lost their mother (要婆忍姿二人遲母傳)

#### **Story No. 4 (Vol. 1, Episode No. 8)**

The story of a devoted son Kinshu who looked for his father. The Buddha's story of repairing the destroyed Vihāras (金珠孝子尋父傳:釋迦緣修造破壞 精舍因緣)

#### **Story No. 5 (Vol. 2, Episode No. 1)**

The story of Kyōtan: a devoted son who suffered from his parents' death (教歎孝子遲父母傳)

\*No detail of the story is described.

#### **Story No. 6 (Vol. 2, Episode No. 2)**

The story of Jōri: a devoted son who was dying for his deceased parents (常利孝子謁父母戀傳)

\*No detail of the story is described.

**Story No. 7 (Vol. 2, Episode No. 3)**

The story of Shizen-Dōji: a boy who suffered from his mother's death (自然童子遲母傳)

\*No detail of the story is described.

**Story No. 8 (Vol. 2, Episode No. 4)**

The story of Ketten and Hōgai: the brothers who suffered from their parents' death (花天寶蓋遲父母傳)

**Story No. 9 (Vol. 2, Episode No. 5)**

The Story of Chōson and Chōzen Missing Their Parents(長尊長善戀父母)

\*The final part of this story is omitted by the writer because the pattern of this story is similar to the previous one.

**Story No. 10 (Vol. 3, Episode No. 1)**

The story of Sōri and Sokuri who lost their father: the past story of Avalokiteśvara and Mahā-sthāma-prāpta (早離速離二人戀父傳：觀音勢至本緣也)

**Story No. 11 (Vol. 3 Episode No. 6)**

The story of Kyōtai who suffered from the loss of parents (教體遲父母傳)

Among these eleven stories, only six (Story Nos. 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11) are completely described and they all tell the suffering of the orphans and the religious methods to save them. Orphans in these stories suffered from their parents' death and they had experienced miserable lives before they were finally saved by the sages. Most of those children are said to be so devoted to their parents that they made clothes, constructed stupas, offered food, read sutras for their parents. These filial devotions were not only practiced during the parents' lifetime but also after their death. This collection places great emphasis on children's gratefulness to and memorial service for their parents.

**I.2. Original Sources Referred to in the Text**

According to the author of the collection, each story originally came from the Buddhist sutras. The titles are mentioned in the text as follows:

Story No. 2: The *Kisshōten-honnen:shū-kudoku-hongi-kyō* (吉祥天本緣, 集功德本記經:

*The sutra of Laksmī*)

Story No. 3: The *Juniyū-kyō* (十二遊經)

Story No. 4: The *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* (往生佛土經: *The sutra of being reborn in the Buddha's land*)

Story No. 8: The *Shinjunksugi□shuku-kyō* (信順決義□宿經)

Story No. 9: The *Ki□jōbutsu-kyō* (起□成佛經)

Story No. 10: The *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* (往生佛土經: *The sutra of being reborn in the Buddha's land*)

Story No. 11: The *Kuzaishōten-kyō* (悔罪生天經: *The sutra of confessing sins and being reborn in the heaven*)

\*"Kyō(經)" refers to "sutra" in Japanese. "□" substitutes for one Chinese character unable to identify.

In all of these titles, only the *Juniyū-kyō* (十二遊經) seems familiar to us, but it is not the one translated by Kālodaka (迦留陀伽) in Eastern Jin dynasty (東晉). And the other titles can not be identified as any scriptures composed in India or China.

### I. 3. Jātaka-Like Narrative Style of the Collection

These stories have Jātaka-like narrative style. Usually, a Jātaka story or an Avadāna tale consists of the following three parts.

The first part is a present story. In this part, the Buddha begins to tell his disciples a story. The second part is a past story, in which the Buddha tells about his own meritorious actions in his previous life. In the final part, the Buddha clarifies the relationship between the past and the present. Specifically he shows that one of the characters in his story was himself. (cf. Iwamoto, (1978) p. 17)

In this narrative collection, Story No. 10 and No. 11 consist of the three parts mentioned above, while the others omit the first part. As far as the third part is concerned, all stories have it in this manuscript, whereas generally this part tends to be omitted in the narrative collection.

### II. Discussions on Story No. 10 and its Original Source the *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* (往生佛土經):

#### *The sutra of being reborn in the Buddha's land*

Now I will provide some details of Story No. 10 and examine the *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* (往生佛土經), which is a source of the Story No. 10. Its detail is as follows:

### Story No. 10 (Vol. 3, Episode No. 1)

**Title:** The story of Sōri and Sokuri who lost their father: the past story of Avalokiteśvara and Mahā-sthāma-prāpta (早離速離二人戀父傳：觀音勢至本緣也)

**Original source:** The *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* (往生佛土經: *The Sutra of being reborn in the Buddha's land*)

**Stage:** Pañcāla (般沙羅國)

#### Characters

**Father:** Chona Brāhmaṇa (長那) **Mother:** Mashira (摩紫良) **StepMother:** Uja (憂闍)

**Two brothers:** Sōri (早離) and his younger brother Sokuri (速離)

#### Outline

##### 1. Present Story (Preface)

I (i. e. the Buddha) remember it happened a long time ago.

##### 2. Past Story (Main Story)

Sōri and Sokuri were born as children of Chōna and Mashira. But their mother Mashira passed away when Sōri was five years old and their father Chōna remarried. When the famine struck, Chōna had to leave for Mt. Dannara (檀那羅) to seek Chinzuka (鎮頭加) fruits which could serve as supply of food for seven days. But after his departure the stepmother brought Sōri and Sokuri out of the house and left them alone at an isolated island where they starved to death. When they almost died, they vowed that they would save suffering people in the future.

##### 3. Identifying the Previous Lives as the Present Lives (Articulation)

The Buddha said to Śāriputra (舍利弗), “At that time, Candra-garbha Buddha (月藏佛) was the father. Amitāyus (阿彌陀佛) was the mother. Avalokiteśvara (觀音) was the elder brother. Mahā-sthāma-Prāpta (得大勢至) was the younger brother. Potala (補陀落山) used to be Sai-gen (齋限) Island.”

According to the author of this collection, this story (No. 10) is based on an episode seen in the *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* (往生佛土經, *The Sutra of being reborn in the Buddha's land*), henceforth referred to as *Text A*<sup>3</sup>. There is also another scripture that includes a similar story, which is entitled the *Kanzeon-bosatsu-ōjō-jōdo-honnen-kyō* (觀世音菩薩往生淨土本緣經, *The Sutra of Avalokiteśvara to be reborn in the Pure Land*, in 卅新纂續藏經No. 12), referred to as *Text B*. This scripture, consisting of 2,500 Chinese characters, is approved to be a Buddhist apocrypha composed in Japan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century or earlier (Saito (1999), Kinugawa (1999)).

<sup>3</sup> The name of *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* (往生佛土經) seen in Story No. 10 is also seen in a Kamakura period copy of Shingen (1064-1136) 's *Ōjōyōshū-kikigaki* 往生要集聞書, *Comments on Ōjōyōshū*) reserved in Shinpuku-ji temple (真福寺). Both texts are digestive versions and very similar to each other.

Story No. 10 based on Text A seems similar to Text B, but is different from Text B in terms of the narrator and one main character. First of all, while the narrator in Story No. 10 is the Buddha himself, the narrator in Text B is Avalokiteśvara (觀音) who was requested by the Buddha to tell his previous life story to Dhāraṇī-Vaśitā-Bodhisattva (總持自在菩薩). In this respect, we can say that Story No. 10 is written in more orthodox Buddhist narrative style than Text B.

Secondly, in the final part of the story in Text B, Avalokiteśvara clarified that the father in his previous life story was the Buddha, though it is said to be Candra-garbha Buddha (月藏佛) in Text A. Both stories are very similar, however, in that they both placed stress on the previous life of a bodhisattva rather than a Buddha. In this very respect they are different from a typical Jātaka story. This might be related with the belief in bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara (觀音). The same pattern can be seen in Story No. 2<sup>4</sup> which depicts the previous life of Laksmī (吉祥).

The story of Sōri and Sokuri must have been very popular in the medieval period in Japan because it was quoted in several texts. It has been considered that most of them had been quoted from or based on Text B<sup>5</sup>. If we focus on the difference between Text A and B, however, we recognize that some of those quotations were from Text A.

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<sup>4</sup> **Story No. 2 (Vol. 1, Episode No. 4)**

**Title:** The Story of Kōke-nyo: a girl who suffered great grief from her mother's death (好花女遲母謁悲傳)

**Original source:** *Kisshōten-honnen:shū-kudoku-hongi-kyō* (吉祥天本緣, 集功德本起經, *Sutra of Laksmī*)

**Stage:** Vārāṇasī (婆羅奈國)

**Characters:** **Father:** Saihi (齋悲) **Mother:** Binjara (愍闍羅) **Daughter:** Kōke (好花)

**Outline:** When the daughter who had lost her father was seven years old, she and her mother went to the mountain for getting food. On the way there, her mother was bitten by a deadly snake and died. She fainted in agony. When she regained her consciousness, the Laksmī-meritorious-sea- tathāgata (吉祥功德海如來) of Mt. lapis lazuli appeared in front of her, and taught her the twelve limbs of dependent origination (十二因緣法). The daughter vowed before throwing herself into the water. She was reborn in the north palace of the heaven.

**Characters' relationship with Buddhist sages or characters:**

Saihi (齋悲): identified to be as Śuddhodana (淨飯王).

Binjara (愍闍羅): identified to be as Māyā (摩耶).

Kōke (好花): identified to be as Laksmī (吉祥天).

Deadly Snake: identified to be as Devadatta (調達).

<sup>5</sup> cf. Koida (2005)

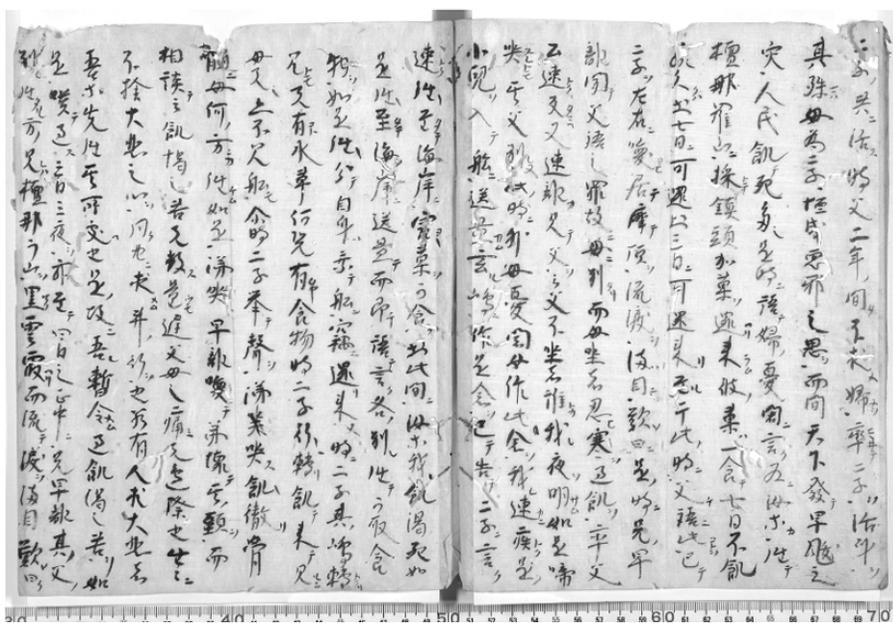
*Kōkō-shū* (孝行集, *Filial Piety Stories*), *Taima-Mandara-Kikigaki* (當麻曼荼羅聞書), *Hokekyō-jikidan-shō* (法華經直談鈔) Vol. 1, *Jikidan-Innen-shū* (直談因緣集), *Ōin-ruijū-shō* (往因類聚) contains a similar story which might be based *Kannon-honnenn-kyō* (觀音本緣經).

*Shaka-narabini-kannon-engi* (釋迦并觀音緣起, *The Story of Buddha and Avalokiteśvara*) is a picture scroll around the 17th century which based on *Kannon-honnenn-kyō* (觀音本緣經).

The story of Sōri and Sokuri was developed in *Tsukihi-no-honji* (月日の本地, *The Story of Moon and Sun*), which is compiled around the 16th century. cf. Okami (1957)

第三卷早離速離二人恋父傳第五 觀音勢至本緣也 往生仏土經說  
 我念往昔無量無邊阿僧祇劫 般沙羅國有一梵志 名長那梵  
 志 其婦名摩紫良女 有二男子 大云早離 弟云速離  
 一云何得此名 小而別母故也 早離年五 速離歲二  
 其母命終 父長那梵志與二子共活時 父二年間不求婦 率  
 二子活身 其殊母為二子恒成惡邪之思 而問天下發早離  
 之災 人民飢死多 是時語婦憂閨言 為汝等往檀那羅山  
 採藥頭加菓還來 彼菓一食七日不飢 若久於七日可還 於  
 三日可還來至 于此時父語此 已二子左右喚居摩頂 流淚  
 滿目 歎曰 是時兄早離 聞父語云 罪故母別 而母  
 坐者 忍寒過飢 卒 父公速反 一又 速離見父云 一父  
 不坐者 誰我夜明 如是啼哭 其父別 此時外母憂閨女  
 作此念 我速疾是小兒入船 送置玄嶋 一作是念 已告  
 二子言 速往至海岸 最菓可食 於此間 汝等我飢渴死 一  
 如是往至海岸 送置而即語言 各別往可取食物 如是往分  
 自身乘船 竊還來 時 二子 其嶋轉見 無有水草 何況有  
 食物 時 二子 行轉飢來見 母無 亦不見船 爾時二子  
 拳聲 涕哭 飢微骨體 母何方往 如是 涕哭 早離 喚  
 弟 懷其頭 而相談云 飢渴之苦 無數量 遲父母之痛 無  
 邊際也 生々不捨大悲之心 同共求 菩薩行也 若有人求  
 大悲者 吾等先往其所處也 是故吾暫令過飢渴之苦 如是嘆  
 過三日三夜 亦至四日之正中 兄早離 其父別往 方見檀那  
 羅山 黑雲覆 而流淚滿目 歎曰 涕泣之聲 響于天宮 如  
 是啼哭 而兄懷弟頭 弟合兄指得並伏 命終 仏告舍利弗 當  
 知 長那梵志 今月藏仏是也 摩紫良女者 阿弥夕仏是 早離  
 者 觀世音是也 速離得大勢至也 資限者 補夕落山是也 一

Transcription of Story No. 10



Photographic Reproduction of Part of Story No. 10

For example, a digested version of Sōri and Sokuri story (original source not referred) is contained in the *Hōbutsu-shū* (寶物集, *The collection of treasure tales*), a famous Buddhist narrative collection compiled by Tairano Yasuyori (平康賴)<sup>6</sup> in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Though the compiler neither mentioned what kind of scripture or text he had referred to when he extracted the Sōri and Sokuri story, nor provided the details about whom the story was narrated by or who the father in the past story was, there is an evidence implying that the story must have come, directly or indirectly from Text A. That evidence is included in the following sentence “The fruit that the father was to seek could serve as supply of food of seven days”. This is seen only in *Text A* and the *Hōbutsu-shū* (寶物集). Therefore, the *Hōbutsu-shū* is based on Text A (Minoura (2007) has more detail. ).

Besides the story of Sōri and Sokuri, Story No. 4 was also based on Text A. What is more, it is recommended to recite this sutra in Story No. 1. Such frequent appearance of this sutra suggests that it was the most important reference of this collection. Then, the question is that the original source of this collection was made? This problem needs to be considered in relation to a Buddhist apocrypha entitled the *Daijō-bishamon-kudoku-kyō* (大乘毘沙門功德經, 7 or 11 fascicles). This scripture that consists of many stories was compiled during the term from the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Japan (Saito (1999)). Similarities between the *Daijō-bishamon-kudoku-kyō* and this narrative collection are as follows:

1. Background of the stories: loss of parents and filial devotions.

2. Religious subjects: consciousness of the time, aptitudes of people, religious requests, belief in Amitâyus, Maitreya (彌勒), sense of crisis over degenerate age (末法).

3. Influence from *The sutra of the Buddha's Name* (佛名經)<sup>7</sup>.

Judging from these similarities, we can say that the *Ōjōbutsudo-kyō* might also be compiled in Japan. As we have discussed above, this scripture is one of the most important scriptures on which this collection was based. If this scripture was actually compiled in Japan, this collection, which contained one of the only extant quotations from the present scripture, will be very important to the studies of Japanese Buddhist apocrypha. But before we determine it to be a Buddhist apocrypha, further investigations in detail will be needed.

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<sup>6</sup> Tairano Yasuyori (平康賴) is also known as one of the characters in a famous Japanese literary work *The Story of Heike* (平家物語).

<sup>7</sup> In story No. 1, the reciting *The Sutra of Twelve Buddhas' Name* (十二佛名微妙典) is promoted.

### III. The Significance of this Narrative Collection

As I mentioned above, the Story of Sōri and Sokuri was included in at least two kinds of scriptures. Generally, the existence of various versions of the same story reflects its popularity. The same thing can be said with the stories in this collection. The main theme in common is children's suffering from their parents' death and the soteriological methods, such as making a vow, through which they were reborn to save the world. This pattern is slightly different from that of Jātaka tales, in which the main story is the meritorious actions of the Buddha in his previous life. Such pattern of the story is related to a genre of literature called "Honji-mono (本地物)", stories of Japanese deities whose previous lives were also miserable and they vowed to be reborn to save the world.

The fact that most of the stories were based on Buddhist apocrypha implies the possibility that these scriptures might have been close to each other. In other words, it is possible that most of the stories in this collection were selected from apocryphal scriptures that had been independently compiled by collecting necessary stories on a particular subject. In spite of the difference in original source that the stories are referred to, depictions like the scene of the parents' death in those stories are extremely similar to each other. Except for the reason that they share a subject in common, similarities to such an extent suggest the possibility that those stories were picked up from those historically or culturally related apocryphal scriptures. This collection can be very significant in clarifying the process of the formation and transformation of the Buddhist apocrypha in Japan.

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