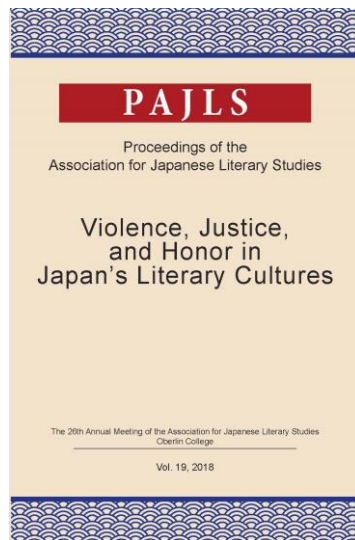


“Compassionate Violence? The Aestheticization of  
Violence in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*”

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*Proceedings of the Association for Japanese  
Literary Studies* 19 (2018): 39–53.



*PAJLS* 19:  
*Violence, Justice, and Honor in Japan's Literary Cultures.*  
Editor: Ann Sherif  
Managing Editor: Matthew Fraleigh

**COMPASSIONATE VIOLENCE?  
THE AESTHETICIZATION OF VIOLENCE IN THE  
*TAIMA-DERA JIKKAI-ZU BYŌBU***

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Buddhism is often presented as a non-violent religion that highlights the virtue of universal compassion. However, it does not unequivocally reject the use of violence, and leaves open the possibility that violence may be committed under special circumstances by spiritually realized beings.<sup>2</sup>

From the tenth century onward, especially due to the popularity of Genshin's *The Essentials of Salvation* (*Ōjōyōshū*, 985), detailed visual and textual descriptions of gruesome Buddhist hells went far beyond mere entertainment. Such representations functioned as nodes in a nexus of real and imagined places understood as hell and paradise. An example of an actual place in Japan that was considered both hell and paradise is Mount Katsuragi in Nara prefecture. Another locale is the temple Taima-dera, situated in Nara prefecture. In terms of imagined places that were considered both hell and heaven, examples include the *Taima mandala*, a cosmic diagram of Amida Buddha's Pure Land Western Paradise, and the *Taima-dera Folding Screens Illustrating the Ten Realms* (*Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* 当麻寺十界図屏風), a set of folding screens dated 1693 and enshrined in the inner sanctuary at Taima-dera, which depicts the local landscape of Mount Katsuragi as a portal to the other world. All of these places are associated with Chūjōhime's cult. From the Kamakura period onward Chūjōhime was woven into the story of the creation of a famous icon of the Pure Land sect, the *Taima mandala*, becoming a saint, as well as into stepchild tales where she is sentenced to die at Mount Katsuragi. Previous scholarship has touched on the relationship between Chūjōhime's cult, Taima-dera, and the *Taima mandala*, but has failed to address the full spectrum of religious, literary, and visual influences that contributed to forming Mount Katsuragi's dual images of Buddhist paradise and hell.

By examining the aestheticization of violence in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*, this paper focuses on the production and appropriation of

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<sup>2</sup> David B. Gray, "Compassionate Violence? On the Ethical Implications of Tantric Buddhist Ritual," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol.14, 2007: 239.

space to illustrate how spatial practices at Mount Katsuragi were mapped onto images and how, inversely, spatial practices which resulted from worship of the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* were mapped onto the actual landscape. My goal is to show that we need to rethink the nature of the non-dichotomous soteriology of Buddhist texts, in which violence and salvation are inextricably intertwined, and can be expressed in the same space.

This study is prompted by a curiosity about the nature of narrated spaces and spatial texts evoked in Japanese Buddhist paintings known as “transformed visions” or *hensō-zu* 変相図. Based on Buddhist sūtras, *hensō-zu* are visual presentations of Buddhist paradises and hells, various manifestations of deities, and scenes of miraculous transformations. *Hensō-zu* served as central icons of worship in temples, for ritual purposes, and stimulated the public imagination. One such example is the *Taima mandara* 当麻曼荼羅: a “transformed vision” of Amida’s Pure Land Western Paradise (*gokuraku ōjō*) and the central icon of worship at Taima-dera 当麻寺, a Buddhist temple of the Pure Land sect (*Jōdo-shū*) in Taimachō, Kitakatsuragi-gun, Nara prefecture.<sup>3</sup>

The *Taima mandara* is a visualization of Shandao’s 善導 (613–681) commentary (*Kangyō Shichō-sho* 觀經四帖疏) on the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* (*Kanmuryōju-kyō* 觀無量壽經) that focuses on the sixteen meditations by means of which one attains birth in Amida’s Pure Land. Shandao’s commentary consists of four chapters, which are visually portrayed as four distinct pictorial narratives in the *Taima mandala*. The first narrative, called “Court of the Central Doctrine” (*gengibun* 玄義分) is located in the center and depicts a glorious palatial architecture symbolizing the Pure Land in front of which are seated Amida and his bodhisattvas, Kannon and Seishi, facing a pond from which enlightened beings are being born on lotus flowers. The next narrative, known as “Court of the Prefatory Legend” (*jobungi* 序分義), is positioned on the left and depicts the story of Queen Idaike 偉提希 who attained enlightenment through faith in Amida. On the right side is the “Court of Specific Contemplations” (*jōzengi* 定善義), which depicts a series of thirteen meditations devotees have to practice in order to attain birth in the Pure Land. Lastly, shown on the bottom is the “Court of the Nine Grades” (*sanzengi* 散善義), which depicts the nine different grades (*kuhon* 九品) people can be born into Amida’s Pure Land based on their karma. Needless

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<sup>3</sup> The *Taima mandara* is also referred to as a “transformed diagram depicting the Pure Land” (*jōdo hensō*). Okazaki Jōji 岡崎譲治, “Jōdokyō-ga” 浄土教画, in *Nihon no bijutsu* 日本の美術, no. 43 (1979): 25.

to say, the *Taima mandara* presents a distinct pictorial-situational spatial logic in terms of narrated spaces and spatial texts, thereby creating a world view of its own.<sup>4</sup>

The characterization of *hensō-zu* like the *Taima mandara* as a domain of its own may be used to highlight the coherence and continuity of spaces. This concept is revived in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* as an enabling analytic construct to meet the redefinition of reading and interpreting images of Amida's paradise with images of Buddhist Hells. Similarly to the *Taima mandara*, the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* requires readers to navigate through the visual text based on the narrative sequence. In addition to the *Taima mandara*, the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* includes "Pictures of the Ten Realms" (*jikkai-zu* 十界図), a genre of Japanese Buddhist painting that comprises the six realms of transmigratory existence, which are those of the gods (*ten* 天), humans (*ningen* 人間), fighting demons (*ashura* 阿修羅), animals (*chikushō* 畜生), hungry ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼), and hell (*jigoku* 地獄); as well as the four realms of enlightened existence, which are those of the Buddhist teachings (*shōmon* 声聞), self-enlightened beings (*engaku* 緣覺), bodhisattvas (*bosatsu* 菩薩), and Buddhas (*hotoke* 仏).<sup>5</sup> The first six are collectively known as the "Six Realms of Karmic Rebirth" (*rokudō* 六道).<sup>6</sup> In Japan, the origin of *jikkai-zu*, which depict the suffering in the circle of rebirth in order for devotees to aspire to birth in Amida's Pure Land, can be traced back to the Heian period (794–1185). From the Kamakura period (1185–1333) onward, with the growth and popularization of Pure Land Buddhism, variations of the *jikkai-zu* appeared. In the Edo period (1600–1868), the Buddhist concept of *jikkai-zu* not only influenced art, but also literature such as the

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<sup>4</sup> When reading the *Taima mandara* visually, the viewer begins at the lower part of the "Court of the Prefatory Legend"; moves up to the top of the court, skips over to the "Court of Specific Contemplations"; reads down to the right-hand corner to the beginning of the "Court of the Nine Grades", which is then read from right to left across; and arrives back at the initial starting point. This ritual circumambulation before focusing on the central image of Amida's Pure Land in the "Court of the Central Doctrine," corresponds to the teachings as they unfold sequentially in the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life* and as outlined in Shandao's commentary.

<sup>5</sup> Pictorial illustrations of all Ten Realms are rare, but the most well-known variations include *Picture of the Ten Dharma Realms for Perfect and Sudden Meditation on the Mind* (*Endon kanjin jūhōkkai-zu* 円頓歎心十法界図) and the *Kumano Ten Worlds Mandala* (*Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara* 熊野歎心十界曼荼羅).

<sup>6</sup> The Six Realms of Karmic Rebirth are also translated as *rokudō-rinne* 六道輪廻 or *muttsu no sekai* 六つの世界.

vernacular Buddhist treatise titled *The Diagram of the Ten Realms of Mind-Learning* (*Shingaku jikkai no zu* 心学十界の図).

Due to its juxtaposition of paradise and hell paintings, the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* is of particular interest because it explores unprecedented vocabulary and new poetic constructions as the aestheticization of violence conveys. I refer to this as an ekphrastic mode of composition, engaging in the graphic and emotional content of the images. Unlike other “Pictures of the Ten Realms,” the two highest realms of enlightened existence—namely those of the bodhisattvas and buddhas—are replaced by the *Taima mandara*. In addition, another unusual feature of the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* are the twenty-four ornate inscribed pieces of paper (*shikishi* 色紙), attached to the screens; twelve of them are written in classical Chinese and refer to passages from Buddhist treatises, and twelve of them are written in native Japanese and refer to Japanese poems (*waka* 和歌) from imperial anthologies. Reading the *byōbu* from right to left, starting in the realms of hell and ending up in Amida’s Pure Land as a series of poems “upon seeing pictures of Hell” unfolds, audiences begin to reflect upon their own lives and internalize the agony depicted in the scenes. The lyric expressions, combined with graphic descriptions of the torments of hell, transform the sequence into a personal journey and a powerful narrative of salvation. An analysis of these poems follows a consideration of the relationship between painting, poetry, and Hell in Japanese tradition.

In Japan, from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, artists have created striking representations of the torments of Hell in a variety of media. Early written accounts of Hell can be found in the 9<sup>th</sup> century *An Account of Miracles in Japan* (*Nihon ryoiki*), a collection of religious tales emphasizing karmic retribution, and the 10<sup>th</sup> century *Ojōyōshū*, a vernacular account that borrows heavily from Buddhist sutras. The reason why the *Ojōyōshū* captured large audiences lies in the gruesome details and fantastic elements of the narrative, as for example this description of the *Hell of Assembly* (*shugyō jigoku*), the third of the Eight Great Hells:

In this Hell there are numerous iron mountains arranged in pairs so as to face each other. There are various ox-headed and horse-headed Hell wardens who are armed with clubs serving as instruments of torture. With these, they drive the sinners before them and make them pass between the pairs of mountains, whereupon the mountains come together crushing the sinners until blood covers the ground...Out from the dungeons of evil come demons and other beasts made of flaming heat, all these

crowd around and devour the victims.<sup>7</sup>

Such stories created powerful images in the minds of audiences and were the basis of many screen and hand-scroll paintings from the Heian period into the modern era.

Paintings were one of the principal means by which the violence of Hell was conveyed to audiences. For example, temple goers would encounter images of Hell used in *etoki* (picture explaining) and Buddhist preachers (*sekkyōshi*) would give sermons, using the pictures to convey the message. Hell screens painted on folding or standing screens and displayed in private aristocratic residences were also common. In the *Pillow Book* (Makura no Sōshi) Sei Shōnagon recounts the following:

On the day after the naming of the Buddhas the screens with the paintings of Hell were carried into the Empress's apartment for her to see. They were terrifying beyond words. Look! Said his majesty. But I replied that I had no desire to see them, I was terrified and hid in the room next door.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, references to Hell screens appear in the *Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (Eiga monogatari, 1092), *Tales of Times Now Past* (Konjaku monogatari shū, 12<sup>th</sup> C), and *Collection of Tales Heard, Past and Present* (Kokon chomonjū, 1254). These stories suggest that the screens themselves held some sort of supernatural power, apart from the fear embodied by the contents of their paintings.

In terms of pictorial analysis, the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* unfolds as follows from right to left. The first two panels depict the realm of hell, where sinners arrive in front of “The Old Woman of the River of the Three Ways” (*datsueba sanzū no kawa no baba* 奪衣婆三途川の婆) who strips souls of their clothes and hangs them from a tree. Then the souls are captured by the demon guardians of hell and presented to King Enma's court where they are judged for their sins and sent to one of the eight hot hells (*hachinetsu jigoku* 八熱地獄); in this case souls are transported in burning carriages to the hell of the searing heat. The third panel depicts the “Blade Tree” or *Tōyōrin*, one of the sixteen satellite hells of the “Hell of Assembly” (*shugō jigoku* 衆合地獄), where sinners climb blade trees out

<sup>7</sup> A. K. Reischauer, “Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*: Collected Essays on Birth into Paradise,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Series 2:7 (1930), 31–32. Modified translation.

<sup>8</sup> Ivan Morris, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), vol. 1, 70.

of their own volition, driven by desire for the apparition of a beautiful woman who beckons to them from the top, just to have their bodies shredded by the blades; the realm of the hungry ghosts who suffer because they cannot satiate their hunger and thirst; and the realms of animals. Panels four to nine illustrate the realm of human beings, with the exception of panel five which, additionally, depicts the realm of fighting demons. Panels ten and eleven depict the realm of heavenly beings, the most favorable form of rebirth in the six realms of trans-migratory existence, as well as the realms of the Buddhist teachings and self-enlightened beings, which belong to the four realms of enlightened existence; and panel twelve concludes with the *Taima mandara*, which represents the realms of both bodhisattvas and Buddhas. The substitution of the *mandara* for the highest realms of enlightened existence in the *Taima-dera jikkaizu byōbu* is a unique characteristic that is not found in any other variants of *jikkai-zu*. But the *mandara* does more than just serving at the temple's central icon of worship and visually connecting spaces in these screens. Mandalas are intended for the practice of identification, which re-orientates the dualistic relationship between the subject and the object. In an aesthetic context, its visual form accommodates the immersion of the viewer into the essence, leading to union with the sacred and divine.

In addition to this depiction of Hell and Amida's Pure Land as both transcendent and earthly landscapes in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*, attached to each panel are two *shikishi* totaling twenty-four for both screens. One of each contains passages from two specific Buddhist texts or *shakkyō* 釈經 (either the *Kanmuryōju-kyō* or the *Ōjōyōshū*,<sup>9</sup> written in classical Chinese); the other one contains *waka* from Heian and Kamakura-period Imperial Anthologies.<sup>10</sup>

What is the significance of pairing these *shakkyō* and *waka* passages against the larger pictorial framework of the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*? In other words, how do they enhance the nature of the verbal narrative and the visual representation of the aestheticization of violence?

A limited number of Buddhist-themed poems, in the form of *bussokusekika* (Lit. "the Buddha's footprint stone poems") as well as Chinese and Japanese poems based on sutra passages, that would later become known as *Kyōshika* ("Chinese and Japanese sutra poems") can be found in 8<sup>th</sup> century collections. Parables from the *Lotus Sutra* (*Hokkekyō*) in particular inspired many poets to compose poetic sequences as votive offerings. To give a few examples of sutra-based poetic sequences,

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<sup>9</sup> Compiled by Genshin in 985.

<sup>10</sup> Takagishi Akira, 14–17.

Fujiwara no Kintō (966–1041), Izumi Shikibu, Akazome Emon (d. 1041), Fujiwara no Tadamichi (1097–1164), and other Heian poets composed poems based on the *Lotus Sutra*.

Regarding the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*, I will focus on the pair of *shikishi* which is attached to panel three of the first set of screens. The *shakkyō* (on the right) describes the “realm of hungry ghosts” from the *Ōjōyōshū* and reads as follows:

飢渴常急身軀枯／竭適望清流走向／趣彼或變作火或／悉枯涸口  
如針孔／腸如大山

[Some have] become so emaciated by their continual hunger and thirst that they are so weak that even a gentle spring breeze would blow them over. At times they succeed in finding a stream of pure water but when they rush to it and try to scoop up the water in their hands... the water suddenly turns into flames and burns them or it ceases to flow and is dried up... [Some] have stomachs as big as a large mountain but mouths as small as the eye of a needle.<sup>11</sup>

Genshin’s descriptions created powerful images in the minds of audiences from the Heian period into the early modern era and were the source for many paintings, including the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*. The most famous extant paintings of “the realm of the hungry ghosts,” the *Scroll of the Hungry Ghosts* (*Gaki zōshi* 餓鬼草紙),<sup>12</sup> designated a National Treasure and dated late twelfth century, displays strong connections to Genshin’s text as well as to the visual illustration in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*.

The *waka* (on the left) is a poem by the Heian-period poet, Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部 (977?–?) included as #644 (Book 10: Miscellaneous II) in the *Kin’yō waka-shū* and reads as follows:

じごくえにつるぎのえだにひとのつらぬかれたるをみてよめる

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from Reischauer’s translation of Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū*. The “realm of hungry ghosts” is characterized by great craving and internal starvation; beings who are reborn as hungry ghosts must endure never-ending thirst, hunger, and torture as the result of their karma.

<sup>12</sup> *Gaki-zōshi*, Kyoto National Museum, Handscroll, Color on paper, 26.8 x 138.4 cm, Late-Heian Period (Late-12th Century), National Treasure, AK 229. <http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/syuzou/meihin/kaiiga/emaki/item03.html> Retrieved May 5, 2013.



あさみや／つるぎのえだの／たはむまで／こはなにのみの／  
なれるなるらん

Composed upon seeing a person speared on the branches of blades in a picture of Hell, I composed:

How frightful!  
The branches of blades,  
so heavy that they bend back from the weight.  
What could their sins have been  
to bring about such fruits?<sup>13</sup>

Izumi Shikibu refers to a Hell picture as the inspiration for her poem, but she most likely understood the picture through her familiarity with stories derived from the *Ojōyōshū*. Izumi Shikibu tells us about the *Tōyōrin*, a treacherous tree with blade branches that male sinners climb, driven by the desire for a beautiful woman who calls to them from the top. When sinners reach the top of the blade tree, their bodies shredded by the blades, the woman appears below the tree, calling the men to ascend, leaving their bodies to be cut again by the blades as seen in this painting.

Izumi Shikibu implies that the despair arises from the mere sight of the violence and suffering, how much more dreadful is the actual experience of it? Like Sei Shōnagon, Izumi Shikibu is overwhelmed by the violent torture of Hell in front of her, but whereas Sei describes her experience in prose, Izumi is moved to compose poems on this topic. Being aware of the violent torture awaiting people in Hell begins to enable her to see the hope of eventually escaping from Hell through the saving grace of Amida Buddha.

In this sense, both Genshin's *shakkyō* and Izumi Shikibu's *waka* emphasize that human suffering is the source of worldly attachments and desires, and that the only way to escape these tortures is to practice the Buddhist teachings. In a similar way that the hungry ghosts are suffering—their bodies are in pain as if pierced by burning spears—the human body is experiencing the same torturous pain being penetrated by the spiky branches of the blade tree. However, the *Taima mandara* appears to be the “light of compassion” at the end of the tunnel in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*.

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<sup>13</sup> Kawamura Teruo, *Kin'yō wakashū, Shika wakashū*. Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 9 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 190. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are my own.

I have argued elsewhere that the inclusion of the *shakkyō-waka* pairs in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* serves to communicate in a more accessible, humanized form the complex Buddhist teachings in order for believers to aspire to birth in Amida's Pure Land.<sup>14</sup> The *waka* can be seen as a link between the complex Buddhist doctrines and the popular Buddhist narratives, the latter of which served as powerful propaganda for converting the masses to the Pure Land faith in the medieval period. Therefore, the imaginary landscape becomes a place of religious awakening in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*: a peaceful place of refuge from the world of spiritual darkness. Furthermore, the inclusion of secular genre scenes painted on the bottom of the panels, such as sitting under cherry blossoms or composing poetry, correspond to both the sentimental experience in poetry and the suffering of sentient beings in the Buddhist texts.

The aestheticization of violence in art has been the subject of considerable controversy. In western art, graphic depictions of *The Passion of Christ* have long been portrayed, as have a wide range of depictions of warfare by later artists. Theater, and in modern times, film have often featured violence while images and descriptions of violence have always been part of literature. According to Margaret Bruder, in cinema “aestheticized violence . . . breaks narrative frames, and indeed ruptures our participation in traditional modes of cinematic storytelling.” Such depictions appeal to audiences because the “cultural forms . . . do not play by the rules of traditional narrative.”<sup>15</sup> In the case of the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*, I would argue that the “aestheticization of violence” lends itself to an additional interpretation, questioning how mandalas appeal to the heart of people beyond their doctrinal content or associated meanings.

At first glance, the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* appears to be foremost an imaginary landscape in the sense that the “Ten Realms” are landscapes based solely on Buddhist ideology, the idea that after death people are reborn in the six realms until they are released from the karmic cycle of suffering and become enlightened beings born in Amida's Pure Land.<sup>16</sup> However, in Japan this imaginary landscape has played an important role in peoples' construction of their world; it has become a socially

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<sup>14</sup> I presented previous research in a paper entitled “Between Text and Image: Literature and Narrating Space in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*,” at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting in Honolulu, Hawai'i, April 3, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Ervin Bruder, “Aestheticizing Violence, or How To Do Things with Style” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2003), 15, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Allan Andrews, *The Teachings Essential for Rebirth: A Study of Genshin's Ōjōyōshū* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970).

constructed landscape involving physical and cognitive experiences associated with the real landscape of *Taima-dera*.

The narrative threads that weave through the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* are spun from Taima-dera's geographical and religious significance. The Taima-Katsuragi area is situated at the eastern foot of the Nijō-Katsuragi-Kongō Mountains bordering Nara and Osaka prefectures. Recensions of Taima-dera's foundation legend, an essential component among the motifs that appear in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*, reveal both the history and divine presence of this temple. The earliest extant reference to Taima-dera is found in the *Record of Pilgrimage of the Kenkyū Era (Kenkyū go junrei-ki 建久御巡礼記)* dated 1191. According to this record, Taima-dera was originally built in 612 as Manpōzō-in 萬法藏院, but in 692—following Prince Maroko's 磨子の親王 auspicious dream that the temple should be moved to a sacred site associated with the Nara-period mountain ascetic En no Gyōja—Taima-dera was erected at its present location in the Taima-Katsuragi area.<sup>17</sup> The *Kenkyū go junrei-ki* also mentions the story of the legendary eighth-century noblewoman, Chūjōhime 中将姫, whose devotion to Amida caused the appearance of a mysterious nun and a mysterious woman, who, in one single night, wove the *Taima mandara*.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, every year on May 14, the Splendid “Lecture of Welcoming” ritual, called *mukaekō* 迎講, is held at Taima-dera and it reenacts the arrival of Amida and a host of bodhisattvas to welcome Chūjōhime to the Pure Land in honor of the creation of the *Taima mandara*.<sup>19</sup>

Contrary to the common assumption of the “aesthetic” as merely aesthetic, the visual and textual descriptions in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* have shown that aestheticization does not consist of a subjectivization that weakens religious authority. I argue that

<sup>17</sup> Emperor Yōmei's 用明天皇 (r. 585–587) third son.

<sup>18</sup> For details regarding the relationship between Taima-dera's origin legend, the production of the *Taima mandara*, and the Legend of Chūjōhime see Chapter Two of Monika Dix, “Writing Women into Religious Histories: Re-Reading Representations of Chūjōhime in Medieval Japanese Buddhist Narratives,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2006, pp. 15–74. For a general history about Taima-dera see Taimachō kyōiku iinkai 当麻町教育員会, *Taimachō-shi* 当麻町史. (Taimachō: Taimachō kyōiku iinkai 当麻町教育員会, 1976). The year 2012 marked the 1400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Manpōzō-in, the temple thought to have been the precursor of Taima-dera, and 2013 is the 1250<sup>th</sup> year since Chūjōhime's faith was responsible for the weaving of the Taima Mandara in 763.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed description about the *mukaekō* at Taima-dera see Gail Chin Bryant, “The *Mukaekō* of Taimadera: A Case of Salvation Re-enacted,” in *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* vol.8 (1995): 325–334.

aestheticization implies a specific authoritative dynamics in which different kinds of distortions can appear with the concurrent result of the disappearance of the subject as shown by my pictorial analysis of the Buddhist Hell paintings and the *Taima mandara*, as well as by the literary analysis of the *shakkyō-waka* pairs. This process of de-subjectivization is intimately connected to the surrender to the aesthetic object involved in the experience.

The Buddhist cosmology posits multiple worlds, such as Buddhist paradises and hells, the world of the living and the world of the dead, and the heterogeneous formation of religious and social communities in which visual and textual memories enhance the appreciation of fictional spaces as reality. This is where the aesthetic viewing of the *Taima mandara* comes in.

Amida's Pure Land is generally associated with the visual representation of the *Taima mandara*. The *Taima mandara* is the reflection of divine consciousness, the dharma, and enlightenment. In its aesthetic art form, the *Taima mandara* embraces the viewers, allowing them to merge into the visual form of consciousness. In the religious practices of visualization and meditation, formless consciousness is experienced internally. The aesthetic dimension of the mandala differs from its spiritual experience during the practice of visualization in the matter of the externalization of the Essence. Similar to Izumi Shikibu's poetry, in the process of visualization, illusory images are deliberately constructed, and the practitioner is actively engaged in the act of imagination. Furthermore, as seen with the poems compiled "upon seeing pictures of Hell," when the *Taima mandara* is the object of aesthetic viewing as in the case of the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*, it is free from doctrinal conceptions, and our eyes can see it with direct insight.

However, the Pure Land also encompassed larger spatial and trans-historical dimensions, including the concept of the Pure Land on earth. The rationale behind the identification of a certain geographical area of Japan with this particular Buddhist paradise was intimately connected to Taima-dera which is located at the foot of sacred Mount Katsuragi. Also known as "Hell Valley" (*jigokudani* 地獄谷), Katsuragi mountain was believed to have been both a place where sinners fell into hell, and a place of Pure Bliss where people attained salvation through faith in Amida and the *Taima mandara*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to the Katsuragi mountain, Mount Tateyama was also known as the gate to heaven and hell, especially in late medieval and early modern periods. See Caroline Hirasawa, *Hell-Bent for Heaven in Tateyama Mandara* (Leiden: Brill,

One of the earliest detailed textual and visual portrayals of hell at Mount Katsuragi is found in the *Miraculous Origin of Taima Temple* (Kyōroku era) (*Taima-dera engi emaki kyōroku-bon* 当麻寺縁起絵巻享禄本), a set of three narrative handscroll paintings dated 1531 and owned by Taima-dera.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to earlier Kamakura-period records of Chūjōhime's story, such as the *Kenkyū go junrei-ki* and the *Taima mandara engi emaki*, which focus on Chūjōhime's vow to see Amida in human form, the miraculous creation of the *Taima mandara*, and the heroine's attainment of birth in the Pure Land, this Muromachi-period version combines the heroine's religious experiences at Taima-dera with an added narrative of her childhood.

Having lost their mother at an early age, Chūjōhime and her brother are abandoned by their wicked stepmother on Mount Katsuragi:

She summoned a brave samurai from within the capital, brought out many gifts, and said: "Bring these children to a border region far away, and leave them there. This is a serious [personal] matter, so be careful that nobody hears about this," and [the samurai] could not refuse her order. He put both children into a palanquin and took them along a distant mountain path. When the children asked: "Are you indeed taking us to a place far away and are getting rid of us?" the samurai comforted them by saying: "I am taking you to the place where your mother is buried." And overcome with joy, the children in the palanquin said: "If this is true, let's go quickly and inquire about it." But in fact the situation did not differ at all from that of sheep in a slaughterhouse because after their journey, they arrived at a place known as "Valley of Hell of the Dreadful Katsuragi Mountain." On that mountain, where there is no sign of human habitation and no young-cut wood or firewood are found on the path, he abandoned the palanquin with the children on a rock.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the opening passage from the *Taima-dera engi emaki* further aids in the transmission of knowledge and enhances the appreciation of Mount Katsuragi as a place where sinners fell into hell, and a place of Pure Bliss based on its topography:

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2013).

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion regarding the production, as well as textual and visual analysis of the *Taima-dera engi emaki* see Chapter Three of Dix, "Writing Women into Religious Histories," 75–163.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 106–108.

Although it is said that there is no limit to the number of countries scattered like millet grain, it is [here in] the land of the rising sun where the [Buddhist] teachings circulate. One is fortunate to receive life and to encounter the essential teachings of the Buddha Sâkyamuni. However, unfortunately, [people] have already fallen into extreme evil and they compete over hurrying towards trivialities. For all, dreams of fame and wealth appear to be the foundation of transience. Due to this, vainly people fall into the burning hell of desire, and are repeatedly kept farther away from the wide-open gates to the Pure Land. Hearing the proper teachings, even [those of] little faith will lose their doubts. Based on whom does one decide one's conduct of renunciation, by means of what do [people] give up on the cause of birth in the Pure Land? Here, at Taima-dera in the province of Yamato, because a person by the name of Chūjōhime prayed to see [Amida] in human form, a mysterious woman appeared, obtained lotus threads from ninety horseloads of lotus stalks, and wove a mandala measuring ten and a half feet. Looking at the entire mandala, it does not differ at all from the explanation in the *Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life*. Four outer borders enclose the central scene, and each Buddha realm of the Nine Grades is truly distinct. One should know that people who made a pilgrimage to this place once immediately achieved birth in the Pure Land, that this doctrine [represented in the mandala] is intended for human beings of the corrupt world, and that it serves as an expedient means to provide an easy path of salvation. What if the benevolent compassion of the Buddha has indeed spread to this place? For this reason, men and women of both high and low ranks lose interest in the defiled world and joyfully begin to aspire to the Pure Land.<sup>23</sup>

As Gorai Shigeru has pointed out, real geographical places were crucial points of reference for medieval preachers and audiences. Preachers could not simply tell their story without some proof of physical reality of their tale. Texts and images played a part in this, but so did the landscape itself. The names of peaks and valleys corresponded to the topography of the legends. This aspect played a significant role regarding the undiminished popularity of the *Taima mandara* and its revival by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 81–83.

means of *bukkyō setsuwa*. Of course, Taima-dera's topography, being situated at the foot of the Nijō-Katsuragi Kongō Mountain range – worshipped by the locals as gateway to hell and the Pure Land, drove these associations even further into peoples' imagination.

The *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu* organizes visual and textual expressions of place-making into a cosmological structure, characterizing the *Taima mandara* as a domain of its own which highlights the coherence and continuity of spaces. In this sense, landscapes—both real and imaginary—like the “Ten Realms” depicted in the *Taima-dera jikkai-zu byōbu*, are meaningful, socially constructed places. Therefore, the *Taima mandara* is both the verbal and pictorial representation of a narrative—the *Kanmuryōju-kyō* and Amida's Pure Land, respectively, as well as a representation of a locus—the two highest realms of enlightened existence in *jikkai-zu* and the locale of Taima-dera, making us rethink the nature of the non-dichotomous soteriology of Buddhist texts, in which violence and salvation are inextricably intertwined, and expressed in the same space.

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