

**EMBODYING THE BUDDHA: THE PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN JAPANESE  
BUDDHIST HAIR EMBROIDERIES, 1200-1700**

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# **EMBODYING THE BUDDHA: THE PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN JAPANESE BUDDHIST HAIR EMBROIDERIES, 1200-1700**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2020

This dissertation explores the patronage, materiality, and ritual function of Buddhist embroideries in premodern Japan. It traces the shifting meanings attributed to embroideries from their use in memorial services during the Kamakura period (1185-1333) to objects metonymic of devout female patrons during the Muromachi period (1333-1573). In past scholarship, Buddhist hair embroideries were evaluated as mere copies of painted masterpieces and thus remain little studied. This study, however, will emphasize materiality over iconography and practice over doctrine to show that Buddhist embroideries uniquely supported the soteriological needs and ritual practices of Japanese women. Each chapter demonstrates that embroidered Buddhist icons enabled women to subvert religious doctrine concerning the impurities of their sex, form a bond with the Buddha, and establish female presence in an otherwise male-dominated space. Chapter Two traces the cross-cultural movement and adaptation of Kannon (Sk. Avalokiteśvara, C. Guanyin) embroideries from China to Japan and considers how the ritual use of these embroideries in Japan differed from those on the continent. Chapter Three examines the development of Japanese Buddhist images embroidered with hair in the late twelfth century to show how this medium was thought to accrue worldly and soteriological merit for women. Chapter Four focuses on the ritual significance of hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime (753?-781?) a legendary aristocratic woman credited with attaining enlightenment after commissioning the famous *Taima mandara* tapestry. These chapters employ methods of social history, material culture studies, and the history

of the body to examine Buddhist hair embroideries not simply for their artistic value (iconography and visuality), but also their cultic value within ritual contexts. Such theories provide a framework for understanding why women were encouraged to express religious devotion through practices that emphasized the sacrifice and denial of their bodies. This dissertation ultimately challenges the assumption that female devotees were marginalized figures in Buddhist communities and contributes an art historical approach to growing scholarship in the fields of history and religious studies on the agency of premodern Japanese women.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*“A woman’s body is filthy and thus cannot attain enlightenment.”<sup>1</sup>*

This passage from the Devadatta Chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (*hokkekyō* 法華經) was frequently quoted by founders of Heian- (794-1185) and Kamakura-period (1185-1333) Buddhist schools to justify the exclusion of women from sacred spaces like Mt. Kōya 高野山 and Mt. Hiei 比叡山. Monks claimed that the female body was polluted and promoted the belief that women were incapable of attaining enlightenment after death. While Buddhist doctrine therefore seems to suggest that Japanese nuns and laywomen were suppressed in their religious communities, recent studies on patronage practices reveal women as active participants, sponsoring ritual ceremonies and founding temples.<sup>2</sup> These studies show that women did not accept and internalize exclusionary ideology. Yet, the many creative ways that women complicated or sidestepped Buddhist discourse, remains not fully understood. My dissertation aims to contribute to this discussion by tracing the multiple significances embroidered Buddhist icons accrued as they were created and rediscovered, venerated and replicated by women.

<sup>1</sup> Burton Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 186.

<sup>2</sup> These studies include Barbara Ruch, *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002); Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Nomura Ikuyo 野村育世, *Bukkyō to onna no seishinshi* 仏教と女の精神史 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2004); Hank Glassman, “Chinese Buddhist Death Ritual and the Transformation of Japanese Kinship,” in *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, eds. Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 378-404; Keller Kimbrough, *Preachers, Poets, Women, and the Way: Izumi Shikibu and the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2008); Patricia Fister, *Amamonzeki: A Hidden Heritage – Treasures of the Japanese Imperial Convents* (Tokyo: Sankei Shinbunsha, 2009); Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010); Christina Laffin, *Rewriting Medieval Japanese Women: Politics, Personality, and Literary Production in the life of Nun Abutsu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016).

This dissertation is an exploration of the patronage, ritual use, and materiality of embroidered Buddhist icons in medieval Japan. Most scholarship on these images provides a detailed technical examination, which while informative does not offer a perspective on the varied meanings and functions that these objects acquired through time. Embroidered images typically replicate the iconography of funerary paintings, such as the *Welcoming Descent of the Amida Buddha Triad* (*Amida raigozu* 阿弥陀来迎図), but their materiality reveals that these costly textiles were deeply personal objects incorporating the hair of female patrons. Women's hair, bundled together and sewn into the silk ground, was used to represent the most sacred parts of the image—Amida Buddha's (Sk. Amitābha) hair and robes, Sanskrit seed-syllables, and excerpts from sutras—while multicolored silk threads were used to depict worldly elements like kneeling human figures and arabesque motifs near the border of the embroidery.

This study seeks to uncover the soteriological significance and ritual use of embroidered Buddhist icons. These textiles were not static and unchanging but accumulated new meanings according to the changing status of women in medieval Japan over time. In the hands of a bereaved husband or wife, Buddhist hair embroideries functioned as objects of memory and reminders of a loved one's lost presence. Later, Buddhist hair embroideries said to be created by saintly women were venerated at pilgrimage sites like Taimadera 當麻寺 as proof that women were capable of attaining enlightenment. The ritual act of making or venerating hair embroideries, then, had crucial soteriological significance in enabling women to achieve salvation in the Pure Land and assisted women in creating a karmic connection (*kechien* 結縁) with the divine.

Japanese embroidered Buddhist icons were, therefore, not simply copies of painted icons, but also sites that facilitated female intervention in particular ideological and social structures. Stitch by stitch, women incorporated their hair into embroideries as a way to defy Buddhist



teachings concerning the impurities of their female bodies. Women also used Buddhist hair embroideries in their devotional practices as tools to achieve enlightenment, to literally and figuratively merge with the Buddha, and to establish a corporeal presence in male-dominated spaces. Indeed, as I argue throughout this dissertation, women were encouraged to express religious devotion through such practices that emphasized the sacrifice and denial of their bodies. The act of sheering and stitching one's hair into an image then reenacted a performance of bodily sacrifice and transformed female hair, a frequently aestheticized and sexualized material, into meritorious matter suitable for depicting the divine.

The study of embroidered Buddhist icons raises the following pertinent questions. Why was the medium of embroidery selected by women for embroidered icons? What does the materiality reveal about the meaning and use of these works? Where were these embroidered icons displayed and to what kind of audiences? By delving into these questions, it becomes clear that women in medieval Japan used embroidered Buddhist icons to respond to the worsening state of their social position and to express their struggles for bodily agency. This research then provides a premodern Japanese case study that will contribute to the growing scholarship on the ways women employed their bodies to circumvent religious and social prohibitions.

## **1.1 PRESENT SCHOLARSHIP**

The study of Japanese Buddhist embroideries is a neglected topic in both Japanese and English scholarship. One of the main reasons for this lack of attention paid to Buddhist embroideries has to do with the modern distinction and bias between “high art” and “craft.” The American art critic, Clement Greenberg, for example, claimed that textiles served as “superficial

surface embellishments” and were “merely decorative” works of “skilled labor” rather than the creative output of an “artistic practice.”<sup>3</sup> Because of this duality between high art and craft, embroidered Buddhist images were historically viewed as objects not within the realm of serious inquiry by Buddhist art historians.<sup>4</sup> To this day, embroidered Buddhist icons continue to be classified as craft (*kōgei* 工芸) in Japanese museums despite the fact that these images depict the same genre and identical iconographies as their painted counterparts, which are classified as art (*bijutsu* 美術).<sup>5</sup> Buddhist embroideries have also been neglected in scholarship because few of these works survive. Approximately 150 premodern embroidered Buddhist icons, created between the seventh to the eighteenth century, survive today in Japan.<sup>6</sup> Due to their fragile material, Buddhist hair embroideries are rarely exhibited by temples. These textiles remain obsolete and hidden to the general public and their existence remains unknown even to many scholars of Japanese art.

My main criticism of the few studies on Japanese Buddhist embroideries is that they heavily rely on technical analyses. This study diverges from that earlier research by applying a contextual approach to the study of embroidered Buddhist images to consider their multiple ritual functions and meanings. In doing so, this dissertation reinstates the central role of women in the creation, propagation, and veneration of these embroidered icons. By considering the roles women

<sup>3</sup> Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 9-15.

<sup>4</sup> Nishimura Hyōbu 西村兵部, “*Shishūbutsu* 刺繡仏,” *Nihon bijutsu kōgei* 348 (1967): 7-25.

<sup>5</sup> Since the academic discipline of Japanese art history derived from this twentieth-century Western art historical tradition, paintings and sculptures have been prioritized over craftworks such as ceramics and textiles. See Dōshin Satō, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 56-70.

<sup>6</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏：修理完成記念特別展 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2018).

played as creators and patrons, recipients and venerators of Buddhist hair embroideries, this study offers a nuanced understanding of gendered Buddhist ritual practices. Before discussing my methodology and approach, I will outline the present scholarship of two subfields that are crucial to this work: Buddhist embroideries as well as women and Buddhism.

### 1.1.1 Buddhist Embroideries

The Nara National Museum organized the first exhibition on Buddhist embroideries in 1963, displaying over one hundred textiles together for the first time in a museum context.<sup>7</sup> Prior to this exhibition, many of these textiles were concealed within temple repositories for centuries. This exhibition contributed significantly to our understanding of Japanese embroidered images because the curators surveyed, catalogued, and photographed the objects for the first time. Ishida Mosaku, the co-curator of the exhibition, argued that the veneration of Buddhist embroideries was inextricably linked to Pure Land Buddhist devotional practices because most of the surviving images depict the Amida Buddha, the central deity of this sect. He claimed that embroidered Buddhist images must have served as the icons of commoners because of the long-held view that Pure Land Buddhism functioned as a faith of “Buddhism for the masses” (*minshū bukkyō* 民衆仏教).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ishida Mosaku 石田茂作 and Nishimura Hyōbu 西村兵部, *Shūbutsu* 繡佛 (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> The Marxist mode of analysis dominated postwar scholarship on medieval Japan. Ishida Mosaku’s interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism likely stems from this approach. Pure Land Buddhism was described as an “ideological weapon” to fight against the elitist “old Buddhism” of the Heian period. Current scholarship has attempted to revise and complicate this opposition between the “elitist old Buddhism” and the “new Buddhism for the masses.” See Kazuhiko Yoshida, “Revisioning Religion in Ancient Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 1 (2003): 1-26; Tomoko Yoshida, “Kuroda Toshio (1926-1993) on Jōdo Shinshū: Problems in Modern Historiography,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 2 (2006): 379-412.

The 1963 exhibition served as a further catalyst for technical study of Buddhist embroideries by textile conservators. Nishimura Hyōbu, a curator of craft and decorative arts at the Nara National Museum, published a general survey on Buddhist embroideries in 1967 in which he examined the various stitching techniques and weave structures of these textiles to more accurately date the images and identify areas that were previously repaired.<sup>9</sup> By analyzing extant examples, Nishimura argues similarly to Ishida that embroidered Buddhist icons gained wide popularity during the Kamakura period. He suggests that future scholars should build upon previous technical analysis of Buddhist embroidered icons. He writes that scholars should consider the social factors that led to the popularity of this medium in Japan at the beginning of the twelfth century.

Scholars of Japanese embroidered images have primarily focused on the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara* 天寿国繡帳曼荼羅, a set of draperies that were commissioned to memorialize Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574-622). This mandara survives today as an assemblage of fragments from two different sets--the seventh-century original textile and the thirteenth-century reconstructed version—randomly arranged and mounted together on a single fabric. Both textile specialists and art historians have sought to investigate the embroidery’s puzzling composition.<sup>10</sup> By examining the ground fabric and stitching techniques, they have come to understand which fragments are part of the original and which were added later. Buddhologists, philologists, and historians of ancient Japan, on the other hand, have been more concerned with understanding the context of the

<sup>9</sup> Nishimura 西村, “*Shishūbutsu* 刺繡仏,” 7-25.

<sup>10</sup> For studies on the *Tenjukoku Shūchō mandara*, see Iida Mizuho 飯田瑞穂, “*Tenjukoku Shūchō mei o megutte* 天寿国繡帳銘をめぐって,” *Kobijutsu* 11 (1965): 43-47; Sawada Mutsuyo 沢田むつ代, “*Tenjukoku Shūchō no genjō* 天寿国繡帳の現状,” *Museum* 495 (1992): 4-25; Ōhashi Katsuaki 大橋一章, *Tenjukoku Shūchō no kenkyū* 天寿国繡帳の研究 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1995); Mita Kakuyuki 三田覚之, “*Tenjukoku Shūchō no genkei to shudai ni tsuite* 天寿国繡帳の原形と主題について,” *Bijutsushi* 57, no. 2 (2008): 265-282.

embroidery's creation and the meaning of its composition.<sup>11</sup> An inscription on the textile identifies this space as a representation of “tenjukoku,” one of the realms of the afterlife, yet scholars have been unable to determine which of the pure lands in Buddhist scriptures it represents because there is no doctrinal basis for this term. Scholars have examined the formal elements along with textual evidence to suggest three likely theories: tenjukoku refers to Tosotsuten 兜率天 (S. Tusita Heaven) of Miroku 弥勒 (S. Maitreya) which is the realm of the Buddha of the Future, the Western Pure Land of Amida, or an idealized representation of India.<sup>12</sup> More recent scholarship on the iconographical program of the *Tenjukoku mandara* has also demonstrated that tenjukoku may not even be a Buddhist realm at all, but a representation of a space based on indigenous Chinese religious beliefs that were transmitted to Japan by continental immigrants.<sup>13</sup>

The meaning and ritual function of the *Tenjukoku Shūchō mandara* has been an extensive topic of debate, yet I have deliberately excluded this embroidery from discussion in this dissertation for three reasons. First, as Chari Pradel convincingly demonstrates, the embroidery with its non-Buddhist funerary imagery cannot necessarily be considered an embroidered Buddhist icon because there is little proof that the textile was associated with Buddhist beliefs in its original context. It is more likely that the textile was given a Buddhist identity later when it was rediscovered by the nun Shinnyo 信如 (1211-?) at Chūguji 中宮寺 in 1274.<sup>14</sup> Second, I did not

<sup>11</sup> For studies on the significance of the term “tenjukoku,” see Tokiwa Daijō 常盤大定, “Tenjukoku ni suite 天寿国について,” in *Shina bukkō no kenkyū* 支那仏教の研究 vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1939); Shigematsu Akihasa 重松明久, *Nihon jōdokyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū* 日本浄土教成立過程の研究 (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1964); Ōno Tatsunosuke 大野達之助, *Shōtoku Taishi no kenkyū: Sono Bukkyō to seiji shisō* 聖徳太子の研究：その仏教と政治思想 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> Chari Pradel, *Fabricating the Tenjukoku Shūchō mandara and Prince Shōtoku's Afterlives* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Pradel, *Fabricating the Tenjukoku Shūchō mandara and Prince Shōtoku's Afterlives*, 84-87.

<sup>14</sup> Hosokawa Ryōichi 細川涼一, *Chūsei no Risshū jīn to minshū* 中世の律宗寺院と民衆 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1987), 114-115.

include the *Tenjukoku Shūchō mandara* as a case study because I wanted to limit the discussion in this dissertation to the medieval period of Japan. Third, the focus of my study is on the materiality and the use of hair in Japanese embroideries. Accordingly, the *Tenjukoku mandara* was omitted because it does not contain human hair nor is there evidence that human hair was originally incorporated within the embroidery.

The study of medieval embroidered Buddhist icons was limited in both the fields of Japanese textiles and Buddhist art history until the early twenty-first century. In 2005, Itō Shinji reignited interest in the art form by grappling with the question of what merits embroidered Buddhist icons could offer worshippers that painted or sculpted icons could not. He was not convinced by Ishida's argument that embroidered icons were preferred by commoners because textual sources indicated that both commoners and elite were fervent supporters of Pure Land Buddhism. He examined the formal and material splendor of Buddhist embroideries to argue that these objects were likely considered even more auspicious and ritually efficacious than painted icons due to their magnificent ornamentation (*shōgon* 荘厳) and time-consuming production.<sup>15</sup> He writes that the power of embroidered Buddhist icons stemmed from their material and visual splendor as vibrant glossy silk threads were sewn to add texture to an otherwise two-dimensional surface, the scroll fixtures were inlaid with silver and crystal, and human hair was incorporated to add a personal dimension to the image.<sup>16</sup> By taking the matter and materiality of Buddhist hair embroideries into consideration, Itō challenged previously-held assumptions that embroidered icons were simply diminutive copies of paintings and demonstrated that Buddhist embroideries

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion on the meaning of *shōgon* in a Japanese Buddhist context, see Chapter Four.

<sup>16</sup> Itō Shinji 伊藤信二, "Chūsei shūbutsu no 'shōgon yōshiki' ni tsuite 中世繡仏の「荘厳様式」について," in *Yōshikiron: Sutairu to mōdo no bunseki* 様式論：スタイルとモードの分析, ed. Hayashi On (Tokyo: Chikurinsha, 2012), 390-407.

are a topic worthy of scholarly attention within the larger field of Japanese Buddhist art history and religion.

Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis is the only scholar who has published on medieval Japanese Buddhist embroideries in English. Ten Grotenhuis agrees with Ishida that the use of embroidered Buddhist images was popularized within Pure Land Buddhist devotional practices but is skeptical about associating this medium specifically with this sect of Buddhism. She examined embroidered mandalas from the esoteric tradition that were also sewn with human hair, such as the *Mandala of the Two Worlds* (*ryōkai mandara* 両界曼荼羅), to suggest that a number of Buddhist hair embroideries show an interplay between Pure Land and esoteric ideology.<sup>17</sup> Ten Grotenhuis points out possible Pure Land Buddhist doctrinal justifications for incorporating human hair into embroidered icons, such as the monk Shōkū's 証空 (1177-1247) interpretation of reciting the *nenbutsu* 念仏, or the name of the Amida Buddha, as a religious practice to form a union between the believer and the Buddha.<sup>18</sup> She suggests that believers may have found alternative methods beyond simply reciting the *nenbutsu* that could enact this union between believer and the Buddha. One of these methods, she argues, is by physically merging one's hair into textiles depicting images or the name of the Amida Buddha. While Shōkū's ideology may have been a catalyst for the development of Buddhist hair embroideries, Ten Grotenhuis notes that the symbolism and association of hair with sexuality, fertility, and death stem from the basic substratum of ancient

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, "Collapsing the Distinction Between Buddha and Believer: Human Hair in Japanese Esotericizing Embroideries," in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, eds. Charles Orzech et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011): 876-92.

<sup>18</sup> For discussion on Shōkū's interpretation of the precepts, see Tanabe Hideo 田辺英夫, "Chūsei Seizanha-shi ni okeru Ao no Kōmyōji ni tsuite 中世西山派史における栗生光明寺について," *Seizan Gakuhō* 48 (2000): 95-105.

Japan.<sup>19</sup> Ten Grotenhuis has contributed significantly to our understanding of the meaning behind incorporating hair within Buddhist embroideries. Nevertheless, she does not address who made these textiles and why, information that is crucial for understanding the ritual function of these icons.

Hioki Atsuko is the first scholar outside of the fields of textile history and Buddhist art history to critically examine Buddhist images embroidered with hair. She has furthered our understanding of the meaning of Buddhist hair embroideries by analyzing extant textiles from the late seventeenth century and records concerning their ritual use. In *Taima mandala to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, Hioki analyzes three extant *Taima mandara* hair embroideries that were created by the monk Kūnen 空念 during his travels across Japan to proselytize the cult of Chūjōhime and Pure Land Buddhist doctrine.<sup>20</sup> She mentions that Pure Land Buddhist believers donated their hair to Kūnen so that he could incorporate these strands within textiles that he dedicated to each of the temples on his journey. Hioki notes that Kūnen primarily visited temples on the periphery of Japan, which was critical to his teachings because he argued that the veneration of Buddhist hair embroideries accrued merit similar to taking a pilgrimage to sacred Buddhist sites. Thus, by contributing their hair, commoners far from Kyoto or Nara could make the pilgrimage to Taimadera mentally without moving. It is clear from Hioki's research that both male and female devotees participated in the creation and veneration of embroidered Buddhist icons during the Edo period. What remains unexamined, however, is the fundamental role that Buddhist hair

<sup>19</sup> On the symbolism of hair in ancient Japanese folktales and literature, see Gary L. Ebersole, "'Long Black Hair Like a Seat Cushion': Hair Symbolism in Japanese Popular Religion," in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, eds. Alf Hiltebeitel and Barbara D. Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998): 75-104.

<sup>20</sup> Hioki Atsuko 日沖敦子, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫 (Tokyo: Benseishuppan, 2010), 285-293.



embroideries played in the ritual practices of women during the medieval period and why even men began to embrace needlework as a devotional practice during the late seventeenth century.

In 2018, the Nara National Museum organized a major exhibition on Buddhist textiles to commemorate the restoration of the original *Taima mandara* tapestry. 138 objects were displayed in the exhibition including twenty premodern embroidered Buddhist icons recently rediscovered in Japanese temples by the scholar, Itō Shinji. The articles in the accompanying catalogue examine issues that are predominately technical, discussing the use of gold thread (*kinshi* 金糸) in textiles and developments in embroidery techniques between the Asuka period (538-710) and the Nara period (710-794).<sup>21</sup> The articles also serve as conservation reports outlining the condition of these embroidered icons and the restoration methods that were employed to restore the images.<sup>22</sup> This exhibition has led to a better understanding of the technical aspects of embroidered Buddhist icons.

In this dissertation, I hope to apply an integrated approach that builds upon these technical studies. I aim to shed light on the historical circumstances of the production, ritual use, and reception of Buddhist hair embroideries. My contribution to the field is twofold. First, I will examine Buddhist hair embroideries from a gendered lens to highlight how women used textiles to respond to changes in their social position and to express their struggles for bodily agency. Not only have scholars overlooked textual sources discussing Buddhist hair embroideries, but they have also deemphasized the crucial role that women played as patrons and recipients, creators and

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Sawada Mutsuyo 沢田むつ代, “Asuka kara Nara jidai ni okeru shishū to kinshi no gihō no henshin 飛鳥から奈良時代における刺繍と金糸の技法の変遷,” in *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏：修理完成記念特別展, ed. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2018): 224-227.

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Naitō Sakae 内藤栄, “Shishū Shaka Nyorai seppōzu (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan shozō) no shūri ni tsuite 刺繍釈迦如来説法図（奈良国立博物館所蔵）の修理について,” in *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏：修理完成記念特別展, ed. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2018): 236-239.

venerators of these icons. Second, this dissertation demonstrates that the use of Buddhist hair embroideries was not limited to the Pure Land Buddhist sect. Although medieval embroidered images of the Amida Buddha most commonly survive today, my study makes clear that Buddhist hair embroideries were made and used in a variety of other schools of Buddhism, such as the Kegon 華嚴, Shingon 真言, Tendai 天台, and Zen 禪 sects.

### 1.1.2 Women and Buddhism

Medieval Japanese women undeniably faced social as well as soteriological challenges due to their gender. During the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, monks propagated Buddhist discourses on women that were often negative and overtly misogynistic. The notions of the five obstructions and three obligations were used to prove the inferiority of women to men and to demonstrate that women were incapable of achieving enlightenment.<sup>23</sup> The Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, which gained popularity during the Heian period, presented a possible avenue for female salvation, but only through rebirth into a male body.<sup>24</sup> Over time, this disparaging attitude towards the female body extended further with claims that women were inherently polluted due to menstruation and that they could not enter sacred sites such as Mt. Kōya and Mt. Hiei due to bodily pollution. Despite this negative view of women in Buddhist doctrine, recent research has demonstrated that female devotees played active roles in Buddhist institutions as patrons of images

<sup>23</sup> The five obstructions refer to the five states of superior being—Brahma, Indra, King Mara, a Cakravartin King, and the Buddha—that women were perceived to be incapable of attaining. The three obligations refers to the belief that women were subordinate to their fathers, their husbands, and their sons when they reached old age. Thus, women were placed under protection of men and forced to take a dependent role within the family. For further discussion, see Yoshida Kazuhiko, “The Enlightenment of the Dragon King’s Daughter in the *Lotus Sutra*,” in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002): 309-11.

<sup>24</sup> Yoshida, “The Enlightenment of the Dragon King’s Daughter in the *Lotus Sutra*,” 306-17.

and rituals. These studies make clear that Japanese women considered Buddhist teachings and devotional practices to be deeply meaningful and even empowering in their everyday lives.

Interest in premodern women grew in Japan during the 1980s under second-wave feminism. The few studies that were produced at this time offered discussion on the everyday lives of all socioeconomic classes of women from aristocrats to commoners. In 1984, Ōsumi Kazuo and Nishiguchi Junko organized a research group to study women and Buddhism. They eschewed studies on sectarian histories or debates on Buddhist doctrine that were popular topics at this time, arguing that this type of research inadvertently and inevitably was male-centric. The goal of Ōsumi and Nishiguchi was to go beyond a male-centered history of Japanese Buddhism. They published a four-volume collection of essays entitled *Shirīzu josei to Bukkyō* シリーズ女性と仏教, covering topics such as the history of convents, biographies of nuns, Buddhist teachings related to women, gendered devotional practices, and female deities.<sup>25</sup> Over a decade later, a portion of these essays were translated into English to be made available to scholars working outside the field of Japanese Buddhism.<sup>26</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, the study of women and Buddhism flourished and developed into a vibrant field. In Japan, Hosokawa Ryōichi and Katsuura Noriko wrote extensively on nunhood and the roles of women in nunneries.<sup>27</sup> Many scholars writing in English were also

<sup>25</sup> Ōsumi Kazuo 大隅和雄 and Nishiguchi Junko 西口順子, eds. *Shirīzu josei to Bukkyō* シリーズ女性と仏教 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1989). (Vol. 1: *Ama to amadera* 尼と尼寺; Vol. 2 *Sukui to Oshie* 救いと教え; Vol. 3 *Shinjin to kuyō* 信心と供養; Vol. 4 *Miko to megami* 巫女と女神).

<sup>26</sup> Many of these translated essays were featured in Barbara Ruch's edited volume. See Ōsumi Kazuo, "Historical Notes on Women and the Japanization of Buddhism," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002) and Nishiguchi Junko, "Where the Bones Go: Death and Burial of Women of the Heian High Aristocracy," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> For examples, see Hosokawa Ryōichi 細川涼一, *Onna no chūsei: Ono no komachi, tomoe, sono ta* 女の中世：小野小町・巴・その他 (Tokyo: Nihon Edaitasukūru, 1989); Katsuura Noriko 勝浦令子, *Onna no shinjin: Tsuma ga shukke shita jidai* 女の信心：妻が出家した時代 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995).

interested in reconstructing the lives of medieval Buddhist women. Most notably, Barbara Ruch published a monograph in Japanese on the life and portraits of the Zen abbess, Mugai Nyodai 無外如大 (1223-1298) in 1991 and later established the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies at Columbia University and an auxiliary center in Kyoto to support research on women and Buddhism and the preservation of Japanese convents.<sup>28</sup>

During the early 2000s, scholars began to question whether to characterize Buddhist institutions as oppressive spaces or places of liberation for medieval Japanese women. Barbara Ruch has argued for the latter claiming that convents functioned as safe havens for women in distraught circumstances. In the volume *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, which she edited in 2002, several scholars discuss the active role that premodern women played in Japanese Buddhism. The volume is divided into five sections considering topics such as 1) the role of aristocratic women in propagating Buddhism during the seventh to the ninth centuries 2) the role of nuns and nunneries 3) doctrinal issues surrounding female salvation 4) female deities and icons commissioned by women and 5) female ritual practices and practitioners. Bernard Faure, a scholar of religion, however, has argued for a more fluid interpretation of the history of Buddhist women. He has argued that the role of women in Buddhist institutions was not linear from an oppressive to a liberated state. By examining several written sources, Faure argues against a singular category of “Buddhism” and even “women.”<sup>29</sup> He shows that medieval Japanese women were not so different from their modern counterparts; some female devotees actively challenged Buddhist discourses, while others were passive victims.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Mō hitotsu no chūseizō: Bikuni, otogi zōshi, raisei* もう一つの中世像：比丘尼・御伽草子・来世 (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 1-30.

These studies inspired a plethora of further research that delved more deeply into the active role of Buddhist women as writers, scholars, and practitioners. Lori Meeks' work on the revival of the Hokkeji convent during the medieval period has shown that female devotees were active participants in ordination practices and even in institutional leadership.<sup>30</sup> *Women, Rites, and Ritual Objects in Premodern Japan*, a volume of ten scholarly essays edited by Karen Gerhart, considers the roles that both nuns and laywomen played in the performance of Buddhist rituals.<sup>31</sup> Christina Laffin's in-depth examination of the literary works of the nun Abutsu 阿仏 (1225-1283) and Katō Mieko's work on blood sutra beliefs and childbirth have also offered proof that women were not simply subjugated within Buddhist institutions.<sup>32</sup>

In the museum context, there was also great interest in examining the role of premodern Buddhist women as artists and patrons. In 2003, both the Nara National Museum and the Nomura Art Museum organized exhibitions on works of art created by Buddhist nuns. The former exhibition entitled "Women and Buddhism" (*Josei to Bukkyō* 女性と仏教) displayed over 194 artworks including objects that were owned by Buddhist women and artworks representing female devotees.<sup>33</sup> The Nomura Art Museum's exhibition entitled "Art by Buddhist Nuns: Treasures from the Imperial Convents of Japan" (*Ama monzeki to nisō no bijutsu* 尼門跡と尼僧の美術) focused on objects made by aristocratic nuns during the Edo period (1603-1868).<sup>34</sup> Both exhibitions commented on the active roles that women played as creators and patrons of Buddhist art and

<sup>30</sup> Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan*.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Gerhart, ed. *Women, Rites, and Ritual Objects in Premodern Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Laffin, *Rewriting Medieval Japanese Women: Politics, Personality, and Literary Production in the life of Nun Abutsu*; Katō Mieko 加藤美恵子, *Nihon chūsei no bōsei to kegarekan* 日本中世の母性と穢れ観 (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Tokubetsuten josei to bukkō: inori to hohōemi* 特別展女性と仏教・いのりとほほえみ (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Patricia Fister, *Art by Buddhist Nuns: Treasures from the Imperial Convents of Japan* (New York: Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies, 2003).

showed that women were also responsible for the teaching and the shaping of Buddhist practices in Japan.

This study builds upon previous research by scholars on women and Buddhism to consider how hair embroidered icons functioned as embodied implements that enabled women to intervene in ideological structures. My dissertation approaches Buddhist hair embroideries from a gendered lens in order to refine our understanding of the crucial role these textiles played in the devotional practices of medieval women. My integrated analysis of the materiality and ritual use of Buddhist hair embroideries gives a fuller picture of how these objects served as tools for women to deal with teachings concerning the impurities of their female bodies, to achieve enlightenment, and to establish corporeal presence in male-dominated spaces.

## **1.2 APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

Since my research is interdisciplinary and contributes to the study of art history, women's history, and Buddhist ritual practices, my approaches to Buddhist hair embroideries draws from various methodologies. Recent theoretical approaches to ritual studies, female agency, and material culture studies have most importantly shaped my interpretation of Buddhist hair embroideries and provide a foundation for understanding why embroidered Buddhist icons exerted such a significant impact on female devotees and played an active role in women's devotional practices.

### 1.2.1 Ritual Studies

The study of ritual has been an important focus in diverse fields including anthropology, art history, and religious studies as a means to understand cultural dynamics. In the 1910s, Emile Durkheim conducted one of the earliest studies on rituals, claiming that these acts were a means of expressing social cohesion and preserving social solidarity.<sup>35</sup> Cultural anthropologists, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, expanded upon Durkheim's theoretical approach to argue that rituals were a means of resolving social conflicts.<sup>36</sup> Since the 1970s, several scholars including Catherine Bell, Jonathan Z. Smith, Thomas Lawson, and Robert McCauley have provided influential theories on ritual, yet there is still no consensus on how exactly to define the term.<sup>37</sup> To complicate matters even further in the field of Japanese studies, there is no direct translation in Japanese for the English term "ritual," but rather more general terms such as etiquette (*reigi* 礼儀), ceremony (*gishiki* 儀式), and practice (*girei* 儀礼). In the context of this dissertation, I use the term "ritual" to refer to a set of prescribed actions that are performed to appeal to the supernatural. These rituals could be both public and private in the sense that such ceremonies were conducted for the recipients of Buddhist hair embroideries. These textiles could be displayed in state funerals or could be performed in one's private quarters.

The study of the ritual use of Buddhist images has become critical in the fields of Japanese art history and Buddhist studies. In the edited volume, *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in*

<sup>35</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954).

<sup>36</sup> Victor Turner, *Schism and the Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (Oxford; Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1996); Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>37</sup> For examples of scholarly definitions, see Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 189-193.

*Context*, Robert Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf challenged the previously held assumption that only ignorant laymen venerated Buddhist images. In Robert Sharf's discussion of the *Mandala of the Two Realms*, he emphasizes that the relationship between ritual and image was often muddled.<sup>38</sup> He argued that the mandala does not necessarily *explain* the ritual nor do ritual manuals usually mention the ritual's direct correlation with the Buddhist image. Thus, he proposes that Buddhist icons do not merely serve as tools in visualization practices or proselytizing but were perceived as divine presences of deities. The study of the ritual function of Buddhist icons then enables scholars to understand the ontological status attributed to these images and challenges the one-dimensional view that these icons simply served as didactic tools in proselytizing, teaching, and visualization practices. Sharf's approach has been useful for expanding my understanding of the relationship between ritual and Buddhist hair embroideries. In this dissertation, I aim to situate these textiles within their original ritual context in order to explore how embroidered Buddhist icons were used to generate merit for a female patron or recipient.

### **1.2.2 Female Agency in Religious Spaces**

This dissertation also draws upon methodologies and scholarship on female agency, power, and religious practice outside of a premodern Japanese context. In her groundbreaking book, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, the social anthropologist, Saba Mahmood, provides a theoretical framework for examining the relationship between female agency and religious practice in a non-Western context. Mahmood critically examines the lives

<sup>38</sup> Robert Sharf, "Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism" in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, eds. Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 151-98.



and motivations of contemporary pious Muslim women in Cairo, Egypt to propose that liberal feminist discourses on agency and ethics must be critically reevaluated. Mahmood argues that women's agency is not always directly linked to resisting or subverting social norms, particularly within a non-liberal context.<sup>39</sup> Through her detailed analysis of the ritual lives and religious practices of women involved in the Islamic moral reform movement, Mahmood argues that these pious women found satisfaction in submitting to social norms that historically secured their subordination to men, a fact that poses a dilemma to the secular-liberal feminist paradigm on agency. Mahmood's research is critical in that she points out shortcomings and assumptions that are made in contemporary western thought concerning modalities of agency, power, and freedom and she provides an alternative approach to agency that can be applied even to a premodern Japanese context.

Dorothy Ko, a historian of late imperial China, also rejects the long-held assumption that late imperial women were oppressed and silenced victims within the Confucian system. In *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-century China*, Ko argues that women in late imperial China found satisfaction and meaning not by actively resisting social constraints within the Confucian family system, but by contributing to this dominant social order.<sup>40</sup> In particular, she examines the lives and writings of elite women in seventeenth-century Jiangnan to support her claim that these women used their writings to articulate women's culture and celebrated gendered practices such as footbinding. The works of both Mahmood and Ko are useful models for my research because they provide a deeper understanding of how women's agency can

<sup>39</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 5-10.

<sup>40</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

also align with dominant systems of power. Their work also explains why medieval Japanese women actively participated and willingly contributed to Buddhist institutions that perceived them as inferior to men.

Historians of medieval Europe have also called into question the notion that Christian nuns lacked agency within convents. Scholars have frequently turned to the study of images as a means to reconstruct Christian female devotional practices and to understand how nuns shaped, viewed, and responded to their cultures.<sup>41</sup> The art historian, Jeffrey Hamburger, points out that an analysis of female monastic imagery provides an understanding of women's agency and religious experiences during the Middle Ages that an analysis of doctrinal texts written by women could not as these accounts were often mediated and filtered by men. In *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and the Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, Hamburger demonstrates that women played a critical role in the development and dissemination of devotional images in the German-speaking late Middle Ages and shows how nuns exercised significant influence even outside the convent walls.<sup>42</sup> Hamburger's gendered analysis of art then provides an important case study on how to reconstruct the voices and practices of medieval women even within a Buddhist context.

In *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, a collection of essays edited by Therese Martin, scholars have also examined female agency by considering the roles of women in artistic production during the fifth to the fifteenth century within

<sup>41</sup> See for example Marilyn Dunn, "Nuns as Patrons: The Decoration of S. Marta al Collegio Romano," *Art Bulletin* 70 (1988): 451-77; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1991); Craig A. Monson ed., *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Ann E. Matter and John Coakley eds., *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1998).

Christian, Jewish, and Islamic contexts.<sup>43</sup> The volume aims to restore medieval women's presence in cultural activities and is divided into six broad thematic categories: 1) display and concealment 2) ownership and community 3) collaboration and authorship 4) family and audience 5) piety and power and 6) memory and motherhood. This research on women's involvement in cultural production through patronage, consumption, and production of art is a valuable project as it uncovers women's perspectives. By applying these approaches to my study on premodern Japan, I aim to reintroduce women's contributions to Buddhist institutions by making and venerating embroidered Buddhist icons.

### **1.2.3 Matter & Materiality**

Over the past few decades, there has been renewed interest surrounding the materiality and agency of “things” within the humanities and the social sciences. This material turn is characterized by the belief that objects possess agency and vitality and that they have the capacity to act and alter the course of events. Scholarship on the material world can broadly be distinguished into two categories: studies of material culture and studies of materials themselves. While material culture studies are focused on the relationship between people and things, studies of materials are more concerned with the broader understandings and implications of particular materials within a work of art. Both approaches are useful in this dissertation for revealing the cultural significance of embroidered Buddhist icons and for understanding how the women who produced, commissioned, and venerated these images responded to these textiles.

<sup>43</sup> Therese Martin, *Reassessing the Roles of Women as “Makers” of Medieval Art and Architecture* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

In *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Alfred Gell develops a theoretical approach for understanding the ways in which visual art mediates social agency. Since Gell is an anthropologist, he is not concerned with the meaning and debates surrounding aesthetics, but rather focuses on the ways in which artworks stand in a network of social relations. Gell created an analytical framework called the “Art Nexus” which involves two components acting upon each other as agent and patient.<sup>44</sup> With his Art Nexus, he is interested in exploring why objects have the power to compel and captivate viewers as these works are produced, circulated, and/or received. “The basic thesis of this work,” Gell argues, “is that works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an *anthropological* theory, as person-like; that is, sources of, and targets for, social agency.”<sup>45</sup> Gell’s approach is a valuable tool for examining premodern Japanese Buddhist art because he is concerned with the efficacy of objects and provides a framework for understanding why Buddhist images were approached as active agents by practitioners. I apply his approach to this study in order to shed light on relationships between agencies of power.

Bruno Latour and Ian Hodder, crucial thinkers in the fields of New Materialism, also discuss the dynamic interaction between human and non-human things. Like Gell, these scholars emphasize that objects do not simply reflect culture but are active agents in social and economic relations. Hodder writes, “material culture transforms, rather than reflects, social organization according to the strategies of groups, their beliefs, concepts and ideologies.”<sup>46</sup> While Latour interprets the relationship between things and humans as an interconnective network, Hodder argues that the relationship can be better described as an “entanglement” of dependence and

<sup>44</sup> The four types of components are 1) artists 2) artworks 3) art audiences (or recipients) and 4) models which he refers to as prototypes. Any of these components can be in a relationship with one another.

<sup>45</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 96.

<sup>46</sup> Ian Hodder, *Symbols in Action: Ethnoarchaeological Studies of Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 212.

dependency.<sup>47</sup> In order to comprehend this reliance between humans and things, Hodder claims that scholars should examine the physical properties of objects, the “non-human ecologies in which they interact, and their fluctuating hold over humans.”<sup>48</sup>

These materialist approaches provide an understanding of why medieval Buddhist practitioners approached Buddhist images as living entities. Embroidered Buddhist icons did not simply reflect or symbolize a deity. In *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism*, Fabio Rambelli examines the writings by Buddhist monks to understand what made practitioners believe that these sacred objects had special powers.<sup>49</sup> He writes that the Shingon monk, Inyū 印融 (1435-1519), for example, used the metaphor of moonlight to explain the ontological status of Buddhist images. Inyū claimed that, while the moon is like the true body of the Buddha, Buddhist icons are the unconditioned image within which the moon’s light is stored. Buddhist images then were not seen as mere objects arbitrarily made by artists, but as samples of “Mahāvairocana’s empowerment and externalizations of his inner enlightenment.”<sup>50</sup> These perspectives on Buddhist images compel us to approach embroidered Buddhist icons not as mute objects but as icons that had the capacity to act upon society. In effect, Buddhist hair embroideries were created and venerated by women because these objects were thought to actively carry out their desires to achieve Buddhahood and complicate notions that they were incapable of attaining enlightenment.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Hodder *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Bruno Latour, “Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts,” in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, Wiebe Bijker and John Law eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994): 225-258.

<sup>48</sup> Hodder *Entangled*, 93-94.

<sup>49</sup> Fabio Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Fabio Rambelli, “Secret Buddhas: The Limits of Buddhist Representation,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 57, no. 3 (2002): 289.

In addition to these theoretical frameworks which treat artworks as person-like social agents, I have found approaches that highlight the material qualities of objects as equally important to the study of embroidered Buddhist icons. In the field of art history, the materiality of objects has been of interest to many scholars in recent years. In 2013, the *Art Bulletin* invited eleven scholars from across the discipline to formulate a working definition of “materiality” within their subfield.<sup>51</sup> Then in 2019, the journal published a series of articles that take materiality as a serious and legitimate art historical approach.<sup>52</sup> By addressing materiality as well as the sensory and physical aspect of objects as a primary concern, art historians have begun to pay close attention to topics such as material culture and decorative arts that were previously only tangentially acknowledged within the field.

The significance of the materiality of Buddhist images has been explored by several scholars in the context of medieval Japan. Christian Boehm, for example, has investigated how sandalwood was considered the most suitable material for carving Buddhist statues due to its pleasant fragrance and medicinal properties.<sup>53</sup> In *Hiraizumi: Buddhist Art and Regional Politics in Twelfth-Century Japan*, Mimi Yiengpruksawan has also looked at the meaning of gold pigment as it was applied to Buddhist icons and other funerary objects.<sup>54</sup> She argues that gold pigment was generously applied to counteract impurities related to death that were intrinsic to mortuary temples as well as to assist the deceased in rebirth into the Pure Land. This dissertation follows in the same

<sup>51</sup> Martha Rosler, Caroline Walker Bynum, Natasha Eaton, Michael Ann Holly, Amelia Jones, Michael Kelly, Robin Kelsey, Alisa LaGamma, Monika Wagner, Oliver Watson, and Tristan Weddigen, “Notes from the Field: Materiality,” *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (2013): 10-37.

<sup>52</sup> Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, “Materiality, Signs of the Times,” *Art Bulletin* 101, no. 4 (2019): 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Christian Boehm, *The Concept of Danzō: ‘Sandalwood Images’ in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture of the 8th to 14th Centuries* (London: Saffron Books, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan, *Hiraizumi: Buddhist Art and Regional Politics in Twelfth-Century Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

vein to illustrate that the power of Buddhist hair embroideries stemmed also from their materiality with the use of costly strands of silk-thread and personal corporeal matter of human hair.

I use the term materiality in this dissertation to argue that the materials used (silk and human hair) enhanced the function and meaning of Buddhist images in a way that form, iconography, inscriptions, and the process of making could not. My overall approach to understanding the significance of the materiality of embroidered Buddhist icons draws largely upon the work of the archaeologist, Tim Ingold. In “Materials against materiality,” Ingold argues that we should redirect our attention from objects to the properties of the materials that make up these objects themselves.<sup>55</sup> He claims that, “things are alive and active not because they are possessed of spirit... but because the substance to which they are comprised continue to be swept up in circulations of the surrounding media.”<sup>56</sup> According to Ingold, then, scholars should focus on the materials that the artist acknowledges and the devotee experiences when encountering objects. Thus, this dissertation applies Ingold’s approach to Japanese Buddhist hair embroideries to emphasize the makers’ relationship to the materials (hair, silk, and gold thread) with which they worked to create these images.

### 1.3 TEXTUAL SOURCES AND INSCRIPTIONS

Textual sources that I have consulted for this study include temple records, historical chronicles, diaries of courtiers and monks, *setsuwa* 説話 tales, Buddhist preaching texts

<sup>55</sup> Tim Ingold, “Materials against Materiality,” *Archaeological Dialogues*, 14 (2007): 12.

<sup>56</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 29.

(*kangebon* 勧化本), commentaries on the ritual use of images, and miraculous origin stories of embroidered Buddhist icons. Since ritual is one of the primary lenses through which I view these textiles, court diaries and temple records have been particularly useful for this study. These diaries, such as *Teishinkōki* 貞信公記, written by Fujiwara no Tadahira 藤原忠平 (880-949), and *Shōyūki* 小右記, written by Fujiwara no Sanesuke 藤原実資 (957-1046), include information on the memorial services of Heian-period royal mothers for which embroidered Buddhist icons were frequently commissioned. These documents describe in great detail the rituals performed and the people in attendance at these ceremonies. Therefore, despite the paucity of surviving Japanese embroidered Buddhist images before the thirteenth century, these records have enabled me to reconstruct the form, ritual use, and meaning of early textiles. Later Buddhist textual sources such as *Shinsen ōjōden* 新撰往生伝 and *Kaichō danwa* 開帳談話 also describe the use of Buddhist hair embroideries in proselytization activities and embodied ritual practices, and thus, can provide a nuanced interpretation of these images in their original context.

Poetry and secular literature such as the eighth-century collection of Japanese *waka*, the *Manyōshū* 万葉集, and the eleventh-century *Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語) have also been essential for uncovering the multiple meanings, from beauty and sexuality to impurity and death, associated with female hair in premodern Japan. There are no records that describe exactly when women began incorporating their hair into embroideries. However, I examine Song Dynasty (960-1279) tales concerning Chinese women who incorporated their hair into Buddhist images to articulate some of the broader ideological implications of this practice.

Inscriptions frequently located on the back of Buddhist hair embroideries or on the box that holds the image are also examined in this study. These inscriptions usually record the textile's date and location of production, the objectives that motivated its creation, the materials such as hair



stitched into the image, and the identity of the patron and/or the recipient. Inscriptions are certainly invaluable resources for providing context to an embroidered Buddhist icon, but these sources should not be trusted blindly. The inscription on a *Descent of Shaka Triad* embroidery from Shinshū-Gokurakuji 真正極樂寺, for example, indicates that this image was mistaken for an image of the *Descent of Amida Triad* and was venerated as such. Therefore, I combine analyses of inscriptions and textual sources with a close examination of the style and form of embroidered Buddhist icons. In the course of researching this dissertation, I was able to examine firsthand many of these textiles. The documentation of these inscriptions, however, remains brief and incomplete and so, in the Appendices, I have transcribed these sources and provided short English translations.

In some cases, however, legends and fabricated stories are useful to gain a picture of how Buddhist hair embroideries served the needs of women at a given time, place, and community. While most of the patrons and recipients recorded in inscriptions are obscure women whose identities do not exist in historical sources, some of them are well-known political figures, such as Hōjō Masako, and saintly legendary figures, such as Chūjōhime. Over a dozen Buddhist hair embroideries survive across Japan today with inscriptions claiming that Chūjōhime created the image. Yet, stylistic analysis dates these embroideries at least four hundred years after her alleged death and so the attribution is illogical and the inscriptions are fallacious. In Chapter Four of this study, however, it is inconsequential whether or not these sources are credible. My concern is not in the legitimacy of these inscriptions, but rather, with how early modern viewers came to interpret these images as objects created by Chūjōhime and why they considered these embroideries as worthy of devotion.

Inscriptions of sutras and liturgical texts stitched on the borders surrounding the image are also crucial sources when considering the subject matter and significance of an embroidered

Buddhist icon. It is true that there is not always a direct correspondence between what is described in these texts and what is pictured in the Buddhist image.<sup>57</sup> Yet these inscriptions also signaled to the viewer the prescribed actions that should be performed in front of the image. As Claude Gandelman writes, “inscriptions can also be said to represent the ‘performative’ aspect of the work of art in the literal meaning of this word; that is they are used to direct the gaze of the observer to specific spots within the painting and are part of the manipulative strategy of the painter.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, whenever possible I consult both textual sources and the inscriptions on the front and back of these textiles to reconstruct the history of embroidered Buddhist icons.

## 1.4 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This dissertation consists of five chapters, including an introduction and conclusion, each of which consists of a case study to demonstrate that the materiality, ritual use, and visibility of Buddhist hair embroideries enabled women in premodern Japan to transform their physical bodies into devotional objects. These chapters focus on the ways that women used Buddhist hair embroideries to shape new attitudes towards female devotion and reassess their role within the larger Buddhist community.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999): 74.

<sup>58</sup> Claude Gandelman, “By Way of Introduction: Inscriptions as Subversion,” *Visible Language* 23, no. 3 (1989): 140.

## **1.4.1 Chapter Two. The Making of a Female Bodhisattva in Chinese and Japanese**

### **Embroidered Images of Kannon**

This chapter traces the adoption and adaptation of embroidered images depicting the bodhisattva Kannon 観音 (C. Guanyin Sk. Avalokiteśvara) from China to Japan. I examine the origin and early function of Guanyin embroideries at the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang and then their use in state rituals at Japanese Buddhist temples during the eighth century. With a critical and comparative examination of Kannon hair embroideries and historical records on both the continent and in Japan, I show that the form, use, and meaning of these textiles differed by cultural context and even by Buddhist sect. Chinese embroideries of Guanyin were often sewn by women in the privacy of their homes as a personal devotional act to express their piety towards this bodhisattva. The value of Guanyin hair embroideries in China stemmed from the image's painful and time-consuming creation process. In contrast, embroidered icons of Kannon in Japan were displayed in public rituals and frequently reference a specific motif from sutras, such as the Dragon Princess from the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra. These hair embroideries also frequently depict Nyoirin Kannon and show that the creation of these textiles were central to its cult. This interplay between text and image then aimed to convey a message that would attract female devotees to pilgrimage sites and Buddhist temples.

## **1.4.2 Chapter Three. From Recipient to Patron: Strands of Women's Devotion in**

### **Embroidered Buddhist Images**

In this chapter, I examine Buddhist embroideries that were commissioned for royal mothers in the Heian period and the development of Buddhist images that were embroidered with hair

during the late twelfth century. Combining a comprehensive analysis of visual and written sources, this chapter demonstrates that Buddhist embroideries were thought to accrue merit for women in Japan in both this life and the next. In particular, I focus on a *Lotus Sutra* mandala dedicated by Hōjō Masako 北条政子 (1156-1225) for the one-year memorial service of her husband, Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147-1199), the founder of the Kamakura warrior government. This mandala complicates the notion that Buddhist embroideries were commissioned solely to memorialize the deceased because Masako's dedication of the *Lotus Sutra* (*hokke mandara* 法華曼荼羅) hair embroidery also served to establish her authority as Yoritomo's proxy and signified her right to rule over his domain of Izu Province. An embroidered Buddhist icon, then, also served as a visual marker for a widow to establish herself as the primary mourner of her husband and to gain economic stability after his death.

#### **1.4.3 Chapter Four. The Chūjōhime Cult and the Veneration of Her Body in Early Modern Hair Embroideries**

Chapter Four examines the ritual significance and efficacy of hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime 中将姫 (753?-781?), a legendary aristocratic woman credited with attaining enlightenment after commissioning the famous *Taima mandara* 當麻曼荼羅 tapestry. Dozens of hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime survive today in convents, temples, and at pilgrimage sites, yet we do not fully understand how and why these textiles became central to her cultic practices. The first part investigates texts, *setsuwa* tales, and images of Chūjōhime from the twelfth century onward and explores possible reasons for Chūjōhime's association with these textiles. The second part identifies the hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime and analyzes the iconography

and patronage of these textiles to consider the varied ritual uses of the images. By exploring the use of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries in proselytization activities, I argue that Pure Land Buddhist temples promoted the veneration of these hair embroideries as a direct response to the popularization of the *Blood Bowl Sutra*. This text asserted that women required monastic intervention to be saved from their impending destiny in the Blood Hells due to their bodily impurity. The hair embroideries purported to have been sewn by Chūjōhime, however, were intended to counter the *Blood Bowl Sutra* (*ketsubon kyō* 血盆経) and suggest that women were capable of attaining enlightenment. The conclusion then summarizes the previous chapters and discusses the contributions that this study makes in various fields. Finally, I put forward questions and directions for future research on embroidered Buddhist icons.

## 2.0 THE MAKING OF A FEMALE BODHISATTVA IN CHINESE AND JAPANESE EMBROIDERED IMAGES OF KANNON

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Kannon (観音 Ch. Guanyin Sk. Avalokiteśvara) is unique among all Buddhist deities because this bodhisattva can take on the appearance of multiple female forms.<sup>59</sup> The bodhisattva was widely venerated across East Asia particularly by women who felt that Kannon was sympathetic towards their sufferings and comprehended their desires. As the bodhisattva gained popularity, the deity's iconography, gestures, and attributes evolved to fit local beliefs and a wide array of forms. Scholars of medieval Japan have accomplished the daunting task of surveying painted and sculpted images of Kannon, tracing the development of Kannon imagery, and analyzing devotees' motives for participating in pilgrimages related to Kannon across Japan.<sup>60</sup> How embroidered images of Kannon contributed to these changes in cultic practice, however, remains overlooked.

This absence in scholarship is not surprising since, compared to the dozens of *Descent of Amida Triad* (*Sanzon Amida raigōzu* 三尊阿弥陀来迎図) embroideries housed in temple

<sup>59</sup> The feminization of the deity Avalokiteśvara is thought to have occurred in the Song dynasty along with the emergence of other goddess cults in China.

<sup>60</sup> See Sherry D. Fowler, *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017); Chelsea Foxwell, "'Merciful Mother Kannon' and Its Audiences," *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010): 326-47; Samuel C. Morse, "The Buddhist Transformation of Japan in the Ninth Century," in *Heian Japan: Centers and Peripheries*, eds. Mikael S. Adolphson, Edward Kamens, and Stacie Matsumoto (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 153-78; Cynthia J. Bogel, "Canonizing Kannon: The Ninth-Century Esoteric Buddhist Altar at Kanshinji," *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (2002): 30-64; Mark W. MacWilliams, "Temple Myths and the Popularization of Kannon Pilgrimage In Japan: A Case Study of Ōya-ji on the Bandō Route," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (1997): 375-411.

collections and museums today, only three embroidered images of Kannon survive from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. In contrast, there are various extant Guanyin embroideries and numerous textual sources describing the creation process of these embroideries in China, notably those from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912).<sup>61</sup> If the bodhisattva Kannon was so popular with women in Japan, particularly during the medieval period, why do so many sculpted and painted images of this bodhisattva survive and yet so few embroidered images? How did the function and creation process of embroidered images of this bodhisattva differ between China and Japan? Most importantly, what could an embroidered image of Kannon offer to believers that painted and sculpted icons of the bodhisattva could not?

This chapter examines the development in the ritual use and meaning of embroidered images of the bodhisattva Kannon in China and Japan by analyzing embroideries of the deity owned by temples of three different sects: Zen 禅, Tendai 天台, and Ritsu 律. I argue that the medium of embroidery enabled artists to express their own doctrinal needs and reconstruct multiple meanings for a single subject. Thus, Japanese embroidered images of Kannon could be used for a variety of ritual settings, whereas embroideries of the *Descent of Amida Triad* tended to be limited to funerary and memorialization contexts because the bodhisattva Kannon was said to save all sentient beings from various forms of suffering, whereas Amida Buddha was called upon only at times of death.

Furthermore, a comparison between embroideries of the bodhisattva in Japan and China enables us to see the varied meanings attributed to these images in each context. While embroideries of Kannon in Japan illustrated a specific scene from Buddhist doctrine and were

<sup>61</sup> The Chinese pronunciation for the bodhisattva Kannon is Guanyin. When I refer to objects of Chinese origin, I will use the term Guanyin. When referring to objects of Japanese origin, I will use the term Kannon.

meant to be publicly displayed in ritual settings, Chinese embroideries of Guanyin were products expressing private devotion where what mattered was not the final image, but the devotional act of the embroidery itself. This chapter then focuses on the plurality and multiplicity of meanings associated with the embroideries of Kannon as proof that the bodhisattva did not have the same significance to devotees in China and Japan.

### 2.1.1 Introduction to the Kannon Bodhisattva

A bodhisattva is a being who achieved the ten perfections and is on the path towards enlightenment, but voluntarily postpones Buddhahood to stay in this world and help all sentient beings attain rebirth.<sup>62</sup> Bodhisattvas are central to the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, which spread from India in the first century and later flourished across East Asia. *Jātaka* tales record the past lives of these bodhisattvas to highlight their compassionate and merciful nature. In these stories, bodhisattvas endure extreme bodily deprivation and mental anguish—they sacrifice their flesh to hungry tigers to satiate them or their eyeballs to blind men so they can see—to show that they attained essential virtues like generosity, truthfulness, and equanimity on the path towards Buddhahood.

Countless bodhisattvas exist within the Mahayana tradition, but the most prevalently depicted one in India, China, and Japan is Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. The name of this bodhisattva is composed of two Chinese characters, "kan" 觀, meaning to observe, and "on" 音, meaning sound.

<sup>62</sup> Not all Buddhist texts claim that the bodhisattva postpones their own on enlightenment. The *Astasaahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra*, for example, claims that the bodhisattvas actually attain Buddhahood but then revoke this status so they can better guide sentient beings towards enlightenment. See Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 316-19; Nancy Lethcoe, "Some Notes on the Relationship between the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the Revised *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*, and the Chinese Translations of the Unrevised *añcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96 (1976): 499-511.



音, meaning sound, as a reference to the belief that this deity can hear and respond to the cries of all sentient beings in distress.<sup>63</sup> It is unclear when the bodhisattva Kannon first appeared in Buddhist thought, but the deity was formalized by 300 CE when the first sutras about the bodhisattva's many salvific powers were first written in India.<sup>64</sup> These sutras, such as the *Kannon Sutra* (*Kannon gyō* 觀音經), the *Infinite Life Sutra* (*Muryōjukyō* 無量壽經 Sk. *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sutra*), and the *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Kegon gyō* 華嚴經 Sk. *Avatamsaka Sutra*), describe the three primary roles of Kannon as the savior of sentient beings, the attendant of Amida Buddha (*Amida Nyorai* 阿彌陀如来 Sk. *Amitābha*), and as lord over the sacred island of Mt. Potalaka (*Fudarakusen* 補陀落山).<sup>65</sup>

While there are multiple iconographical types of Kannon, two out of the three extant Japanese Kannon embroideries depict the form of Nyoirin Kannon (如意輪觀音 Sk. *Cintāmanicakra-avalokiteśvara*), one of the six types of Kannon that rescues beings from the Six Realms (*rokudō* 六道). His name derives from two of his accoutrements—the wish-fulfilling jewel (*nyoi* 如意) and the Dharma wheel (*rin* 輪)—which became formalized features of Nyoirin Kannon during the eighth century.<sup>66</sup> The *Guanzizai Ruyilun Guanyin pusa yuqie fayao* (Jp. *Kanjizai nyoirin*

<sup>63</sup> The Sanskrit name, Avalokiteśvara, also has multiple meanings such as the "Lord who sees" and the "Lord who is seen." Gotō Daiyō 後藤大用, *Kanzeon Bosatsu no kenkyū* 觀世音菩薩の研究 (Tokyo: Sankibo Busshorin, 1976), 1-17.

<sup>64</sup> These sutras concerning Kannon include the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sutra*, the *Mahāvastu*, the *Cheng-chü kuang-ming t'ing-i-ching*, the *Druma-kinnara-rāja-pariprcchā Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Heart Sutra*. On the role of these sutras in the development of the figure Avalokiteśvara in India, see Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University, 2001), 7-8.

<sup>65</sup> The *Kannon Sutra*, which was originally the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, claims that the bodhisattva Kannon takes on thirty-three different manifestations to rescue all sentient beings from the seven difficulties, three poisons, and two misunderstandings. The *Infinite Life Sutra* states that Kannon serves as one of Amida Buddha's attendants in the Pure Land, and the *Flower Garland Sutra* offers evidence that Kannon reigns over the mythical island of Mt. Potalaka.

<sup>66</sup> Rituals connected to the Six Kannon Cult were performed to alleviate a wide variety of concerns for this world and for the afterlife. People venerated these images to save beings from the Six Realms, avert calamities, and assure safe childbirths. The six realms of existence in the afterlife include the Hell Realm (*jigokudō* 地獄道), the Hungry Ghosts

*bosatsu yuga hōyō* 觀自在如意輪菩薩瑜伽法要), translated by the Indian monk Vajrabodhi (671-741), is the first text to describe Nyoirin Kannon's six arms and golden body.<sup>67</sup> Images of Nyoirin Kannon typically have six arms with each one representing a different realm.

All bodhisattvas, in theory, transcend gender, but Kannon is distinct as the deity takes on a masculine, an androgynous, and a female form. One reason for this feminization of Kannon is that the bodhisattva was thought to have the capacity to transform into a total of thirty-three different manifestations (*keshin* 化身) of which seven were female. For the sake of clarity, however, I will only use “he/his” pronouns when referring to the bodhisattva Kannon, even if the deity takes on a female appearance.

## 2.2 BUDDHIST EMBROIDERIES IN CHINA

### 2.2.1 Early Royal Patronage and Continental Buddhist Embroideries

The earliest embroidered Buddhist images were not made in China, but rather created in India and then transferred to other Buddhist kingdoms. The *Ekottarāgama* sutra, an early Mahayana Buddhist scripture from India, is the oldest text to mention the creation of Buddhist embroideries and offers proof that some of the earliest images of the Buddha were embroidered.<sup>68</sup>

Realm (*gakidō* 餓鬼道), the Animal Realm (*chikushō* 畜生道), the Asura Realm (*shuradō* 修羅道), the Human Realm (*ningendō* 人間道), and the Heavenly Realm (*tendō* 天道). See Fowler, *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan*, 14-48.

<sup>67</sup> Fowler, *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan*, 27-28.

<sup>68</sup> The *Ekottarāgama* sutra is among one of the oldest extant Buddhist texts, so it is impossible to give a precise date for its creation. Scholars, though, have discovered that this sutra was translated into Chinese around the fourth or fifth centuries. See Tse-fu Kuan, “Legends and Transcendence: Sectarian Affiliations of the Ekottarika Āgama in Chinese Translation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 133, no. 4 (2013): 607-634.

This text discusses the creation process of the first Buddhist image, a five-foot sandalwood sculpture of the historical Buddha, Śakyamuni (*Shaka nyorai* 釈迦如来), which was created during the Buddha's lifetime. The legend states that King Udayana commissioned this image because he was distressed that Śakyamuni briefly left this world to preach the Dharma law to his mother in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven (*Tōriten* 忉利天).<sup>69</sup> The sutra then proceeds to discuss the merits of image-making and claims that all images of the Buddha, whether cast in metal or carved in wood, embroidered with pearl or silk, or assembled with mud and ash, are worthy of devotion.

The biography of the monk Daoan 道安 (312-385) contains the earliest record of a Buddhist embroidery in China and offers proof that the first embroideries were brought to China by rulers and traveling monks. According to this account, an envoy of Fu Jian 苻堅 (338-385), the founder of the Qianqin 前秦 kingdom, presented Daoan with five Buddhist images acquired from foreign lands.<sup>70</sup> Two of these Buddhist images were painted with added gold-leaf, one was woven, and the remaining two were embroidered with lavish materials of pearls and gold thread.<sup>71</sup> The record discusses the form of only one of the Buddhist images—the pearl-embroidered image—which depicts the future Buddha, Maitreya (*Miroku bosatsu* 弥勒菩薩). This embroidery reflected

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion on this tale and the animacy of early Buddhist images, see Robert H. Sharf, “The Scripture on the Production of Buddhist Images,” in *Religions in Chinese Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 262.

<sup>70</sup> The exact origin of these Buddhist images is unknown, but Itō Shinji suggests that they were created in the western regions of modern-day China. The measurements of these Buddhist images are also unknown except for one of the gold-leaf Buddhist paintings which is recorded as seven-feet high. See Itō Shinji 伊藤信二, *Nihon no Bijutsu* 日本的美術 470 (2005): 18.

<sup>71</sup> Gold thread is created by beating gold metal sheets onto paper or animal membranes. These sheets are then cut into strips and either used flat or wrapped around thin silk threads. See James CY Watt, *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 213.

Daoan's own religious interest as he was the founder of the Maitreya cult in China and emphasized the worship of this deity for rebirth in the Tusita heaven (*Tosotsuten* 兜率天).<sup>72</sup>

Many rulers in northern Chinese kingdoms converted to Buddhism by the sixth century. They declared the faith as the state religion and commissioned monumental embroidered Buddhist images to convey their devotion. Xiao Zhangmao 蕭長懋 (Crown Prince Wenhui 文惠太子; 458-493), the ruler of the Southern Qi, for example, promulgated the faith by inviting eminent monks to his kingdom to give public lectures and commissioning a Buddhist embroidery that was five-and-a-half meters tall.<sup>73</sup> Yuwen Yong 宇文邕 (Emperor Wudi 武帝 r. 543-578), the ruler of the Northern Zhou Dynasty, also commissioned an embroidered image of Śakyamuni and attendants that was over three-and-a-half meters tall in 560 CE after ascending to the throne.<sup>74</sup> Fourteen years later, however, this same emperor launched a severe persecution of Buddhism due to the expanding economic growth and political power of the monastic community.<sup>75</sup> Emperor Wudi confiscated temple properties and destroyed Buddhist images and sutras until 577 CE, assuring prolonged consequences. This extensive destruction led to the pessimistic belief that the world had entered an apocalyptic and degenerative age known as *mofa* (末法 *J. mappō*).<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> For a discussion on Daoan and the Maitreya Cult, see Dorothy Wong, "Four Sichuan Buddhist Steles and the Beginnings of Pure Land Imagery in China," *Archives of Asian Art* 51 (1998-99): 56-79.

<sup>73</sup> The record claim that the measurements for the embroidery were 1 *jō* 8 *shaku*. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏：修理完成記念特別展 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2018), 7.

<sup>74</sup> The record claim that the measurements for the embroidery were 1 *jō* 6 *shaku*. Although the embroidery no longer survives, it was likely created using the chain stitch because this was the predominate technique used before the Tang Dynasty. See Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏, 7, 224.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion on the politics behind the early persecution of Buddhism in China, see Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Taoists in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>76</sup> Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 89.

The widespread belief in *mappō* transformed Chinese imperial patronage practices and royal responsibilities during the Sui (581-618) and early Tang Dynasties (618-907). The age of *mappō*, or the “End of the Buddhist Law,” is characterized as a corrupt and immoral era and is considered the third and final stage after Śakyamuni’s death. The Chinese monk Nanyue Huisi 南嶽慧思 (515-577) calculated the beginning of *mappō* to 434 CE and warned believers that all Buddhist laws would vanish at the end of this era in ten thousand years’ time.<sup>77</sup> Buddhist rulers of Chinese states came to believe that they were divinely appointed to preserve the faith and took it as their responsibility to prevent the disappearance of Buddhist thought. They commissioned Buddhist images and sutras carved out of stone to utilize the durability and longevity of this material. The power and magnificence of embroidered images, however, was not forgotten.<sup>78</sup> Records claim that, during the reign of Emperor Wen 隋文帝 (541-604, r. 581-604) of the Sui Dynasty, countless woven and embroidered Buddhist images were displayed at court.<sup>79</sup>

Under the patronage of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624-705), the sheer number and scale of embroidered Buddhist images served a political function to convey that China was the center of the Buddhist world and that Wu governed this center. Confucian doctrine had long prohibited female sovereignty, but Empress Wu usurped the throne after her husband, Emperor Gaozong’s 高宗 (628-683) death and relied on Buddhist ideology to legitimate her rule by claiming to be the reincarnation of Maitreya. In addition to commissioning several Chinese translation projects of

<sup>77</sup> This third and final age is mentioned in a variety of Buddhist scriptures such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra* (*Kongōhannya kyō* 金剛般若經 Sk. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*), and the *Nirvana Sutra* (*Daihatsunehan gyō* 大般涅槃經 Sk. *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra*). See Sofukawa Hiroshi 曾布川寛, “Kyōdōzan sekkutsu ko 響堂山石窟,” *The Toho Gakuho: Journal of Oriental Studies*, Kyoto 62 (1990): 165-207.

<sup>78</sup> Katherine R. Tsiang, “Monumentalization of Buddhist texts in the North Qi Dynasty: The Engraving of Sūtras in Stone at the Xiangtangshan Caves and Other Sites in the Sixth Century,” *Artibus Asiae*, 56, no. 3 (1996): 233-261.

<sup>79</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 7.

sutras, Empress Wu focused her zealous patronage on images of the bodhisattva Guanyin to justify female rule.<sup>80</sup> After receiving a painting of the Thousand-Armed Guanyin (*Senju Kannon Bosatsu* 千手観音菩薩) from an Indian monk, Empress Wu instructed court ladies and craftsmen to make an assortment of embroidered and painted images of the deity to propagate the cult.<sup>81</sup> Empress Wu also commissioned one thousand embroidered images of the Eleven-Headed Guanyin (*Jūichimen Kannon* 十一面観音) in 686 CE to generate karmic merit for her deceased husband.<sup>82</sup> These embroideries no longer survive so it is difficult to reconstruct their iconography and style, but relief sculptures of the Eleven-Headed Guanyin on the Tower of Seven Treasures (Qibaotai 七寶臺) that were also commissioned by the empress may provide some insight.<sup>83</sup> The bodhisattva Guanyin, depicted standing on a lotus pedestal, holds a lotus flower in his raised right hand and a vase in his left. He wears a conical-shaped three-tiered headdress with five heads depicted on the bottom tier, four in the middle, and one at the top.<sup>84</sup> Empress Wu's devotional activities may have impacted the populace at large because the patronage of the Eleven-Headed Guanyin reached an all-time high in China during the late seventh century.

<sup>80</sup> Harry N. Rothschild, *Emperor Wu Zhao and Her Pantheon of Devis, Divinities, and Dynastic Mothers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

<sup>81</sup> In addition to embroideries of Kannon, Empress Wu commissioned four hundred embroidered images depicting the Pure Land. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 7.

<sup>82</sup> A wide-array of sewing techniques were used in Tang-Dynasty Buddhist embroideries including satin, split, and long and shot stitches. Embroiderers in Tang-Dynasty China likely learned to adopt similar techniques as those used in Persian and Sogdian embroideries. Watt, *When Silk Was Gold*, 23, 168-175.

<sup>83</sup> Dorothy C. Wong, "Reassessing the Wall Paintings of Hōryūji," in *Hōryūji Reconsidered* 法隆寺の再検討, eds. Dorothy C. Wong and Eric M. Field (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 178-80.

<sup>84</sup> There are many theories concerning the meaning of Kannon's eleven heads. Some scholars argue that they represent the eleven stages on the path of enlightenment. Other scholars argue that the eleven heads stem from the tale that Kannon shattered his head into eleven fragments to save an increasing number of sentient beings. Fowler, *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan*, 22-23.

## 2.2.2 The Function of Embroidered Buddhist Images on the Silk Road

Although royal patrons seemed to prefer Buddhist images carved in stone for their durability to outlast the age of *mappō*, records reveal that all types of mediums—sculpted icons, painted murals, woven and embroidered images—adorned the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang, a pilgrimage site on the Silk Road. Each medium, then, likely had a distinct use and significance.<sup>85</sup> Song Yun 宋雲 (fl. C. 518-522) and Hui Sheng 慧生, two traveling monks in the early sixth century, describe feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of textiles at this pilgrimage site. They claim in the *Record of Buddhist Temples in Luoyang* (*Luoyang qielanji* 洛陽伽藍記;) that “tens of thousands of colored hanging canopies [were displayed at Dunhuang]... and embroidered images of the Buddha as well as statues of the Buddha were displayed whenever the Dharma was preached.”<sup>86</sup> Embroidered Buddhist images were also displayed in ritual services at Chinese Buddhist sites like Lelin Temple 樂林寺, Yongning Temple 永寧寺, and Shengguang Temple 勝光寺.<sup>87</sup>

Textual and visual evidence reveal that Buddhist embroideries at Dunhuang did not function as the main icon, but rather, as meta-images and representations of a patron’s devotion. A large-scale Buddhist embroidery discovered by Sir Aurel Stein (1862-1932) in the “Secret

<sup>85</sup> According to Yuhang Li, Buddhist embroideries were often displayed as a pair alongside woven images as early as the Eastern Jin and Sixteen Kingdoms period (317-420). One example is at the Buddha Hall of Yongning Temple in Luoyang. Yuhang Li, “Gendered Materialization: An Investigation of Women’s Artistic and Literary Reproductions of Guanyin in Late Imperial China” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2011), 94.

<sup>86</sup> James CY Watt, *China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 172.

<sup>87</sup> The embroidery at Lelin Temple depicts the Amida Buddha and was commissioned by a nun named Shibaoyuan 釈宝願 of the Southern Qi in 486 CE. Five Buddhist images embroidered with gold thread were enshrined in Luoyang’s Buddha Hall of the Yongning Temple in 516 CE of the Northern Wei Dynasty. At Shengguang Temple, there was an embroidery of the Śakyamuni Buddha that was almost five meters in height. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 7.

Library” Cave during one of his expeditions in Dunhuang serves as evidence of this first type. This monumental image, over 2.4 meters high and 1.6 meters long, dates to the late seventh or early eighth century and depicts a central Buddha wearing a red monk’s surplice (*kesa* 袈裟) standing on a lotus pedestal. The figure lowers his right hand to his side while his left hand holds the hem of his robes near his chest in a gesture of preaching. Art historians have claimed that this embroidery depicts Śakyamuni preaching at Vulture Peak, a rocky terrain in India, due to the gathering crowd of monks, bodhisattvas, and laymen in the foreground and the depiction of a boulder in the background. Wu Hung, however, has argued that the boulder represents Mt. Yugu of Fanhe, China where a miraculous image appeared to pilgrims.<sup>88</sup> Although the correct subject of this “meta-image” is unknown, it serves as a deliberate representation of a particularly important scene, whether that is the preaching Śakyamuni or the appearance of a miraculous icon. The embroidery, then, is not meant to be worshipped, but rather serves as a visual reminder of a crucial event.

The second type of embroidered Buddhist images at Dunhuang was frequently donated by aristocrats to signify their devotion to the Buddhist faith. Although surviving in fragments, the earliest extant Buddhist embroidery in China is an example of this latter type and was gifted by a prince to Dunhuang in 487 CE.<sup>89</sup> This embroidery, predominately sewn in split stitch, depicts a Buddha wearing a red *kesa* seated on a lotus pedestal while preaching to a group of devotees portrayed at the bottom of the image. Although only a fragment depicting the hem of green robes

<sup>88</sup> The monk Liu Sahe predicted the appearance of this miraculous image at Mt. Yugu right before his death. A record written by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667) reveals that Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝 (569-618) then ordered craftsmen to copy and circulate this miraculous image in 609 CE. Wu Hung, “Rethinking Liu Sahe: The Creation of a Buddhist Saint and the Invention of a ‘Miraculous Image,’” *Orientalisms*, 27, no. 10 (1996): 34-39.

<sup>89</sup> Watt, *China*, 172.



survives to the left of the central Buddha, we can conjecture that this clothing belonged to one of the bodhisattvas that are frequently depicted flanking a Preaching Buddha. The portion above the Buddha in the embroidery no longer survives, but based on extant paintings, the top of the image likely depicted flying apsaras and other celestial beings. The bottom right of the embroidery depicts two men identified as Prince Guangyang 廣陽 of Huian and a monk based on the inscription and their clothing. The bottom left depicts four women and the inscription states that they are a nun, the prince's mother, wife, and his two daughters. Although the inscription on the embroidery claims that Prince Guangyang bestowed this embroidery to Dunhuang, it is unlikely that he took the arduous journey there himself. He more likely sent the embroidery with a Buddhist monk as an envoy. Many donors to Dunhuang likely selected embroidered images like this over painted or sculpted mediums because silk was considered a superior and precious material that was more widely used as currency than coins until the end of the Tang Dynasty.<sup>90</sup>

### 2.2.3 Gender Differences in the Making of Chinese Embroidered Buddhist Images

Records indicate that the populace, and not just emperors and monks, created embroidered Buddhist images in China by the eighth century. These texts also show that both men and women commissioned embroidered Buddhist images and picked up needle and thread to create their own textiles to express their personal devotion. For example, in the poem “The Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup (*Yinzhong baxian* 飲中八仙),” Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) uses the phrase *changzhai xiufu* 長齋繡佛 to describe the great piety of the immortal Su Jin 蘇晉.<sup>91</sup> He writes that Su Jin,

<sup>90</sup> Angela Sheng, “Determining the Value of Textiles in the Tang Dynasty: In Memory of Professor Denis Twitchett (1925-2006),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 2 (2013): 175-95.

<sup>91</sup> Li, “Gendered Materialization,” 101.

“persistently maintains a vegetarian diet and embroiders images of the Buddha.”<sup>92</sup> Dugu Ji 獨孤及 (725-777) also discusses the creation of an embroidered Buddhist image by He Changxi 何昌系, the country magistrate from Anyang and writes that he embroidered a life-sized image of Guanyin when he was sixty-years-old to liberate himself from worldly suffering.<sup>93</sup> Thus, originally, the act of creating Buddhist embroideries in China was not gender specific.

The practice of creating embroidered Buddhist images as an expression of one’s faith likely spread across China along with Chan Buddhist doctrine, which emphasized the importance of the repetitive and meditative nature of embroidering images of the Buddha. Chan texts claim that each stitch made by an embroiderer represents the body of the Buddha, and, by creating more stitches, one can reproduce more Buddhas and thus, accumulate additional merit.<sup>94</sup> This thinking could explain why early Buddhist embroideries were often fully covered in stitches in a type of embroidery known as *manxiu* 滿繡.

A poem by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) entitled “A Eulogy for Embroidered Kannon Done by Madam Xu from Jing’an County,” (*Jing’an xian jun Xushi xiu Guanyin zan* 靜安縣君許氏繡觀音贊) describes the fictional figure of Madame Xu making countless stitches to create an image of Guanyin and manifest the form of the divine. Su Shi claims that Madame Xu created this embroidered image in the hopes of expressing and delivering the appearance of the bodhisattva Guanyin’s form through “all six senses.” He emphasizes the laborious process of stitching

<sup>92</sup> The phrase *Changzhai xiufu* is interpreted differently in some English translations of this poem. In the alternate interpretation, these scholars think that the statement means that Su Jin keeps up a vegetarian diet in front of an embroidered image of the Buddha, not that he embroiders the Buddhist image himself.

<sup>93</sup> Li, “Gendered Materialization,” 97-98.

<sup>94</sup> Yuhang Li, “Sensory Devotions: Hair Embroidery and Gendered Corporeal Practice in Chinese Buddhism,” in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): 369.

Buddhist embroideries and states, "...How many times to prick the needle? Even a person good with almanacs cannot calculate this. If the needle were a Buddha, there should be ten million Buddhas..."<sup>95</sup> In this way, the finished embroidered image is not the only expression of one's devotion, but each stitch made by the embroiderer was considered a devotional act. The more stitches one made, the more merit one accumulated.

While both men and women during the Tang and Song Dynasties embroidered Buddhist images as an expression of their own faith, women in various tales from these periods made Buddhist images also to pray for the safety and security of their family. For example, "The Eulogy and Preface of the Embroidered Icon of Bhaisajyaguru" (*Yaoshi rulai xiuxiang zan bing xu* 藥師如來繡像贊并序) describes how the wife of Lü Wen 呂溫 (772-811) devoted herself to the task of making an embroidered image to assure her husband's safe return from an official mission to Tubo.<sup>96</sup> She took part in all aspects of creating an embroidery of *Yakushi nyorai* 藥師如來 (Ch. Yaoshi Sk. Bhaisajyaguru) by weaving the background, twisting and dyeing the silk threads, and embroidering stitch by stitch the image of this Buddha. Once the Buddhist embroidery was complete, she gave offerings to the icon and venerated it day and night until her husband's safe return.

The moral of this story emphasizes a Confucian value that the wife's dedication to "womanly work" (Ch. *nügong* 女工), or textile making, was a method to assure the safety of her husband. In *Lessons for Women* (*Nü Jie* 女誡), the female historian, Ban Zhao 班昭 (45-116), considers textile-making to be "womanly work" and argues that it is one of the four Confucian

<sup>95</sup> Li, "Gendered Materialization," 89-90.

<sup>96</sup> Li, "Gendered Materialization," 95-96.

virtues that women should develop as wives.<sup>97</sup> Women of all classes participated in the various aspects of clothmaking—hatching silkworm eggs, twisting fibers, dyeing threads, weaving cloth, sewing fabrics, and embroidering embellishments and designs—to create clothing for their household and supply silk fabrics, cloth, and yarn to be given as state taxes.<sup>98</sup> In this way, from the Zhou (1046-256 BCE) until the late Ming Dynasties (1368-1644), women contributed to the household economy by supplying textiles as taxes.

Women in premodern China often merged their religious beliefs and practices from Buddhism with their roles in society as virtuous women under Confucian discourse. During the sinification process of Buddhism, they were encouraged to uphold Confucian virtues of filial piety and loyalty while expressing these values through Buddhist religious practices and behaviors.<sup>99</sup> The story of Lü Wen's wife then emphasizes her female virtues in both the Confucian and Buddhist traditions by demonstrating that she relied on the womanly work of textile production.

Many women likely turned to embroidery when creating Buddhist images because this medium enabled them to express their Confucian virtue as well as their cultivated status. The act of embroidery was considered a female substitute for literacy and was regarded as a refined and civilized pastime for women especially during the late imperial period.<sup>100</sup> Embroidery was also perceived as an erotic act, as the Chinese verb to embroider (*xiu* 繡) served as a homophone for

<sup>97</sup> The other three virtues are womanly speech, womanly deportment, and womanly virtue. For further discussion on the Four Virtues, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994), 172-176.

<sup>98</sup> Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 184-87.

<sup>99</sup> Bret Hinsch, "Confucian Filial Piety and the Construction of the Ideal Buddhist Woman," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 30 (2002): 161-88.

<sup>100</sup> On embroidery and personal cultivation of women in late imperial China, see Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 266. Dorothy Ko also writes that Chinese brides-to-be were expected to embroider shoes for their future mother-in-laws and female relatives. These embroidered shoes became a method for judging the moral cultivation of their prospective daughter-in-law. See Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 92, 170.

sexual intercourse. Paintings of beautiful women often depict court ladies in elaborate dress absorbed in their needlework.<sup>101</sup> By creating embroidered images of the Buddha, women transformed sewing from an erotic to a devotional act and their finished object from an item that supported the finances of the home to a talisman that supported the welfare of their household.

#### **2.2.4 Chinese Buddhist Hair Embroideries of Guanyin**

Guanyin was the most popular subject for Buddhist embroideries in China followed by images of the Buddha and the Arhats.<sup>102</sup> Guanyin received wide support from women because it was believed that the bodhisattva empathized with their suffering and concerns. The form of Guanyin gradually became feminized in the Song Dynasty when embroidered Buddhist images were popularized. The feminized form of Guanyin, as mentioned previously, likely stems from the belief that the bodhisattva could transform into seven different female manifestations, but the women who commissioned and embroidered images of Guanyin may have also contributed to the association of Guanyin with women in China.

The earliest surviving example of a Guanyin embroidery in China is attributed to the female artist Guan Daosheng 管道昇 (1262-1319) in 1309.<sup>103</sup> The embroidery depicts the bodhisattva Guanyin standing alone in a vast open space while his long, thick hair and simple white robes

<sup>101</sup> Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 147-60.

<sup>102</sup> Arhats are a group of the Buddha's disciples who achieved enlightenment. They are often depicted as a group of sixteen elders and are thought to have been handpicked by Śakyamuni to protect and disseminate his teachings after his death.

<sup>103</sup> The inscription on this embroidery claims that this image was created by Guan Daosheng, but the authenticity of this claim remains debatable. There are very few artworks that survive today that are proven creations of Guan Daosheng. This image could be the work of an entirely different artist, it could be an embroidered copy of one of Guan Daosheng's paintings of Guanyin, or it could be the embroidered work of Guan Daosheng herself. It would not be surprising that Guan Daosheng was skilled in embroidery as well as painting because embroidery was considered a cultivated past-time for well-to-do-women.

appear to be blown by a strong gust of wind. He holds prayer beads in the left hand while his right-hand clasps his left wrist. Although the form of this Guanyin does not seem decidedly masculine or feminine, the moustache with which the male-form of this bodhisattva is often depicted is omitted. While this embroidery uses black silk floss to depict the outlines of Guanyin's robes, face, and body, the bodhisattva's hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes incorporate human hair to form a hyperrealistic image. It is unclear whose hair was used, but most likely the artist used her own hair. Guan Daosheng was an accomplished painter, poet, and calligrapher who even commissioned works for the emperor, but she is also remembered for living a pious Buddhist life.<sup>104</sup> She was well-connected with Chan Buddhist monks and nuns and even painted murals for temples. Therefore, Guan Daosheng may have participated in the art of Buddhist hair embroidery along with other members in the Chan Buddhist community.

Tales of women creating Buddhist objects with their own hair were written in China as early as the Song Dynasty and express this tension women likely felt between Confucian filial piety and Buddhist devotion.<sup>105</sup> In the earliest surviving tale, a young girl named Zhou Zhenguan 周貞觀 created the copy of the *Lotus Sutra* with her hair and blood to memorialize her deceased parents and demonstrate her filial piety. Zhou Zhenguan lost her father at the age of six, and, since she did not have any brothers, she intended to stay unmarried and support her mother who also passed away years later. With no material offerings to provide her parents for their posthumous merit, Zhou Zhenguan decided to use her own body-parts to create a Buddhist sutra. She pricked her tongue to draw blood and splits the hairs from her head to write and stitch 70,000 characters

<sup>104</sup> For a discussion on Guan Daosheng's artistic career, see Marsha Weidner, *Views from the Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300-1912* (Indianapolis: Rizzoli, 1988), 66-70.

<sup>105</sup> Li, "Gendered Materialization," 123-29.

of the *Lotus Sutra*. She began the project at age thirteen and at the age of twenty-three, she completed this sutra made from her hair and blood and, moments later, took her last breath in a seated cross-legged pose to suggest that she attained enlightenment in the afterlife.

Buddhist hair embroideries in China likely often depict Guanyin because the theme of sacrificing one's body to express Confucian filial piety was central to the tales of Princess Miaoshan 妙善, a female manifestation of this bodhisattva.<sup>106</sup> Princess Miaoshan's father suffered from an incurable disease and healers claimed that only the eyes and hands of one without anger could cure it. Princess Miaoshan, a virtuous being, cut off her hands and gouged out her eyes and then she gave these body parts to her father to save his life. When her father, the king, expressed his gratitude to Princess Miaoshan, she revealed herself as a manifestation of Kannon and her father converted to Buddhism as a result of her pious act.

The story of Princess Miaoshan likely resonated with women who embroidered images of Guanyin with their hair as a means to cure the illnesses of their parents or themselves. For example, a woman named Wang Yuan 王瑗 from the early Qing Dynasty created a hair embroidery of Guanyin to heal the illness of her sick parents.<sup>107</sup> A courtesan named Lin Jinlan 林金蘭 also created a Guanyin hair embroidery in 1480 on the bodhisattva's celebrated birthday of 2.19 in an attempt to cure her own eye disease. Embroidering Buddhist images with hair also substituted for the Confucian practice of *gegu* 割股, a filial practice of incorporating one's flesh into medicine as a means to heal sick parents and other family members.<sup>108</sup> Women plucked their own hair from

<sup>106</sup> This tale of Princess Miaoshan likely developed to explain the reason behind the iconography of the Thousand-Eyed and the Thousand-Armed Kannon. In some versions of this tale, Princess Miaoshan sprouts a thousand eyes and a thousand arms after sacrificing her hands and eyes for her father. See Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 293-350.

<sup>107</sup> Li, "Sensory Devotions," 364-365.

<sup>108</sup> Jimmy Yu, *Sanctity and Self-Inflicted Violence in Chinese Religions, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 62-88.

their heads to exemplify this practice of “slicing one’s flesh,” perhaps to associate with the pain and bodily sacrifice that Princess Miaoshan felt after severing her hands and gouging her eyes.<sup>109</sup> Experiencing pain, then, was part of the devotional act of embroidering images of Guanyin and it offers proof that the process of embroidering was more important than the completed image in China.

The act of embroidering images of Guanyin was also particularly popular among widowed and unmarried women because Princess Miaoshan rejected her father’s wishes for her to marry and become a mother in order to retain her purity. For example, a widow named Ni Renji 倪仁吉 (1607-1685) from Pujiang embroidered images of Guanyin with her hair.<sup>110</sup> Ni Renji married at seventeen and though her husband died two years later, she refused to remarry. Coming from an affluent household, Ni Renji had the economic means to remain single and cultivate her talents in Buddhist embroidery as an expression of her devotion.

As can be seen from these examples, the reasons for embroidering images of Guanyin cannot be placed under a specific category. Both men and women following Chan Buddhist doctrine took part in the creation process of Buddhist embroideries as an expression of their faith. Women predominately took part to fulfill their duties of womanly work, to associate with Princess Miaoshan, or to offer merit to their sick or deceased parents.

<sup>109</sup> Li, “Sensory Devotions,” 362.

<sup>110</sup> Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 172-173.



### 2.2.5 The Chinese Prototype: An Embroidered Image of the Willow-Branch Guanyin

The Willow-Branch Guanyin (*yōryū kannon* 楊柳觀音) embroidery is a prototype of some of the embroidered Buddhist images that were brought to Japan from China. This embroidery depicts the twenty-eighth scene from the *Nyūhokkai-bon* 入法界品 (Sk. *Gandavyūha Sutra*), an early Buddhist text about the youthful Zenzai Dōji's 善財童子 (Sk. Sudhana-sresthi-dāraka) visits with fifty-three deities on his path towards enlightenment. This embroidery represents the acolyte's meeting with Guanyin from this text. Guanyin is depicted seated in the royal-ease pose in the center of a three-tiered boulder meant to represent Mt. Potalaka.<sup>111</sup> Guanyin wears a dazzling white robe under a *kesa*-like outer garment along with a jeweled pendant and ornate earrings. Unlike the other Chinese embroidered images of Guanyin, this image represents the bodhisattva wearing a large bejeweled crown that depicts a *kebutsu* (化仏 Sk. *Nirmāṇa-buddha*) in the center with lotus flowers and jewels decorating the sides.<sup>112</sup> Although the crown protrudes upward as if to cover most of Guanyin's thick hair, six stylized blue locks cascade downward onto his shoulders. To Guanyin's right side is a willow branch depicted inside a water vessel on the edge of the boulder. Guanyin places his right arm on this rock while his left hand limply rests on his raised left leg. Although the bodhisattva is depicted shifting his weight onto his left leg, his gaze rests in the opposite direction towards the youthful Zenzai Dōji on the bottom righthand corner. The acolyte clasps his hands together in prayer and gazes reverently upward at the bodhisattva Guanyin. He

<sup>111</sup> Kiriata Ken argues that the boulders depicted in this embroidery are based on stylized depictions of taihu stone (*taikoseki* 太湖石), a type of porous limestone found at the foot of Dongting Mountain 洞庭山 in Suzhou, China. See Kiriata Ken 切畑健, "Gentei gannen san shishū yōryū kannonzō (Kyoto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan) ni tsuite 元貞元年賛刺繡楊柳觀音像 (京都国立博物館) について," *Gakusō* 2 (1980): 89-100.

<sup>112</sup> *Kebutsu* means "manifestation of the Buddha" and are considered emanations of Buddhist deities frequently depicted on the crown or mandorla of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The *kebutsu* depicted on Kannon's crown is often Amida Buddha.

stands on a single lotus petal in the ocean which is represented in this embroidery in a stylized rhythmic wave pattern.

The Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery is currently housed within the Kyoto National Museum's collection, but its provenance history remains unknown. The only record we have is that the Kyoto prefectural governor gifted this embroidery in 1891, along with 1,075 other objects, to the museum that was referred to at the time as the Imperial Museum of Kyoto (*teikoku Kyoto hakubutsukan* 帝国京都博物館). Although much remains unknown about how this embroidery ended up in the governor's hands, the inscription written in nine columns at the top of the image reveals that the calligraphy was done by a Chinese monk named Yuji Zhihui 愚極智慧 (ca. 1215-1300) on 1296.1.1.<sup>113</sup> Yuji Zhihui was a Chan Buddhist monk from Jingci monastery 淨慈 in Zhejiang Province and his name and seal can be found on other ink paintings such as the figure painting of Jittoku (Ch. Shide 捨得), a popular Zen Buddhist figure, currently housed in the Yale University Art Gallery.<sup>114</sup> It is unlikely that Yuji Zhihui himself embroidered this Willow-Branch Guanyin image because it is sewn by an expert hand. Instead, Yuji Zhihui was probably commissioned by the embroiderer to write a poem on the top of the image or added the inscription himself at a later date.

The extravagant use of gold thread in the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery sets this textile apart from other Chinese embroidered images of Guanyin.<sup>115</sup> The embroidery is done by an

<sup>113</sup> The inscription describes Zenzai Dōji's encounter with Kannon. It states, 「口這些兒回頭・口面已入三摩地・無声五色線善・財童見(兒)便見月・明風定江如練・普陀境出現遠・彩三山携・繡像命贊元貞・一年元日淨慈曾慧」

<sup>114</sup> Kanzan (寒山 Ch. Hanshan) and Jittoku were two popular eccentric figures in Zen Buddhist painting. They are frequently depicted as a pair wandering in nature with a cheerful disposition. See Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, and Andreas Leisinger, "ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings," *Artibus Asiae* 40 (1996): 89-100.

<sup>115</sup> The Willow-Branch Kannon was also a popular form of the deity in Korea during the Goryeo period (918-1392). See Foxwell, "'Merciful Mother Kannon' and Its Audiences," 326-47.

accomplished artist who incorporated two materials—flat silk threads (*hira ito* 平糸) and gold thread—and predominately used two embroidering techniques: the long-and-short stitch and the couching stitch which holds the gold threads in place. The gold thread is carefully entwined to create leaf and hexagon patterns on Guanyin’s robes and to reproduce the water vessel, the wave patterns, Guanyin’s jewelry, Zenzai Dōji’s clothing along with his lotus petal base, and the outline of the boulder.<sup>116</sup> Guanyin and Zenzai Dōji’s mandorlas were also originally embroidered with gold thread, but most of the stitches in this area have fallen out, so gold-leaf (*kinpaku* 金箔) has been overlaid on top of the mandorla’s gold thread, either by the original artist or by a restorer at a later date.<sup>117</sup> Textiles incorporating gold thread became increasingly popular in early eleventh-century China. The Song imperial court repeatedly prohibited the public from making gold ornaments and manufacturing clothing and fabrics embroidered or woven with gold thread, but these textiles continued to be widely consumed by society.<sup>118</sup> The abundant use of gold thread in the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery then conveys that the patron of this image had the economic means and political power to bypass these imperial regulations and sumptuary laws.

Another crucial difference between the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery and the other embroidered images of Guanyin from China is that this image does not incorporate human hair. Tales concerning the creation of embroidered images with hair emerge as early as the Song Dynasty, so hair embroidery was an accepted practice by the time the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery was sewn. The Guanyin hair embroideries mentioned earlier, however, were made in

<sup>116</sup> Kirihata 切畑, “Gentei gannen san shishū yōryū kannonzō (Kyoto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan) ni tsuite 元貞元年贊刺繡楊柳觀音像 (京都国立博物館) について,” 95.

<sup>117</sup> We know that the mandorlas were also originally embroidered with gold thread because a few stitches remain on the Zenzai Dōji’s mandorla.

<sup>118</sup> For a discussion on sumptuary laws and the use of gold in Song Dynasty China, see Christian de Pee, “Purchase on Power: Imperial Space and Commercial Space in Song-Dynasty Kaifeng, 960-1127,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 53, no. 1 (2010): 149-84.

the context of personal devotion. The Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery may have not incorporated human hair into the image because it served the Jingci Monastery as a whole perhaps in meditation rituals, unlike the previous embroidered images which served the private needs of a specific devotee.

The official title of this embroidery is the Willow-Branch Guanyin, but the image in reality is a combination of Willow-Branch Guanyin and the Guanyin of the South Sea iconographic forms. The Willow-Branch Guanyin is one of the thirty-three manifestations of this bodhisattva and appears in two early Buddhist scriptures; the *Senkōgen kanjizai bosatsu himitsu hōkyō* 千光目觀自在菩薩秘密法經 and the *Dai hishin dharani* 大悲心陀羅尼.<sup>119</sup> This form of Guanyin is sometimes called the Medicine-King Guanyin (*yakuō kannon* 藥王觀音) since he is associated with healing, with the willow branch that he holds being thought to cure all illnesses.<sup>120</sup> The landscape elements, such as the waves and the isolated boulder, however, link this embroidery to the iconography of Guanyin of the South Sea where the deity is thought to reside on Mt. Potalaka. Although Mt. Potalaka was considered an otherworldly realm, it was believed that the island existed in the East China Sea. This iconography became especially popular in China during the sixteenth century, but Guanyin in these later versions is depicted with a female body, whereas in this embroidery, Guanyin is represented in an androgynous manner.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, while Guanyin in later images is depicted as a maternal figure of Zenzai Dōji, this embroidery places a

<sup>119</sup> Kirihata 切畑, “Gentei gannen san shishū yōryū kannonzō (Kyoto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan) ni tsuite 元貞元年贊刺繡楊柳觀音像 (京都国立博物館) について,” 90.

<sup>120</sup> From the Tang Dynasty onward, the willow branch became the established attribute for the bodhisattva Kannon. While early Chinese images of Kannon usually depict the bodhisattva holding the willow branch, in later versions, he is usually depicted alongside it. In Japanese images of Kannon, however, the willow branch is not always depicted. See Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 78-79.

<sup>121</sup> Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 87

respectful distance between the two figures to demonstrate that their relationship is more formal than familial.<sup>122</sup>

The exquisitely fine stitches as well as the style of the Guanyin's figure in this embroidery suggest that it may have been created earlier than the 1296 CE date on the inscription. In the *Notes on Silk and Embroidery* (*Sixiu biji* 絲繡筆記; 1930), Zhu Qiqian describes Song-Dynasty embroidery as finely detailed and full of vitality.<sup>123</sup> He writes that Song-dynasty embroiderers used hair-thin needles to create fine details that rivaled an ink brush. Zhu Qiqian states that Yuan-dynasty embroidery, in contrast, was coarse with uneven stitches and he reprimands these later embroiderers for depending on an ink brush to execute fine lines on a silk ground. Since black ink is also used in the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery to portray the folds of the bodhisattva's ornate robes, this image likely straddles the Song and the Yuan dynasties in terms of style and technique. Secondly, many Chinese images of Guanyin from the late thirteenth-century onward depict the bodhisattva in a decidedly feminine manner and the attire is much more simplified.<sup>124</sup> In a late thirteenth-century ink painting of the Water and Moon Guanyin (*Suigetsu Kannon* 水月観音) from the Nelson-Atkins Museum, for example, Guanyin is depicted with a round face and contemplative gaze as if the bodhisattva is a courtesan and wears a headdress and veil that covers most of his hair. The artist also emphasizes the natural landscape in the background of the ink painting by depicting the full moon, a tall pine tree, and a waterfall. These details though are starkly absent in the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery.

<sup>122</sup> For a study on the maternal figure of Kannon, see Foxwell, "'Merciful Mother Kannon' and Its Audiences," 326-47.

<sup>123</sup> Zhu Qiqian (1872-1964) was a leading scholar on Chinese textiles in the twentieth century. Kirihata 切畑, "Gentei gannen san shishū yōryū kannonzō (Kyoto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan) ni tsuite 元貞元年賛刺繡楊柳観音像 (京都国立博物館) について," 96.

<sup>124</sup> On the iconographical development for the Water and Moon Kannon, see Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 251-53.

While Kirihata argues that the lack of a natural landscape in the background of the Willow-Branch Guanyin is the result of limitations in the embroidered medium, I argue that this absence is deliberate to highlight the Chan/Zen Buddhist ideal of emptiness. Chan Buddhism emphasized the teaching of emptiness which is the belief that all reality is illusory and the phenomenal world is made up of nothingness.<sup>125</sup> Chan (Zen) Buddhists used meditation as a practice to contemplate this inherent emptiness of all things. The artist of the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery may have kept the background bare to express the teaching of nothingness that makes up the natural world. Although the provenance of this embroidery is unknown, it likely belonged in a Chan Buddhist temple, possibly even Jingci Monastery itself, because the iconography of Guanyin seated alongside a water vessel on a boulder is frequently found in Zen Buddhist temples across China and Japan.<sup>126</sup> The serene posture and calm expression of the bodhisattva Guanyin was likely the ideal state that Zen Buddhists aimed to achieve through meditation. Chan and Zen monks may have found this subject especially appealing as a model for both meditation practice and the reclusive ideal.

If this Willow-Branch Kannon embroidery originally belonged to Jingci Monastery, then the scene depicted in the image must have personally resonated with the monks, as it was believed that Zide Huihui (1090-1159 自得慧暉), the abbot of the monastery, also visited Mt. Potalaka in 1137.<sup>127</sup> Zide Huihui claimed that the island of Mount Putuo (*Putuo Shan* 普陀山) in the East

<sup>125</sup> Chan Buddhism is the predecessor to Zen Buddhism in Japan. The name in Chinese and Japanese differ because the character *zen* (禪 Ch. Chan) is transliterated differently in Chinese and Japanese. Chan Buddhism gained wide popularity by the sixth century in China and this doctrine was adopted in Japan later during the twelfth century.

<sup>126</sup> A famous example of this iconography is the *Guanyin, Crane, and Gibbons* ink-painting created by the Chan Buddhist monk Muqi (牧谿 Jp. Mokkei). The hanging scrolls are currently housed within Daitokuji 大徳寺, a Zen Buddhist temple in Kyoto, Japan.

<sup>127</sup> Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 386.

China Sea was the residence of the bodhisattva Guanyin, and he attracted many pilgrims to the island by promoting the sanctity of the site. The Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery, then, may have served as a representation of the magnificent scene Zide Huihui witnessed upon visiting Mount Putuo. The embroiderer must have also retained the emptiness of the background as a means to focus the viewer's gaze on the interaction between the bodhisattva Guanyin and the acolyte; a crucial encounter for both Chan/Zen Buddhist thought and the Jingci Monastery.

## 2.3 EMBROIDERIES OF KANNON IN JAPAN

### 2.3.1 Early Records of Buddhist Embroideries in Japan

Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (554-628) commissioned the first embroidered Buddhist image in Japan on 605.4.1, which awakened the most zealous patronage of Buddhist embroideries by the court in Japanese history. Over sixteen monumental embroidered Buddhist images were created by the imperial court and monastic community over the next 200 years, mostly by female empresses. For example, an embroidery of Amida's Pure Land (*Amida jōdo-zu* 阿弥陀浄土図) commissioned by Empress Jitō 持統天皇 (645-703) in 692 CE measured nine meters in height and six meters wide, while two embroideries commissioned by Empress Kōken 孝謙天皇 (718-770) for Tōdaiji 東大寺 in 760 CE each measured over ten meters in height and seven meters wide.<sup>128</sup> How were these Buddhist embroideries used and what was the significance of their

<sup>128</sup> The original Japanese measurements for Empress Jitō's embroidery is 3 *jō* 丈 high and 2 *jō* 1 *shaku* 8 *sun* 寸 wide. For Empress Kōken's embroideries of Tōdaiji, the measurements were 35 *shaku* high and 25 *shaku* wide each.

monumental scale? There are three types of embroidered Buddhist images that were created during this period that differ based on their ritual function.

The first type of early Buddhist embroidery was commissioned to be used for didactic purposes, such as the teaching of sutras. In 742 CE, Dōji 道慈 (-744), the abbot of Daianji 大安寺, commissioned two embroideries after the temple was relocated to the new capital of Heian-kyō 平安京 (present-day Kyoto).<sup>129</sup> While the two embroideries no longer survive, records indicate that they depicted the *Four Locations and Sixteen Assemblies of the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* (*Daihannya-haramitta-kyō Shijōjūrokue zō* 大般若四所十六会図像) and the *Avatamsaka's "Flower Garland Sutra" Seven Locations and Nine Assemblies* (*Kegon shichijokyue ezō* 華嚴七所九会絵像). These embroideries likely followed Chinese iconographical prototypes that Dōji discovered while studying Buddhism in China during Empress Wu's reign. Records state that several mural paintings in Chang'an temples depicted the form of the *Seven Locations and Nine Assemblies*, so Dōji must have been familiar with this iconography.<sup>130</sup> A painting on silk of this subject was discovered in Cave 61 of Dunhuang and still survives today. This tenth-century painting depicts the Buddha seated on a lotus pedestal nine times in a grid pattern and is meant to illustrate a passage from the *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Kegon kyō* 華嚴經 Sk. *Avatamsaka Sutra*) in which the Buddha simultaneously appears in various locations to preach to the many assemblies. A didactic embroidery from Kajūji 勧修寺 also survives today that depicts Śakyamuni Buddha seated on a throne teaching the Lotus Sutra to priests, bodhisattvas, and celestial beings gathered at Vulture Peak. These two objects indicate that scenes from various Buddhist scriptures were

<sup>129</sup> Itō Shinji 伊藤信二, *Nihon no Bijutsu* 日本の美術, 22.

<sup>130</sup> Dorothy Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks as Agents of Cultural and Artistic Transmission: The International Buddhist Art Style in East Asia, ca. 645-770* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018), 99-115.



often depicted on embroidered Buddhist images as visual aids to instruct monks on the Buddha's life and teachings.

The second type of Buddhist embroideries commissioned during this two-hundred-year-period was used for funerary purposes and to memorialize the deceased. The most prominent Buddhist embroidery from this category is the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara* 天寿国繡帳曼荼羅 which was commissioned by Tachibana no Ooiratsume 橘大郎女, a consort of Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (574-622), to enable her to see her deceased husband entering one of the paradises in the afterlife.<sup>131</sup> While the original embroidery only survives in fragments, scholars have examined primary documents and excavation records from Hōryūji 法隆寺 where the embroidery was rediscovered in 1273 to suggest that the mandara may have initially been almost eight meters wide.<sup>132</sup> Empress Jitō (645-703) also dedicated an embroidered Buddhist image of Amida's Pure Land to memorialize her husband, Emperor Tenmu 天武天皇 (631-686). This colossal embroidery, mentioned above, was displayed in the Lecture Hall (*kōdō* 講堂) at Yakushiji 薬師寺, a temple founded by her husband in 680 CE. Although medieval Buddhist embroideries became smaller in scale, they were predominately commissioned for this same purpose—to memorialize the deceased and to assure their auspicious rebirth.

The third type of Buddhist embroidery was created to adorn the Main Hall (*hondō* 本堂) or Lecture Hall of a Buddhist temple. Adornment, referred to as “*shōgon* 莊嚴,” was considered

<sup>131</sup> Scholars are uncertain which heavenly realm is specifically referred to the *tenjukoku*. Chari Pradel argues that it may be *tenju* (天壽 Ch. *Tianshou*) found in the Daoist text, *The Scripture on Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) which offers the deceased the longest lifespan in heaven, 120 years. See Chari Pradel, *Fabricating the Tenjukoku Shūchō mandara and Prince Shōtoku's Afterlives* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 83-130.

<sup>132</sup> See Pradel, *Fabricating the Tenjukoku Shūchō mandara and Prince Shōtoku's Afterlives*, 133-34.

an essential method for activating the divine within a sacred Buddhist space.<sup>133</sup> For example, the Tōdaiji embroideries of the standard form of Kannon and the Fukūkenjaku Kannon 不空羼索觀 were hung within the Great Buddha Hall (*Daibutsuden* 大仏殿) to flank the central colossal bronze statue of Dainichi nyorai (大日如来 Sk. Vairocana). This grouping of the Vairocana Buddha flanked by two images of Kannon seems to have been an established iconographical form during the late eighth century, so the embroideries were possibly hung for specific ritual ceremonies that required this triad set.<sup>134</sup>

Since the first embroidered Buddhist image in Japan was made before traveling monks brought Buddhist embroideries back from China, how were these artists able to create an embroidered Buddhist image without a prototype? The artist of the first Japanese Buddhist embroidery was Tori Busshi 止利仏師, chief of the saddle-makers' guild (*kuratsukuri-be* 鞍作部), which was a group of artisans descended from immigrants of the Korean peninsula.<sup>135</sup> Korean artists frequently brought Buddhist images with them to Japan for private worship, so the first Buddhist images created in Japan were based on these continental styles. A record from the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 confirms that Tori Busshi mastered forming Buddhist images from various materials because Empress Suiko ordered him to create two *jōroku* 丈六 Buddhas—one made of

<sup>133</sup> Ishida Mosaku 石田茂作 and Nishimura Hyōbu 西村兵部, *Shūbutsu* 繡佛 (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1964), 4.

<sup>134</sup> A Vairocana Buddha was also installed with a Fukūkenjaku Kannon and a One-Thousand Armed Kannon flanking the image at Daianji's Main Hall in 749 CE. See Dorothy C. Wong, "The Case of Amoghapāśa," *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 2 (2007): 151-158.

<sup>135</sup> The full title of Tori Busshi is Shiba no Kuratsukuri-be no Obito Tori Busshi (司馬鞍作部首止利仏師). He was ordered by imperial decree to make many Buddhist images, the most famous one being the life-sized Yumedono Kannon 夢殿觀音 bronze sculpture for Hōryūji. According to the *Fusō ryakki* 扶桑略記, Tori Busshi's clan arrived to Japan from the Korean peninsula in 522. The problem with this record though is that it was written several centuries later. See Lucie R. Weinstein, "The Yumedono Kannon: Problems in Seventh-Century Sculpture," *Archives of Asian Art* 42 (1989): 30-31.

bronze and the other embroidered—on 605.4.1.<sup>136</sup> Tori Busshi was skilled at creating Buddhist images in all mediums because craftsmen of the saddle-makers' guild were trained in a variety of skills such as casting, wood carving, lacquering, gilding, and embroidering. Tori Busshi completed the two 4.8 meters high monumental Buddhist images the following year on 606.4.8, and though records do not indicate where the embroidered Buddhist image was hung, we know that the bronze Buddha was placed within the Golden Hall 金堂 of Gangōji 元興寺.<sup>137</sup>

Ladies-in-waiting (*uneme* 采女) from the palace also embroidered Buddhist images that were sponsored by the imperial court during the Asuka (538-710) and Nara periods (710-794). For example, inscriptions on the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara* claim that immigrant artists created the rough sketches and design (*shita-e* 下絵) for the mandara while a group of ladies-in-waiting embroidered the image.<sup>138</sup> *Shōsōin bunsho* 正倉院文書 also states that sixty-seven female attendants (*hi* 婢) were called to Tōdaiji on 757.1 to embroider a shroud for the shrine (*zushi* 厨子) within the Sutra Scriptorium (*Shakyōjo* 写経所) of the temple.<sup>139</sup> Thus, both the makers and patrons of embroidered Buddhist images in early Japan were often women.

<sup>136</sup> *Jōroku*, or sixteen *shaku*, refers to the height of the Buddhist image and is approximately 4.8 meters tall. Many early Buddhist images in Japan were sculpted at this scale because it was believed that the Śakyamuni Buddha was this tall during his lifetime.

<sup>137</sup> This date is questionable since some records, such as the *Gangōji engi* 元興寺縁起, claim that the bronze image was not completed until four years later.

<sup>138</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 292.

<sup>139</sup> This record is 「書写所食口帳」 from the *Shōsōin bunsho*. See Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 293. A document from the *Shōsōin bunsho* 正倉院文書 from 745 entitled *Takumi-ryō kai* 『内匠寮解』 discusses the number and types of workers employed within the Bureau of Imperial Artisans (*Takumi-ryō* 内匠寮). Not a single weaver or sewer is mentioned which suggests that this type of work may have been exclusive to court women and saddle-makers. For example, there were 17 *banjō*-rank craftsmen (*banjo shōshu* 番上匠手), 18 metal workers (*kondō dōtetsu* 金銀銅鉄), 10 wood, stone, and jewel carvers (*kisekidogawara shikaku shōshu* 木石土瓦齒角匠手), twelve cloth makers (*ori nishiki ryōra shu* 織錦綾羅手), two makers of willow boxes (*ori yanagi bako shu* 織柳箱手), six *kokukō* 国工, and thirty Buddhist image makers (*tsukuru bosatsu tsukasa no takumi* 造菩薩司匠). However, it is plausible that the image makers were also involved in the creation process of making all types of Buddhist images like Tori no Busshi. See Nitō Atsushi 仁藤敦史, *Kodai ōken to kanryō sei* 古代王権と官僚制 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2000), 254.

### 2.3.2 Early Records of Embroidered Images of Kannon

During the Nara Period, images of the Kannon bodhisattva were frequently made in all mediums. The *Temple Asset Records of Saidaiji* (*Saidaiji shizaichō* 西大寺資財帳) lists Buddhist images that were created at Saidaiji during the late Nara period and, out of twenty-seven images, eleven were a variety of forms of Kannon.<sup>140</sup> The bodhisattva Kannon was likely popularized in 737 CE when scriptures concerning esoteric forms of Kannon were copied for the first time in Japan.<sup>141</sup> In fact, there are forty-seven records that survive concerning the creation of images of Kannon between 728 and 801 CE out of which icons of the Thousand-Armed Kannon were most popular followed by the Fukūkenjaku Kannon and then the Eleven-Headed Kannon. Although most patrons of Buddhist images in these records were members of the elite and monastic communities, the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本霊異記, a compilation of *setsuwa* 説話 stories from the early ninth century, reveals that the bodhisattva Kannon was also widely accepted by the populace.<sup>142</sup> The Thousand-Armed and Eleven-Headed Kannon were the most frequently mentioned deities in these tales and they are often discussed as saving people from harm's way and providing good fortune to the downtrodden.

Japanese Buddhist embroideries predominately depict an esoteric form of Kannon that reflects the fervent support for esoteric versions of Kannon during the Nara period. The earliest record of a Kannon embroidery in Japan comes from the *Shōsōin bunsho* 正倉院文書 and states that the courtier, Fujiwara no Toyonari 藤原豊成 (704-765), donated sixty spools of thread (*kō*

<sup>140</sup> Hayami Tasuku 速水侑, *Kannon shinkō* 観音信仰 (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobo, 1970), 42-47.

<sup>141</sup> Ishida Mosaku 石田茂作, *Shakyō yori mitaru Narachō bukkyō no kenkyū* 写経より見たる奈良朝仏教の研究 (Tokyo: Tokyo Bunko, 1930), 37.

<sup>142</sup> Hayami 速水, *Kannon shinkō* 観音信仰, 98-99.

勾) for the creation of a three-meter-high image of a Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Kannon (*Senju sengen kannon* 千手千眼観音) on 737.9.26.<sup>143</sup> Along with the embroidered image of Kannon, Toyonari requested the creation of fifty copies each of the *Sutra of the Thousand-Armed Kannon* (*Senjukyō* 千手経) and the *Golden Light Sutra* (*Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明経). Since the *Golden Light Sutra* was copied by the court for its talismanic properties to protect the state (*gokoku* 護国) as early as 676 CE, it is likely that the Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Kannon embroidery along with the sutra were also thought to have the capacity to protect the state against epidemics and natural disasters.<sup>144</sup>

As mentioned previously, two monumental embroideries of Kannon flanked the colossal bronze statue of Vairocana in the Great Buddha Hall of Tōdaiji.<sup>145</sup> The *Chronicles of Tōdaiji* (*Tōdaiji yōroku* 東大寺要録) claims that Empress Kōken commissioned the images for her father, Emperor Shōmu 聖武天皇 (701-756), and her mother, Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701-760). Empress Kōken commissioned the embroidery of the standard Kannon for her father on 754.3.15. The embroidery was completed by 757 and displayed within the Great Buddha Hall for Emperor Shōmu's first anniversary of death on the second day of the fifth month. Although neither embroidery survives today, the inscriptions on them have been documented. These records state

<sup>143</sup> The record states that Fujiwara no Toynari ordered that the embroidery should be one *jō* in height. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 292.

<sup>144</sup> In 741 CE, the Hossō sect monk, Genbō 玄昉 (-746), began writing one thousand copies of the *Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Sutra* and completed the project three years later. In the postscript, Genbō equated the power of the Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Kannon to that of the Four Heavenly Kings (*Shitennō* 四天王) that were called upon to bring peace and tranquility to the realm after Fujiwara no Hirotsugu rebellion in 740 CE. This is another example that suggests that the Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Kannon was linked to the protection of the state. See Hayami Tasuku 速水侑, *Kannon, jizō, fudō* 観音・地蔵・不動, (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2018), 16-18.

<sup>145</sup> It is unclear whether these textiles were embroidered images or woven images because the records are inconsistent. The *Tōdaiji yōroku* claims that these were woven textiles while the *Record of Pilgrimage to Seven Great Temples* (*Shichidai-ji junrei shiki* 七大寺巡礼私記) claims that these images were embroideries of Kannon.

that the embroidered image of the standard Kannon was displayed on the east, or the right side of the Great Buddha in the hall, and that it was created in the hopes that Emperor Shōmu would attain rebirth in the Keron paradise.<sup>146</sup> Because Empress Kōken commissioned the embroidery before her father's death, the image of Kannon may have had a separate function besides accumulating posthumous merit for her father. Emperor Shōmu suffered from an eye disease that left him blind and, since Empress Kōken commissioned the embroidery before his death, her original intent may have been to cure her father's illness.

The exact date that Empress Kōken commissioned the embroidered image of Fukūkenjaku Kannon is unknown, but records indicate that it was completed by 760 CE and hung on the left side of the Vairocana sculpture along with the embroidery of the standard Kannon in the Great Buddha Hall. An embroidered image of Fukūkenjaku Kannon was likely selected by Empress Kōmyō because she was personally devoted to this bodhisattva. For example, Empress Kōmyō herself commissioned a sculpted image of Fukūkenjaku Kannon, completed between 746 and 747 CE, for the Sangatsudō Hall 三月堂 of Tōdaiji.<sup>147</sup> The inscription on this no-longer-extant embroidery noted the worldly benefits, such as tranquility and longevity, that one might acquire upon venerating Fukūkenjaku Kannon, so it is likely that Empress Kōken commissioned this embroidered image while her mother was still alive.<sup>148</sup>

A few embroidered images of Kannon, however, were brought to Japan by visiting Chinese monks. The *Tōdai wajō tōsenden* 唐大和上東征伝, for example, claims that the Chinese monk, Ganjin 鑑真 (688-763), brought two embroidered images with him on his travels to Japan in 753

<sup>146</sup> The Keron Realm was also referred to as the Eastern Paradise. Hayami 速水, *Kannon shinkō* 観音信仰, 48-49.

<sup>147</sup> Manabe Shunshō 真鍋俊照, "Fukūkenjaku Kannon no hyōgen to sono fuhensei 不空羼索観音の表現とその普遍性," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 65, no. 1 (2016): 150-57.

<sup>148</sup> Hayami 速水, *Kannon shinkō* 観音信仰, 48-49.

CE.<sup>149</sup> One image was a Thousand-Armed Kannon embroidery and the other was an embroidered *Kudoku Fushūhen* (功德普集変).<sup>150</sup> Records do not state where these images were hung, but it is possible that Ganjin gifted the embroideries to Tōdaiji where he presided first or to Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺, the temple that he founded six years later in Nara.

## 2.4 MEDIEVAL EMBROIDERED IMAGES OF KANNON IN JAPAN

Unlike the medieval Chinese embroidered images of Guanyin discussed previously, these embroideries of the bodhisattva specifically draw on doctrinal sources and iconographical types in their depictions. There are likely two reasons for these differences. First, the men and women involved in the making of Buddhist embroideries in China were rarely linked to the monastic communities, whereas the anonymous embroiderers of Japanese images were aware of Buddhist scriptures and iconographical sources. Second, embroidered Buddhist images of Guanyin in China were likely only displayed within private settings, such as the maker's or recipient's home for private devotion. The embroideries that exist in Japan, however, were created for use in ritual ceremonies to proselytize the powers of the bodhisattva Kannon. In this way, Kannon embroideries in Japan took on a multiplicity of functions.

<sup>149</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 293.

<sup>150</sup> The *kudoku fushūhen* is a type of *tō-e* mandara 都会曼荼羅 in which all the *kenzoku* 眷属 assemblies are depicted except for Dainichi nyorai. *Reibun bukkyōgo daijiten* 例文仏教語大辞典, s.v. “fushūhen 普集変,” (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1997).

### 2.4.1 Nyoirin Kannon Hair Embroidery from Kannonji

An embroidered image of Kannon is housed in the collection of Kannonji 観音寺, but compared to the Willow-Branch Guanyin embroidery discussed above, the form and iconography of this textile accentuate the otherworldliness of this bodhisattva.<sup>151</sup> The bodhisattva Kannon in the Kannonji embroidery is seated in a similar pose on a boulder and is adorned with the same elaborate crown and ornate jewelry as the Willow-Branch Kannon embroidery. The iconography of these two embroidered Buddhist images, however, is different. The straw mat on which the Willow-Branch Kannon sat is replaced in this embroidery with a stylized lotus pedestal. Straw mats were used for meditation, and while the Jingci Monastery embroidery emphasizes Guanyin in a state of meditation, the Japanese embroidery depicts Kannon seated on a stylized lotus pedestal. This detail makes the image of Kannon appear more formal and rigid.

Additionally, the figure of Kannon is depicted with six arms to indicate that this is the Nyoirin Kannon form of the bodhisattva. Due to the damaged condition of the Kannonji embroidery, it is difficult to make out the accoutrements that the Nyoirin Kannon holds and the gestures of each of its hands. Fortunately, Nyoirin Kannon's pose and attributes in the Kannonji embroidery appear to be identical to a fourteenth-century Nyoirin Kannon painting from Hōgonji 宝厳寺, a temple located on Chikubushima. In this painting, the bodhisattva raises one hand to his chin while the other is lowered onto the rock base. The other four hands hold the deity's attributes including a rosary, a lotus flower, a Dharma wheel, and a wish-fulfilling jewel. The artist of the

<sup>151</sup> There are nine temples currently called Kannonji in Aichi Prefecture. The Kannonji temple that I refer to in this chapter is commonly called Arako-Kannon 荒子観音 because the precinct is located in the Arako District of Nagoya. The temple Arako-Kannon also goes by the name *Jōkaisan Enryū'in Kannonji* 浄海山圓龍院観音寺.



Kannonji embroidery, however, draws the viewer's attention to the wish-fulfilling jewel held close to the bodhisattva's chest by outlining the form with wide yellow thread to imply that the jewel glimmers in the light.

Another major difference between the Willow-Branch Kannon embroidery and the Kannonji Nyoirin Kannon embroidery is that the figure of the Zenzai Dōji depicted in the lower left corner of the former image is replaced by a dragon. A thick dark outline, most likely stitched with hair, surrounds the dragon as if to signify puffs of smoke. The dragon is portrayed presenting a jewel to Nyoirin Kannon as a gift. From as early as the twelfth century, the figure of Kannon was often flanked by Zenzai Dōji and the human form of the Dragon Princess in Chinese paintings and sculptures. Chün-Fang Yü argues that this iconography likely developed as a counterpart to Daoist paintings because there is no scriptural source for a Kannon triad with Zenzai Dōji and the Dragon Princess.<sup>152</sup> This Kannonji embroidery, however, is noteworthy because the figure of a Dragon Princess is depicted alone with Nyoirin Kannon; an unprecedented composition in Chinese and Japanese images of this bodhisattva.

The inscription on the back of the Nyoirin Kannon image refers to this icon as a main image (*honzon* 本尊) and claims that a nun named Myōkōzen 妙向禪 donated the embroidery to

<sup>152</sup> Two attendants, a Golden Boy and a Jade Girl, are usually depicted flanking a Daoist deity to symbolize the yang and the yin. These images of the Kannon triad are thought to serve as a Buddhist counterpart to this concept. The dragon king is also sometimes included within these Kannon, Zenzai Dōji, and Dragon Princess triads images. While there are no scriptural sources for the Kannon triad, there is a tale discussed within the *Complete Biographies of the Twelve Perfectly Enlightened Ones of Guanyin* (*Guanyin shier yuan jue quan fu* 觀音十二圓覺全傳) which describes the relationship between these three figures. In this text, Kannon sends Zenzai Dōji into the ocean to save the Dragon King who was caught by a fisherman. The Dragon Princess presents Kannon with a "night-illuminating pearl" in gratitude so that the deity can read sutras at night. Kannon then persuades the Dragon Princess to become one of her disciples. The iconography of the Kannonji embroidery is likely not based on this tale because there is no evidence that this story reached Japan and because the figures of the Zenzai Dōji and the Dragon King are absent from this embroidery. See Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 440.

Kannonji on 1443.11.13.<sup>153</sup> What made this Nyoirin Kannon embroidery so exceptional that Myōkōzen referred to the textile as a main image, a term reserved for the primary icon of worship by a person or temple? The iconography along with the inscriptions depicted on the border of this embroidery portray Nyoirin Kannon as a savior of women and make a strong case for the capacity of all sentient beings, including women, to achieve enlightenment.

#### 2.4.1.1 The Dragon Princess

The scene depicted on the Kannonji embroidery likely stems from esoteric sutras of the Thousand-Armed and the Fukūkenjaku Kannon. These scriptures discuss Kannon traveling to the Dragon King's Palace at the bottom of the ocean to preach the Buddha's teachings. In return, the Dragon Princess presents the bodhisattva Kannon with a precious jewel as a token of her gratitude.<sup>154</sup> It was believed that the Dragon King's Palace was located at the bottom of the ocean near Kannon's paradise of Mt. Potalaka, so by portraying both the Dragon Princess and the bodhisattva Kannon together, this embroidery alludes to both paradisiacal locations.<sup>155</sup> Medieval literature includes ample examples of women who aim to be reborn in another life as the Dragon Princess. In the *Heike monogatari* 平家物語, for example, the imperial consort Kenreimon'in 建礼門院 (1155-1213) shares her desire to be reborn as a Dragon Princess and has a dream that all

<sup>153</sup> There are two inscriptions on the back of this embroidery. The older inscription states, 「妙向禪尼嘉吉三年亥十一月十三日・此本尊寄進主也・天文十四年九月九日高秀再興之」 and the newer inscription states, 「尾張国荒子観音寺住什物・天保十三壬寅春二月・現住・権大僧都全栄再幅。」 Beyond discussing the name of the patron and the date that she bestowed this embroidery, the text discusses the restoration history of the image. This embroidery was restored for the first time by a layman named Takahide 高秀 on 1545.9.9 and the second time in 1852.2 by a Kannonji priest named Zenyō 全栄.

<sup>154</sup> In some versions of this story, the Dragon Princess presents a pearl and not a jewel to Kannon. See Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 440.

<sup>155</sup> Fabio Rambelli, *The Sea and the Sacred in Japan: Aspects of Maritime Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 114.

members of the Taira clan were reborn inside the Dragon King's Palace.<sup>156</sup> A nun named Myōtatsu 妙達, who was the disciple of Myōe 明恵 (1173-1232), drowned herself in the hopes of attaining rebirth as a Dragon Princess after her teacher's death. The Dragon Princess, then, became an emblem of purity and an archetype of enlightenment for women.

The Dragon Princess in medieval Japan, however, was more widely known from the *Devedatta* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* for achieving enlightenment despite having a female body. In this sutra, the eight-year-old Dragon Princess receives the teachings of the Buddha from the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (*Monju bosatsu* 文殊菩薩) in the Dragon King's Palace. Mañjuśrī announces to the gods that the Dragon Princess attained perfect enlightenment, but Śāriputra (*Sharihotsu* 舍利弗) refuses to believe this statement on account of the Five Obstructions and the inherent pollution of the female body. In response to Śāriputra's skepticism, the Dragon Princess offers a jewel to Śākyamuni Buddha and, within an instant, transforms from a dragon into a man and enters the undefiled realm of enlightened beings. The jewel is a metaphor for the enlightened mind in Mahayana scriptures, so by accepting the Dragon Princess' jewel without hesitation, Śākyamuni conveys that the Princess, in fact, attained the perfect wisdom and achieved enlightenment.<sup>157</sup> The form of the wish-fulfilling jewel that the dragon holds in the Kannonji embroidery is identical to the one that the Dragon Princess presents to the Buddha in the "Devadatta" chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* from the twelfth-century Heike Nōkyō 平家納経 handscroll. In this illustrated handscroll, however, the Dragon Princess is depicted as a young girl rather than a dragon. The artist of the

<sup>156</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 98.

<sup>157</sup> On the symbolism behind the Dragon Princess' jewel in the *Lotus Sutra*, see Ryūichi Abé, "Revisiting the Dragon Princess: Her Role in Medieval Engi Stories and Their Implications in Reading the Lotus Sutra," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 42, no. 1 (2015): 27-70; Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 92-99; and Brian D. Ruppert, *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 145-156.

Kannonji embroidery may have wanted to accentuate the Dragon Princess' lack of biological defilement by depicting her as a dragon, rather than in human form. To put it another way, the Dragon Princess in the *Lotus Sutra* is considered less impure than most women because she is spared from blood defilement by entering paradise at the age of eight. By depicting the Dragon Princess in her animal form, then, the artist may have wanted to accentuate her lack of blood pollution.

#### 2.4.1.2 Nyoirin Kannon and the Inscriptions on the Kannonji Embroidery

The inscriptions on the top and borders of the Kannonji embroidery refer to the role of Nyoirin Kannon in saving all sentient beings, especially women. The inscription on the top of the embroidery comes from the *Gumyōkaie Sutra* (弘猛海慧經). This sutra no longer survives but is quoted in Genshin's 源信 (942-1017) *Ōjō-yōshū* 往生要集 and is considered the Original Vow (*honzei* 本誓) of the bodhisattva Kannon.<sup>158</sup> The inscription states, "All beings suffer. Perfect enlightenment cannot be achieved. One cannot be saved unless they proclaim the bodhisattva Kannon's name three times."<sup>159</sup> This text, then, describes Kannon as a bodhisattva with the salvific power to help all beings achieve enlightenment.

The inscriptions on the left and right borders of the Kannonji embroidery come from the *Nyoirin kōshiki* 如意輪講式, a liturgical text that was associated with female enlightenment, as it was written by the Tendai monk, Chōken 澄憲 (1126-1203) at the request of the mother of

<sup>158</sup> Bodhisattvas make a sacred vow (*honzei*) during their path towards enlightenment that they will save all sentient beings. The vow written here is specific to the bodhisattva Kannon. For a description on original vows, see Kobayashi Naoki 小林直樹, *Chūsei setsuwashū to sono kiban* 中世説話とその基盤 (Osaka: Izumi shoin, 2004), 11-21.

<sup>159</sup> The inscription states, 「衆生有苦三称我名不往救者不取正覚。」

Fujiwara no Hidehira 藤原秀衡 (1033-1187).<sup>160</sup> These inscriptions from the *Nyoirin kōshiki* emphasize the wondrous paradise that awaits believers in the afterlife and the veracity of the Buddhist teachings that all beings, including women, can attain enlightenment. The inscription on the left border comes from the seventh and final section of the *Nyoirin kōshiki* and is called the section on the *Rebirth in Paradise* (*ōjō gokuraku* 往生極樂). The inscription states that, “If people consistently call out the Buddha’s name, they will encounter his immeasurable light and hear the Buddha’s teachings preached within the afterworld of the paradise of rebirth.”<sup>161</sup>

The inscription on the right border comes from the fourth section of the *Nyoirin kōshiki* entitled the *Merits of the Buddhist Vow* (*hongan riei* 本願利益) and discusses the benefits that specifically women can accrue in the afterlife by venerating Nyoirin Kannon. The inscription selected for this embroidery claims, “if even one person who took these vows is unable to attain rebirth, I am prepared to fall [into the hells] for my falsehood and turn my back on the belief in Original Enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覺).”<sup>162</sup> By examining a few verses above this drastic statement from the *Nyoirin kōshiki*, it becomes clear that Chōken is claiming that he will turn his back on Buddhist teachings if he discovers even one woman who is unable to achieve

<sup>160</sup> A *kōshiki* is a chanted lecture compiled from sutras about the virtues of a certain Buddhist deity and refers both to the text itself and the ritual. The liturgical text of a *kōshiki* consists of a pronouncement of intention (*hyōbyaku* 表白), an odd number of sections (*dan* 段), and Chinese verses (*kada* 伽陀). This form of liturgical text flourished from the late-Heian to the early-Kamakura periods as a method of teaching the merits of Buddhist deities to laymen and laywomen. See Barbara R. Ambros, James L. Ford, and Michaela Mross, “Editors’ Introduction: ‘Kōshiki’ in Japanese Buddhism,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 43, no. 1 (2016): 1-15; Shiba Kayono 柴佳世乃, “Chōken kara Jōkei he: ‘Nyoirin kōshiki’ wo megutte 澄憲から貞慶へ：『如意輪講式』をめぐる,” *Gobun ronsō* 33 (2018): 1-13.

<sup>161</sup> The inscription states, 「若人恒念大士名, 当得往生極樂世界, 面見如来無量寿, 聽聞妙法燈元生。」

<sup>162</sup> The inscription states, 「若我誓願大悲中一人不成二世願我随虚妄罪過中不還本覺捨大悲。」 Original Enlightenment thinking is the belief that all beings have the Buddha-nature within them. This ideology was most commonly identified with the Tendai sect of Buddhism. For a further discussion, see Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999).

enlightenment after praying to Nyoirin Kannon. A few verses earlier, Chōken writes, “Above all, [Nyoirin Kannon] is the origin of mercy. More specifically, women are the recipients of this [bodhisattva’s] mercy because the traces of this bodhisattva (*wakō suijaku* 和光垂迹) appeared in the body of a woman. Above all else, women also wish to attain the path of blessings and sympathy provided to all living creatures.”<sup>163</sup> Not only the form of the Dragon Princess then but also the passages of the *Nyoirin kōshiki* sewn into the Kannonji embroidery make a strong case for the potential of female enlightenment.

The notion that women were the primary venerators of Nyoirin Kannon and the benefactors of this bodhisattva’s vow is well documented. The *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書, a history of Japanese Buddhism written in 1322, for example, claims that an imperial consort named Nyoi 如意 requested Kūkai 空海 (774-835) to carve the first statue of the Nyoirin Kannon from her image in 830.<sup>3.18</sup>, and thus, the bodhisattva took on female form.<sup>164</sup> During the tenth and eleventh centuries in particular, aristocratic women relied on images of Nyoirin Kannon for an auspicious marriage, to conceive a child, and to assure a safe pregnancy. Furthermore, the sculptor, Kōshun 康俊, created a statue of Nyoirin Kannon in 1351 to be the principal image for a building referred to as the “Women’s Hall” (*Nyonin dō* 女人堂) in Nyoirinkannonji 如意輪観音寺.<sup>165</sup>

The Kannonji embroidery, then, combines the form of the Dragon Princess and excerpts concerning the salvific powers of the Nyoirin Kannon to assure women that they too have the capacity for enlightenment. This embroidery also contrasts with most of the earlier embroidered

<sup>163</sup> This translation comes from section 4, verses 25-27 of the *Nyoirin kōshiki*. The liturgical text states, 「就中、観音是慈悲之本也。女人則慈悲之質也。故和光垂跡之形、多現婦女身。利生感應之道、殊満女人願。」

<sup>164</sup> Inoue Kazutoshi 井上一稔, *Nihon no Bijutsu* 日本の美術 312 (1992): 32-53.

<sup>165</sup> Inoue 井上, *Nihon no Bijutsu* 日本の美術, 32-53.

images of Kannon in Japan because those images were created for merit in this life while the Kannonji embroidery focuses on the capacity for enlightenment in the afterlife. Furthermore, the Kannonji embroidery incorporates the patron's hair within the image unlike earlier Japanese Kannon embroideries. The donor, the nun Myōkōzen, likely stitched her own hair into the embroidery for the three inscriptions, Nyoirin Kannon's hair and robes, and the black silhouette surrounding the dragon to achieve a karmic connection with the bodhisattva and to merge herself with the Dragon Princess. Why does this embroidery make such a strong case for female enlightenment? Why did women require the assurance that their existence in the afterlife would be safe and secure? Since the Kannonji embroidery served as a principal image, I argue that it likely was not used in a memorialization context, but rather to proselytize Nyoirin Kannon's ability to save women from the hell realm, and in particular, the Blood Hells.

#### 2.4.1.3 Nyoirin Kannon and the Blood Hells

A variety of hell paintings depict Nyoirin Kannon as the savior of women suffering in the Blood Hells. The most famous example is the *Kumano kanshin jikkai mandara* (熊野観心十界曼荼羅), a didactic painting used by nuns to proselytize the teachings of the *Blood Bowl Sutra* (*Ketsubon kyō* 血盆經). Women who defiled the earth with their menstrual and parturitive blood are depicted engulfed in the Lake of Blood (*Chi no ike* 血の池) in the bottom righthand corner of the painting. Nyoirin Kannon is portrayed above this lake handing out sutras to these women in order to save them from drowning in their own blood.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>166</sup> These paintings of the Blood Hells do not specify which sutra Nyoirin Kannon distributes to the drowning women. One theory is that Nyoirin Kannon hands out the *Blood Bowl Sutra* to reenact the Tendai ritual of throwing this sutra for talismanic purposes. Another theory is that Nyoirin Kannon bestows the *Heart Sutra* (*Hannya shingyō* 般若心經) to these women because this text describes Kannon's vow to save all suffering beings. See Barbara Ruch, "Woman to

Though there is no doctrinal source in Japan that claims Nyoirin Kannon saves women from the Blood Hells, members of the Tendai sect circulated this ideology by creating images that were used to proselytize this belief and performing rituals that alleviated the suffering of these women. The Tendai sect was most likely responsible for popularizing this ideology that Nyoirin Kannon saved women from the Blood Hells because the religious institutions and pilgrimage sites that currently house paintings of the Blood Hells depicting Nyoirin Kannon—such as the Kumano Sanzan Grand Shrines (*Kumano sanzán* 熊野三山), the Rokkakudō 六角堂 in Kyoto, and Zenkōji 善光寺 in Nagano—were all under the Tendai sect’s administration during the medieval period.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, the ritual throwing of the *Blood Bowl Sutra* to save women in the hells was predominately carried out by Tendai ascetics.<sup>168</sup> Since Kannonji is a Tendai Buddhist temple as well, this Nyoirin Kannon embroidery may have been used in similar proselytization activities related to the *Blood Bowl Sutra*.

The belief that the bodhisattva Kannon could save women in the Blood Hells circulated as early as the mid-fifteenth century when this Kannonji embroidery was created. The *Taishiden* 太子伝, a 1466 tale transmitted by Tendai Buddhists, provides a description of the Blood Hells, lists the causes of these women’s transgressions, and offers the solution that prayers directed towards

Woman: *Kumano bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan,” in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), 566-575.

<sup>167</sup> The Grand Shrines of Kumano were under the administration of the Tendai sect temple, Onjōji 園城寺 since 1090. Tateyama was part of the mountain ascetic tradition of the Tendai sect called *Honzan shugen* 本山修験 since the tenth century. The Rokkakudō 六角堂 in Kyoto, which houses an image of *Kannon and the Blood Hells* (*Chi no ike kannon-zu* 血の池観音図) is a Tendai Buddhist temple. Zenkōji 善光寺 belongs to both the Pure Land and Tendai sects of Buddhism. See Kōdate Naomi 高逵奈緒美, “Chinoike jigoku no esō wo meguru oboegaki 血の池地獄の絵相を巡る覚書,” in *Jigoku no sekai* 地獄の世界, ed. Sakamoto Kanamae (Tokyo: Hokushindō, 1990), 667-90.

<sup>168</sup> This ritual is described in greater detail in Chapter Four. Tokieda Tsutomu 時枝務, “Chūsei Tōgoku ni okeru Ketsubon Kyō shinkō no yōsō: Kusatsu Shiranesan wo chūshin toshite 中世東国における血盆経信仰の様相—草津平根山を中心として,” *Shinano* 36, no. 8 (1984): 28-46.



the bodhisattva Kannon will save suffering women.<sup>169</sup> This text is likely not an isolated example because scholars of medieval China have discovered copies of Chinese *Blood Bowl Sutras*, which also claim that the bodhisattva Kannon has the power to save women in this realm.<sup>170</sup> This Nyoirin Kannon embroidery, then, likely attracted many female pilgrims to Kannonji centuries later because the temple is one of the thirty-three sites on the Owari Thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage route (*Owari sanjūsan kannon reijō* 尾張三十三観音霊場) that was established in the Edo period.<sup>171</sup> These pilgrims likely traveled from afar to venerate the Nyoirin Kannon embroidery and affirm their conviction that the bodhisattva will rescue them from the Blood Hells in the afterlife.

#### 2.4.2 Nyoirin Kannon Hair Embroidery from Hokkeji

A Nyoirin Kannon hair embroidery also survives from Hokkeji 法華寺 with a similar iconography, but there are no inscriptions concerning the patron or the creation date, nor are there excerpts from Buddhist sutras that link this image to a specific ideology. The Nyoirin Kannon of the Hokkeji embroidery is depicted in a similar manner as the Kannonji embroidered Kannon—seated on a boulder in the middle of the ocean—but there are a few differences in the iconography. First, the bodhisattva appears frontal facing in the Hokkeji embroidery rather than in a three-

<sup>169</sup> The text that associates Nyoirin Kannon with the Blood Hells must have been written before Blood Hell images were created because the earliest painting concerning the Nyoirin Kannon and the Blood Hells that survives dates to the late sixteenth century. The *Taishiden* claims that these women fell into the Lake of Blood not only because of parturitive blood but also because of menstrual blood. This is a significant discovery because prior research suggested that the impurity surrounding menstrual blood developed later during the Edo period. See Kōdate 高達, “Chinoike jigoku no esō wo meguru oboegaki 血の池地獄の絵相を巡る覚書,” 675-66.

<sup>170</sup> Henri Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine* (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1919), 128.

<sup>171</sup> There were many versions of the Thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage route in Japan. The earliest route, known as the Saigoku 西国, was established during the Heian period but a majority date to the sixteenth century or later. The number thirty-three is significant because this number was thought to correlate with the number of Kannon’s manifestations. See MacWilliams, “Temple Myths and the Popularization of Kannon Pilgrimage In Japan,” 375-411.

quarter view, perhaps to emphasize the iconic and statue-like presence of this bodhisattva.<sup>172</sup> Secondly, Zenzai Dōji is portrayed where the Dragon Princess was originally positioned. Finally, the natural landscape background is more elaborate, with two bamboo trees depicted on the right and the full moon stitched in the upper left-hand corner. The artist may have incorporated the moon in this embroidery to link the image with the Nyoirin Kannon as well as the Water-Moon Kannon, a form of the bodhisattva that was popular in both China and Korea, as it was believed all of one's worldly and otherworldly wishes could come true when venerating this type.<sup>173</sup>

Although the patron of the Hokkeji embroidery is not recorded, we know that the image was predominately viewed by upper-class women because it was housed within an imperial convent. Empress Kōmyō, who was mentioned previously as the patron of embroidered Buddhist images, founded this convent in 745 CE, and it attracted many pilgrims later during the medieval period as a center for worshiping the empress and the bodhisattva Kannon. For example, women of the thirteenth-century court, such as the nun-poetess Abutsu 阿仏 (ca. 1220-1283), visited the temple for spiritual cultivation and literary inspiration.<sup>174</sup> In 1336, Emperor Kōmyō 光明天皇 (r. 1336-1348) appointed his daughter as abbess thereby elevating the status of Hokkeji to an imperial convent (*bikuni gosho* 比丘尼御所). Women from the shogunal Ashikaga family as well as the royal family served as abbesses over the subsequent decades.

Hokkeji became a center for Kannon worship because Empress Kōmyō was thought to be a manifestation of the Eleven-Headed Kannon. A sandalwood sculpture of the Eleven-Headed

<sup>172</sup> On the significance of the frontal facing hieratic pose, see Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 239.

<sup>173</sup> The monk, Shinkaku 心覚 (1177-1180) copied the “Method of Worshipping the Water-Moon Master Perceiver,” a Chinese text describing the methods of venerating the Water-Moon Kannon and included drawings of this form in his iconographical manual, the *Besson zakki* 別尊雜記. See Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 243-44.

<sup>174</sup> Patricia Fister, *Amamonzeki: A Hidden Heritage – Treasures of the Japanese Imperial Convents* (Tokyo: Sankei Shinbunsha, 2009), 356.

Kannon, said to be created in the image of Empress Kōmyō herself, serves as the main icon of this convent. According to the *Kōfukuji ranshōki* 興福寺濫觴記, this statue was grouped with two other sculptures—an image of Dainichi nyorai and an image of the Nyoirin Kannon—until at least the fourteenth century, yet there is no known iconographical significance for this grouping.<sup>175</sup> Lori Meeks argues that the three images were likely considered a set since they all shared the same goal of remembering the presence of Empress Kōmyō.<sup>176</sup>

While the Kannonji embroidered form and inscriptions strongly emphasize Nyoirin Kannon's capacity to offer enlightenment to women in the afterlife, the Hokkeji embroidery does not have any inscriptions from Buddhist scriptures. This absence may have been intentional though to indicate that the image's use and meaning were flexible. That is, the Hokkeji embroidery of Nyoirin Kannon might have been venerated for a variety of functions from fulfilling worldly wishes to securing a better existence for loved ones in the afterlife. Based on the audience of Hokkeji temple and the popular cults of Kannon that appeared during the medieval period, I argue that the Hokkeji Nyoirin Kannon embroidery likely had two major significances.

Imperial women were the predominant audience for the Hokkeji embroidery, so the image of Nyoirin Kannon may have been used to reinforce the belief that they were a positive force with the capacity to sway imperial decisions. This is because the Nyoirin Kannon was associated with the Jade Woman (*gyokujo* 玉女), a self-sufficient agent thought to guide the emperor and other

<sup>175</sup> See *Kōfukuji ranshōki* 興福寺濫觴記. In *Dai Nihon Bukkyō Zensho* 大日本仏教全書, vol. 119 (Tokyo: Ushio shobo, 1931), 402-433.

<sup>176</sup> The Dainichi nyorai statue, for example, was thought to be carved by the empress herself and the Nyoirin Kannon statue was thought to refer to the monk Dōkyō 道鏡 (700?-772) who had a close relationship with the empress' daughter. It was thought that Dōkyō won the affections of this empress' daughter and attained political power through his skillful means at performing the Nyoirin Kannon rite. The sculpture of Nyoirin Kannon then also served as proof to women that this form of the bodhisattva had the power to sway their luck in love and power. See Lori Meeks, *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 43-48.

powerful male figures towards salvation through her sex appeal.<sup>177</sup> The Shingon ritual manual, *Kakuzenshō* 覺禪抄, which was compiled in 1182, is the first record that connects Nyoirin Kannon with the Jewel Woman who secures men's rebirth in the Pure Land. Many monks, including Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1263) in 1201 recorded dreams in which Nyoirin Kannon appeared to them as the Jewel Woman to lead him to the paradise. The Tendai monk, Jien 慈円 (1155-1225), also dreamed in 1203 that the Jade Woman entered the body of the queen and helped her influence the emperor in making good decisions in this life and the next.<sup>178</sup> In this way, the Nyoirin Kannon became synonymous with an imperial consort. Nyoirin Kannon became the most popular principal image at imperial convents and is frequently venerated in other convents across Japan. Since many of the women at Hokkeji were directly related to the emperor, this Nyoirin Kannon embroidery likely served as an emblem of their own agency and political authority as imperial women.

The Hokkeji Nyoirin Kannon embroidery may have also functioned as a stand-in for the Six Kannon set, which gained wide popularity from the tenth through the sixteenth centuries and these six images were venerated to save beings trapped in one of the Six Realms.<sup>179</sup> While temples often commissioned six separate paintings or sculptures to use in Six Kannon Rituals, this would be a laborious and costly project to complete for an embroidered medium. It is likely then that the

<sup>177</sup> Tanaka Takako 田中貴子, "'Gyokujo' no seiritsu to genkai: 'Jishin oshōmusōseki' kara 'Shinran no yume ki' made 〈玉女〉の成立と限界—『慈鎮和尚夢想記』から『親鸞夢記』まで," in *Miko to joshin* 巫女と女神, ed. Ōsami Kazuo 大隅和雄 and Nishiguchi Junko 西口順子 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1989), 91-126.

<sup>178</sup> Jien was not the only Kamakura-period monk who had a dream about the Jade Maiden. Myōe and Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1263) also had these dreams concerning the Jade Maiden and her relationship to imperial power. Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 205-10.

<sup>179</sup> According to the eleventh-century text, the *Ningai chūshinmon* 仁海注進文, the forms of Kannon venerated in the Six Kannon Cult are the Shō Kannon standard form, the Thousand-Armed Kannon, the Horse-Headed Kannon (*Batō Kannon* 馬頭観音), the Eleven-Headed Kannon, the Juntei Kannon 准提観音, and the Nyoirin Kannon. It was believed that each of the forms of Kannon helped beings in one of the six realms: Shō Kannon in the Hell Realm, the Thousand-Armed Kannon in the Hungry Ghosts Realm, the Horse-Headed Kannon in the Animal Realm, the Eleven-Headed Kannon in the Asura Realm, the Juntei Kannon in the Human Realm, and the Nyoirin Kannon in the Heavenly Realm. See Fowler, *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan*, 14-48.

embroiderer selected just the image of Nyoirin Kannon to substitute for the entire set as it was believed that each of the Nyoirin Kannon's six arms had the ability to roam in each of the Six Realms of Existence (*rokudō* 六道) and thus, had the capacity to save beings in all situations.<sup>180</sup>

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the development of embroidered Buddhist images as well as the significance of extant examples of Kannon embroideries in order to understand their role in the larger cult of the bodhisattva in China and Japan. Embroidered Buddhist images were an ideal format for early imperial patrons to declare their faith; the medium was relatively portable despite its massive size and could be transmitted to pilgrimage sites or displayed temporarily for ritual ceremonies. Both men and women were initially involved in the production process and patronage of embroidered Buddhist images, yet by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, notions concerning “womanly work” transformed the practice of Buddhist embroidery from a genderless expression of Buddhist devotion to a sign of feminine virtue and female cultivation.

The iconography of embroidered images of Kannon and the texts discussing Buddhist embroideries in China and Japan indicate that the form, use, and meaning of these images from the medieval period onward differed by cultural context and even by Buddhist sect. Local legends concerning Princess Miaoshan and Zhou Zhengguan stimulated the idea that the custom of embroidering images of Guanyin with hair was a virtuous yet painful devotional practice in China.

<sup>180</sup> There are six realms in Buddhist thought in which six different classes of beings reside: hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and gods. See Robert Sharf, “Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism,” in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, eds. Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 151-198.

In Japan, however, embroidered images of Kannon became the medium through which temples could reach women and propose solutions for them to achieve their desires in this realm and the other realm.

Indeed, women in both China and Japan created and venerated embroidered Buddhist images of this bodhisattva, but the similarities between these practices seem to have ended there. The value of embroidered images of Guanyin in China was in the process of creation and not the final product. In contrast, the value of Japanese Kannon embroideries was in the capacity of the form and inscriptions on the embroidery to join together to convey a Buddhist message that was relatable to a wider audience. The next chapter will examine records from the Heian and Kamakura Period concerning Buddhist embroideries to show exactly what kind of women commissioned and received these images and in what rituals these images were used.

### 3.0 FROM RECIPIENT TO PATRON: STRANDS OF WOMEN'S DEVOTION IN EMBROIDERED BUDDHIST IMAGES

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the Heian period (798-1185), emperors commissioned Buddhist embroidered images for the memorial services of their royal mothers, but during the Kamakura period (1185-1333), women became active patrons, often incorporating their own hair into the images to attain merit for this life and the next. In this chapter, I examine Heian- and Kamakura-period court diaries, historical chronicles, and temple records that describe the dedication of embroidered Buddhist images in order to analyze and clarify the shifting role of laywomen from recipients to patrons. I argue that the development of hair embroideries can be understood as a unique female innovation which served as a symbolic gesture to associate widowed aristocrats and shogunal wives with Buddhahood while marking them as their deceased husband's proxies in this life.

Due to their fragile material, less than two hundred embroidered Buddhist images, dating from the Asuka Period (538-645) to the Edo Period (1600-1868), survive in Japan today.<sup>181</sup> These textiles can be classified into two types based on the materials used for the embroidery; silk floss and strands of hair. For silk embroideries, multicolored silk threads are sewn into a woven silk ground. For hair embroideries, both silk thread and human hair are incorporated into the image. Two or three strands of human hair are usually bundled and stitched together to depict the deity's

<sup>181</sup> The first exhibition on Buddhist embroideries took place at the Nara National Museum in 1963 and sixty-six embroidered Buddhist images were displayed. Another Buddhist embroideries exhibition took place at the Nara National Museum in 2018 to commemorate the restoration of the *Taima mandara* tapestry. At that time, 138 embroideries were displayed and many images were newly discovered in temple collections.

hair or robes, Sanskrit seed-syllables (*shuji* 種子), and excerpts from Buddhist sutras inscribed near the border or the mounting of the embroidery. In this way, human hair is incorporated to accentuate and embellish the most sacred parts of the image—the Buddha’s body and the Buddha’s words. It is believed that hair embroideries originated in Japan during the twelfth century, as all extant embroideries created before this period only incorporate silk thread.

Even if pre-modern Buddhist embroideries still survive today, a majority of the images lack inscriptions recording the names of the artist, patron, and recipient of the image. Thus, it is difficult to uncover the names and identities of the women involved in the creation process of these embroidered icons. The aim of this chapter is to attempt to uncover some of the lost female patrons and recipients of Buddhist embroideries by examining primary documents. I begin by analyzing the reasons why Buddhist embroideries were considered an exclusive and even meritorious offering for the memorial services of royal mothers (*kokumo* 國母) during the Heian period.<sup>182</sup> I will then closely examine how and why hair embroideries were intimately linked with female patronage during the Kamakura period and argue that widows incorporated their tonsured hair into Buddhist images as a symbolic gesture to associate themselves with their husband’s household and confirm their position as primary inheritors of his property and wealth. Finally, I will explore the multiple significances female hair accrued as it was incorporated into Buddhist images. Through these primary sources, we know that Buddhist hair embroideries were not only dedicated in mortuary rituals but were also used to heighten the position of women in this life and the next.

<sup>182</sup> *Kokumo*, literally translated as the “mother of the realm,” was a title bestowed to the mother of the emperor. This title was granted to mothers as early as the late eighth century to signify their support of the emperor’s rule. The title was more than symbolic as it enabled women to participate in government. A royal mother also acquired the *Jōneidan* 常寧殿, the official administrative hall and shared the *Shiki no Mizōshi* Office 識御曹司 with the regent which enabled them to attain administrative control over the government. See Hashimoto Yoshinori 橋本義則, “Kōkyū no seiritsu: Kōgō no henbō to kōkyū no saihen 後宮の成立・皇后の変貌と後宮の再編,” in *Kuge to buke: Sono hikaku bunmei shiteki kōsatsu* 公家と武家・その比較文明史的考察, ed. Murai Yasuhiko (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1995).



These examples of female virtuosity and patronage reveal that medieval Japanese women were not defined by patriarchal Buddhist doctrine nor inheritance laws in their devotional practices.

### 3.2 THE PRODUCTION OF HEIAN-PERIOD BUDDHIST EMBROIDERIES

There are several extant large-scale examples of Japanese Buddhist embroideries from the Asuka and Nara periods (710-794), but the creation of these monumental icons appears to have come to an abrupt halt during the ninth century. Heian-period records concerning the production of Buddhist embroideries are scant and not a single embroidered Buddhist icon survives from this period until the twelfth century.<sup>183</sup> Many temple structures, images, and documents were destroyed in the great fires that plagued the capital during the medieval period and the embroideries hung within temples likely suffered a similar fate. While the Heian court routinely donated funds for the reconstruction of Buddhist halls and sculptured images destroyed by these fires, there appears to have been little interest in, or perhaps necessity, to remake damaged embroidered Buddhist images during this period due to improvements in painting techniques in Japan and changes in Buddhist architectural spaces.<sup>184</sup>

During the mid-tenth century, painters of the Imperial Painting Bureau (*edokoro* 絵所) began to paint in the native *tsukuri-e* 作絵 style in which layers of thick opaque pigments were

<sup>183</sup> For further discussion on the iconography and ritual function of early Japanese Buddhist embroideries, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>184</sup> In Yui Suzuki's study on images of the Yakushi Buddha, she discovered that a fire in 1070 destroyed most of the temples and images near Gion. The main Buddhist icons at temples such as Dairenji were remade the following year to replace the destroyed sculpted images. I have not located Heian-period sources discussing the recreation or repair of damaged Buddhist embroideries from the Heian period so the restoration of these images may have been considered inessential. See Yui Suzuki, *Medicine Master Buddha: The Iconic Worship of Yakushi in Heian Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 78-79.

applied on silk or paper to create a vibrant surface.<sup>185</sup> As this native painting style developed in Japan, patrons may have come to prefer the simplicity in design and rapid production of painted images to the labor-intensive embroideries.<sup>186</sup> Additionally, the spatial layout of Buddhist temples changed during the ninth century. Lecture Halls (*kōdō* 講堂), previously used by monks for recitations of sutras and Buddhist sermons, were converted into Worship Halls (*raidō* 礼堂) to accommodate large numbers of laymen and women who began to participate more actively in ritual ceremonies.<sup>187</sup> Pictorial diagrams, such as the *Illustrated Story of the Miraculous Origin of the Yakushi Temple* handscroll (*Yakushi-ji engi emaki* 薬師寺縁起絵巻), reveal that prior to this change, large-scale embroideries were frequently hung within the Lecture Hall and used for didactic purposes to illustrate the teachings of the Buddha. Since laymen became the primary audience for these new spaces of Worship Halls, Buddhist embroideries visualizing scenes from sutras for moral instruction may have been considered too esoteric or even inconsequential to them.

Another plausible reason for the lack of Buddhist embroideries from the Heian period is the deteriorating relations between China and Japan. Official embassies to Chang'an were suspended in 894 by the ambassador (*kentō taishi* 遣唐大使), Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903), due to unsafe travel conditions, political instability in the Chinese capital, and because the Japanese court no longer relied on Tang models of culture and goods.<sup>188</sup> A Japanese style of

<sup>185</sup> For more on the emergence of *tsukuri-e*, which would eventually be called *yamato-e*, see Minamoto Toyomune 源豊宗, “*Onna-e: Yamato-e no Seiritsu* 女絵・大和絵の成立,” in *Yamatoe no kenkyū* 大和絵の研究 (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1976), 5-32.

<sup>186</sup> Ishida Mosaku 石田茂作 and Nishimura Hyōbu 西村兵部, *Shūbutsu* 繡佛 (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1964), 5.

<sup>187</sup> Fujii Keisuke 藤井恵介, “*Heian jidai no butsudō kūkan: kondō, kōdō no seikaku no henshitsu* 平安時代の仏堂空間—金堂・講堂の性格の変質—,” Paper presented at the Rekishi Bunka 歴史文化 forum, Kokubunji, Tokyo, February 15, 2015.

<sup>188</sup> Ishii Masatoshi 石井正敏, “*Kentōshi Q&A*,” in *Kentōshi jidai no Nihon to Chūgoku* 遣唐使時代の日本と中国, ed. Egami Namio (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1982), 260-67.

clothing, the twelve-layered robes (*jūnihitoe* 十二単), and a native writing system (*kana*) developed as the imperial court began to distance itself from continental precedents. Since Buddhist textiles were originally introduced to Japan by Korean emissaries and Chinese monks, the medium may have been disfavored by members of the imperial court due to its association with the continent.<sup>189</sup>

Buddhist embroideries were also likely seldom produced from the ninth to the eleventh centuries because silk was an expensive and lavish material that could only be acquired by the elite. After a native sericulture industry developed around the third century in Japan, embroidered clothing became a status symbol. For example, during the reign of Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (554-628), only members holding the second court rank or higher were permitted to wear clothing embellished with embroidered patterns.<sup>190</sup> During the Heian period, silk textiles and threads were collected by the imperial government as a per capita tax and represented the power of the state over the surrounding provinces.<sup>191</sup> Wealthy and elite families like the Fujiwara clan were the only ones capable of conducting private trade with continental merchants in order to obtain silk fabrics during this period after official trade between China and Japan came to a halt.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>189</sup> The *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki* 日本書紀; 720) claims that Japan's first introduction to silk goods came from the king of Silla, who offered Empress Jingū 神功皇后 (r. 201-269) embroidered silk hangings in the third century. As for Buddhist embroideries, Empress Wu Zeitan 武則天 (624-705) of China commissioned one thousand embroideries of the eleven-headed Kannon after Emperor Gaozong's 高宗 (628-683) death. The Chinese monk, Ganjin 鑑真 (688-763), brought back one of these embroideries to Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺 in Nara, the temple he founded in 759 CE. See Young Yang Chung, *Silken Threads: A History of Embroidery in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2005), 399.

<sup>190</sup> Tokugawa Art Museum 徳川美術館, *Nihon no shishū: Asuka jidai kara edo jidai made* 日本の刺繍・飛鳥時代から江戸時代まで (Nagoya-shi: Tokugawa Bijutsukan, 1998), 139.

<sup>191</sup> According to the *Engishiki* 延喜式 (927), silk was produced in 48 provinces across Japan during the Heian period and collected by the government as tax in the form of woven silk taffeta, silk thread, damask and twill. For more on provincial taxes paid to the Heian court, see Charlotte von Verschuer, "Life of Commoners in the Provinces: The *Owari no gebumi* of 988," in *Heian Japan: Centers and Peripheries*, eds. Mikael S. Adolphson et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 310-317.

<sup>192</sup> On the Fujiwara family's involvement in the private mercantile trade, see Akiyama Kenzō 秋山謙蔵, "Nittō bōeki no hatten to Dazaifu no hensen 日唐貿易の発展と太宰府の変遷," *Shigaku zasshi* 45 (1934).

Heian-period documents do not specify the makers of Buddhist embroideries, but it is likely that they were the craftsmen and women of textile guilds (*oribe no tsukasa* 織部司).<sup>193</sup> These artists were involved in the creation of luxurious brocade silk and twill weave textiles for the imperial court until around the middle of the Heian period when they began to open private workshops in the Kamigyō Ward in modern-day Kyoto.<sup>194</sup> Records indicate that a massive fire destroyed the textile district in 839, but while this disaster may have initially led to a decline in the industry, the workshops began to acquire royal patrons again in the mid-tenth century.

In 1964, Ishida Mosaku claimed that not a single Heian-period Buddhist embroidered image survives, yet recent iconographical, stylistic, and technical analyses of extant textiles suggest otherwise.<sup>195</sup> An embroidered image of *Fugen and the Ten Female Demons* (*Fugen jūrasetsunyo zō* 普賢十羅刹女像) from Hōgonji 宝厳寺 at Chikubushima is believed to date before the Kamakura period during the mid-twelfth century because it is the same scale and style as painted images of Fugen (Sk. Samantabhadra) created during this period.<sup>196</sup> Two other Buddhist embroideries—a *Seated Amida Triad* (*Amida sanzō zō* 阿弥陀三尊像) from Sainenji 西念寺 and an image of *Monju Bodhisattva Seated on a Lion* (*Monju bosatsu kishi zō* 文殊菩薩騎獅像) currently held in the collection of the Yamato Bunkakan Museum in Nara—are also thought to

<sup>193</sup> For a discussion on the various guilds established to make silk goods in the early Heian period and its relationship to the Palace Storehouse Bureau (*Kuraryō* 内蔵寮), see Takeshi Horibe 堀部猛, “Oribeshi rinjisho to kurayo: Heian shoki ni okeru shukōgyō seisan kanshi no saihen 織部司臨時所と内蔵寮：平安初期における手工業生産官司の再編,” *Shikyō* 史境 59 (2009): 19-37.

<sup>194</sup> Tatebe Norio 立部紀夫, “Ishōshi ni okeru oribe no tsukasa no yakuwari ni tsuite 意匠史における織部司の役割について,” *Bulletin of Japanese Society for the Science of Design* (1981): 38-39.

<sup>195</sup> Ishida and Nishimura, *Shūbutsu*, 4-5.

<sup>196</sup> For a discussion on the stylistic similarities between the embroidered image of Fugen from Hōgonji and painted images from the twelfth century, see Itō Shinji 伊藤信二, “Heian jidai, kamakura jidai no shūbutsu 平安時代、鎌倉時代の繡仏,” in *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏：修理完成記念特別展, ed. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2018), 240-43.

date earlier than the Kamakura period. Like the *Fugen* embroidery from Hōgonji, the material and design of these textiles diverge from Kamakura-period ones as they do not incorporate hair and there is no embroidery located on the mounting and background.<sup>197</sup>

### 3.3 THE RITUAL USE OF BUDDHIST EMBROIDERIES IN HEIAN-PERIOD MEMORIAL SERVICES

From the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh century, Buddhist embroideries were commissioned by emperors for the memorial services (*tsuizen* 追善) of their royal mothers. These royal mothers—Fujiwara no Inshi 藤原胤子 (-896), Fujiwara no Onshi 藤原穩子 (885-954), and Fujiwara no Anshi 藤原安子 (927-964)—were all members of the northern Fujiwara lineage and lived at a moment when the family had attained political dominance.<sup>198</sup> The Fujiwara family rose to prominence and became the most powerful aristocratic family by marrying off their daughters and sisters to future emperors and establishing the role of regent (*kanpaku* 関白) as a hereditary position reserved for their clan.<sup>199</sup> The descendants of these Fujiwara women recognized that their prestige and prosperity arose from their royal mothers' politically advantageous marriages and

<sup>197</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏：修理完成記念特別展 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2018), 260-61.

<sup>198</sup> See Appendix A for the genealogical chart of the Fujiwara clan.

<sup>199</sup> During the Insei period, the emperor was frequently young and required the guidance and direction of the Regent and his royal mother. Since women could not become emperors, the political standing of women diminished during the Heian period. Nevertheless, it is evident that women continued to privately exert political influence especially over matters of imperial succession. See Fukutō Sanae and Takeshi Watanabe, "From Female Sovereign to Mother of the Nation: Women and Government in the Heian Period," in *Heian Japan: Centers and Peripheries*, eds. Mikael S. Adolphson et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 15-34.

ensured that their memories survived by carrying out ceremonies on their behalf for decades to come.

The purpose of a memorial service was not simply to remember and commemorate the dead but to transfer merit to the deceased by sponsoring ritual performances, reciting prayers, and bestowing expensive offerings so that they could attain an auspicious rebirth in Amida Buddha's (Sk. Amitābha) Pure Land. During the Heian period, memorial services were held every seventh day after a person's death, which culminated in the grand forty-ninth day (*shichinanoka* 七七日) service. This ceremony was followed by a hundredth-day service, a first annual memorial service (*ikkai ki* 一回忌), and additional ceremonies continued to be performed each year on the anniversary of the person's death.<sup>200</sup> Esoteric Buddhist painted mandalas, such as the *Womb World Mandala* (*taizōkai* 胎藏界) or the *Diamond World Mandala* (*kongōkai* 金剛界), were frequently dedicated to the deceased, along with Buddhist texts such as the *Lotus Sutra* (*hokkekyō* 法華經), *Amida Sutra* (*Amida kyō* 阿弥陀經), and *Heart Sutra* (*Hannya shingyō* 般若心經).<sup>201</sup>

The quality and quantity of offerings at memorial services were important to assure an auspicious rebirth for the deceased. Buddhist embroideries, then, were likely dedicated for the solemn occasions of an empress' death anniversary because the textiles were considered more potent than painted icons due to their magnificent design and time-consuming production. Itō Shinji has examined the motifs framing central deities in Buddhist embroideries as well as the embellishments carved onto the metal scroll rods used for hanging them, to argue that Buddhist

<sup>200</sup> For a study on death rituals in medieval Japan, see Karen Gerhart, *The Material Culture of Death in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

<sup>201</sup> For a compiled list of offerings given for the memorial services of Heian emperors and empress consorts, see Yamamoto Nobuyoshi 山本信吉, "Hokke hakko to Michinaga no sanjikkō 法華八講と道長の三十講," *Bukkyō geijutsu* 77 (1970): 71-83.

embroideries were more ornamental and elaborately decorated than their painted counterparts in order to manifest the divine.<sup>202</sup> Pious adornment (*shōgon* 莊嚴) refers to the belief in Japanese Buddhism that splendid objects adorning an Image Hall (*hondō* 本堂) and the splendid ornamentation of Buddhist images had the capacity to sanctify a sacred space and manifest the divine in this world.<sup>203</sup> The *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Kegongyō* 華嚴經), for example, describes the precious jewels, trees, and flowers of the Western Paradise as a reflection of the Buddha's spiritual powers and thus ornamental splendor was considered a reflection of spiritual virtue.<sup>204</sup> If Itō's theory is correct—that Buddhist embroideries were thought to be more auspicious than painted icons due to their pious adornment—then Buddhist embroidered images were likely commissioned for particularly dire circumstances, such as to assure the post-mortem salvation of women who were unable to attain enlightenment due to their sex.<sup>205</sup>

Although men and women alike worked in the textile guild, embroidery was associated with women in the Heian imperial court. It was perceived as a female virtue and leisurely female pursuit so this link may explain why embroidered icons rather than painted images were offered to women in memorial services.<sup>206</sup> *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語) provides many

<sup>202</sup> Itō Shinji 伊藤信二, “Chūsei shūbutsu no ‘shōgon yōshiki’ ni tsuite 中世繡仏の「莊嚴様式」について,” in *Yōshikiron: Sutairu to mōdo no bunseki* 様式論：スタイルとモードの分析, ed. Hayashi On (Tokyo: Chikurinsha, 2012), 390-407.

<sup>203</sup> *Shōgon* is a Japanese Buddhist term that can be translated into English as “pious adornment” and refers to three types: 1) splendid things that adorn the Image Hall 2) splendid things that adorn the Buddha's body and 3) virtues and good deeds with which Buddhas and bodhisattvas adorn themselves. The term originates from the Chinese word *zhuangyan* and combines two Ancient Indian concepts: *alamkara* meaning to “manifest the divine” and *vyuha* which means to “make perfect.” For a discussion on the soteriological benefits of *shōgon*, see Mochizuki *bukkyō daijiten* 望月仏教大辞典, “*Shōgon* 莊嚴” by Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨, Sekai Seiten Kankō Kyōkai, 1954-1958.

<sup>204</sup> On the doctrinal use of the term *shōgon*, see Christian Matthias Boehm, “The Concept of Danzo: ‘Sandalwood images’ in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture of the 8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries” (PhD diss., University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005), 64-72.

<sup>205</sup> The doctrinal justification for why women could not attain enlightenment after death is discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>206</sup> The concept of “womanly work” stems from the Four Female Virtues originally described in the *Lessons for Women* by the Chinese historian, Ban Zhao 班昭 (41-119) and further explicated by the Chinese scholar, Zheng Xuan

examples of aristocratic women embroidering, spinning threads, and beating silk.<sup>207</sup> These women embroidered pictures of famous places (*meisho-e* 名所絵) and lines from their favorite *waka* poems on their outermost robes to express their individuality and personal taste.<sup>208</sup> Court ladies also frequently gifted their handiwork. The poetess Kenreimon'in 建礼門院 (1155-1213), for example, embroidered her poems with purple floss onto a monk's surplice (*kesa* 袈裟) and offered the garment to the poet, Fujiwara no Shunzei 藤原俊成 (1114-1204).<sup>209</sup> Mastery in sewing and embroidery was also considered an attractive female accomplishment as a young Guard Officer in the *Tale of Genji*, for instance, compares his lover to that of the Celestial Weaver Maid (*orihime* 織姫) celebrated during the Tanabata Festival.<sup>210</sup> Thus, as womanly work, embroidery may have been perceived as a gendered and moral activity for women to attain merit in a Buddhist context.

Since Heian-period Buddhist embroidered images created before the twelfth century no longer survive, we must rely on primary sources concerning the dedication of Buddhist

鄭玄 (127-200), in *Annotations to the Rite of Zhou*. They argue that women must aspire to four female behaviors: womanly virtue, womanly speech, womanly appearance, and womanly work. Womanly work was often interpreted as one's skills in sewing, dying, and beating silk or hemp. These ideas of womanly work were likely transmitted from China and impacted Japanese court culture and female devotional practices at Buddhist temples. On womanly work and its relation to sewing in Late Imperial China, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Susan Mann, "Women's Work in the Ningbo Area, 1900-1936," in *Chinese History in Economic Perspective*, eds. Thomas G. Rawski and Lillian M. Li (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 243-70.

<sup>207</sup> Court ladies participating in textile work is described in many chapters of the *Tale of Genji* including Chapter 28 "The Typhoon" (*Nowaki* 野分), Chapter 47 "Trefoil Knots" (*Agemaki* 総角), and Chapter 51 "A Boat upon the Waters" (*Ukifune* 浮舟). See *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 in Iwanami shoten, 1997.

<sup>208</sup> Both the *Tales of Flowering Fortunes* (*Eiga monogatari* 栄花物語; eleventh-twelfth century) and the *Murasaki shikibu nikki* 紫式部日記 (eleventh century) discuss court ladies embroidering their robes to stand out and attract attention. Court women were prohibited from wearing certain colors of robes based on their rank, so embroidery became an appropriate method of expressing individual aesthetic taste. See Liza Dalby, "The Cultured Nature of Heian Colors," *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 3 (1988): 1-19.

<sup>209</sup> This event is recorded in the poetry collection, *Kenreimon'in ukyō no daibu shū* 建礼門院右京大夫集. See Ishikawa Yasumi 石川泰水 and Tani Tomoko 谷知子, eds. *Shikishi Naishinnō shū, Kenreimon'in ukyō no daibu shū, Toshinari-kyō no Musume shū*, Enshi 式子内親王集・建礼門院右京大夫集・俊成卿女集・艶詞. Waka Bungaku taikai 和歌文学大系 23 (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 2001).

<sup>210</sup> See Chapter Two, "The Broom-Tree" (*Hahakigi* 帚木) of *The Tale of Genji*.



embroideries to understand the ritual significance and reception of this medium in memorial services. In this section, I will examine entries from two court diaries—the *Teishinkōki* 貞信公記, written by Fujiwara no Tadahira's 藤原忠平 (880-949), and the *Shōyūki* 小右記, written by Fujiwara no Sanesuke 藤原実資 (957-1046)—as well as one historical chronicle—The *Brief History of Japan* (*Fusō ryakki* 扶桑略記), a chronicle of Japanese history compiled by the Tendai Buddhist priest, Kōen 皇円 (?-1169), during the twelfth century—to provide context for the ritual use of embroideries (Appendix B). These records serve as evidence that these textiles were a costly and exclusive medium, considered more auspicious than painted images, that were reserved for memorializing elite members of the Fujiwara aristocratic family who directly impacted imperial rule and enabled the Fujiwara clan to attain power. In particular, embroideries were commissioned for Fujiwara women, which attests to the fact that gender and status were contributing factors in selecting the material for Buddhist images.

### 3.3.1 Fujiwara no Inshi's Memorial Service at Kajūji

*Teishinkōki*, Tadahira's diary, is the first Heian-period record to discuss a Buddhist embroidery commissioned for the memorial service of a royal mother and claims that the textile was an exceptional (*keu* 希有) work. Tadahira writes that the Lectures on the Lotus Sutra (*Hokke hakkō* 法華八講) were performed at Kajūji 勧修寺 on 925.8.23 for Fujiwara no Inshi and that her son, Emperor Daigo 醍醐天皇 (885-930), provided many lavish offerings including sutras copied

by the emperor himself, priests' garments, cloth, and an embroidered image.<sup>211</sup> The embroidery does not survive and Tadahira does not provide further context concerning the iconography or genre of this textile. Fortunately, the ceremony is also documented in the aforementioned *Brief History of Japan*, along with a letter in the *Kajūji Documents* (*Kajūji monjo* 勧修寺文書), and the *Collection of Dedicatory Prayers* (*Ganmonshū* 願文集) and these sources claim that the embroidery, sewn by an “expert hand” (*myōshu* 妙手) only depicted the central assembly of the Womb World Mandara (*Taizōkai nai'in mandara* 胎藏界内院曼荼羅).<sup>212</sup>

Tadahira likely describes the embroidered Buddhist image as an exceptional image not only for its exquisite craftsmanship but also its unusual form. The *Taizōkai nai'in* refers to the central assembly of the *Womb World Mandala*, so it appears that only this central square was depicted.<sup>213</sup> The *Womb World Mandala*, frequently paired in rituals along with the *Diamond World Mandala*, was introduced to the Japanese imperial court by the founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism, Kūkai 空海 (774-835), after his study of esoteric Buddhism in China and it was often commissioned for memorial services as well as monastic initiation rites. The central assembly of the *Womb World Mandala*—referred to as the Hall of the Central Dais Eight Petals (*Chūtai hachiyōin* 中台八葉院)—depicts Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 (Sk. Vairocana) seated in the center

<sup>211</sup> The *Teishinkōki* claims that the offerings were 「施法服、又請僧并給度者布施、宸筆經縫仏甚希有也」 Although Tadahira's diary was later condensed and censored by his son, Saneyori 実頼 (900-970), the entry concerning Inshi's memorial service is lengthy and offers rich description concerning the number of monks present, the types of rituals performed, and the quantity of offerings made for Fujiwara no Inshi. These details were likely not removed because they were important precedents for later memorial rituals. See *Teishinkōki* 貞信公記. In *Dai Nihon kokiroku* 大日本古記録, vol. 8. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1956).

<sup>212</sup> The term *myōshu* is used to describe the embroidery which suggests that the image was exquisitely rendered. See *Fusō ryakki: Teiō hennenki* 扶桑略記・帝王編年記, in *Kokushi taikō* 国史大系, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1967); *Kajūji monjo* 勧修寺文書 in vol. 5 of DNS (Enchō 3:925.8.23), 742-43; *Ganmonshū* 願文集 in vol. 5 of DNS (Enchō 3:925.8.23), 743-44.

<sup>213</sup> *Reibun Bukkyōgo daijiten* 例文仏教語大辞典, ed. Ishida Mizumaro 石田瑞麿 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1997).

of an eight-petaled lotus flower whereas the other Buddhas of the four directions along with four bodhisattvas are depicted seated on each of the lotus petals.<sup>214</sup> While this embroidery's composition was uncommon, as it only depicted the central assembly of the mandala, this form was not unprecedented. Kūkai's inventory of Buddhist images, sutras, and relics from his Chinese master Huiguo 惠果 (746-805), for example, lists a number of mandala paintings that depict only one or a combination of assemblies.<sup>215</sup>

A time-consuming embroidered image, rather than a painted mandala, was likely offered for Inshi's memorial service in order to reinforce her status as a royal mother and progenitor of the affluent Fujiwara clan. Inshi gave birth to three sons, one of whom became the future emperor, but she passed away on 896.6.30 and posthumously received the title of "royal mother" when her son ascended to the throne in 897. This epithet of royal mother was favorable and essential for the imminent prestige of the Fujiwara clan since Emperor Daigo appointed Inshi's brother, Sadakata 定方 (873-932) as Minister of the Right (*udaijin* 右大臣), the second most important office in the government, after her death. Both the imperial court and Fujiwara family continued to perform memorial services for Inshi until 982, over fifty years after her death, which attests to the family's filial devotion to her as an imperial mother.

<sup>214</sup> Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999): 58-77.

<sup>215</sup> Cynthia Bogel, *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009): 112-138.

### 3.3.2 Fujiwara no Onshi's First Annual Memorial Service at Hosshōji

Thirty years later, a Buddhist embroidery was commissioned once more for a royal mother.<sup>216</sup> On 955.1.4, Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 (926-967) dedicated an embroidered *Lotus Sutra Mandala* and copied the *Lotus Sutras* in his own hand for the first annual memorial service of his mother, the empress consort, Fujiwara no Onshi (885-954). This ceremony took place at Hosshōji 法性寺 and is described both in the *Brief History of Japan* and the *Collection of Dedicatory Prayers*.<sup>217</sup> By commissioning an embroidered *Lotus Sutra mandala*, Emperor Murakami deviated from traditional offerings that emperors bestowed upon their mothers in memorial services since it was customary for them to dedicate the entire Buddhist canon.<sup>218</sup>

A patron required substantial resources to produce the Buddhist canon (*Issaikyō* 一切經), a collection of all the legitimate Buddhist sutras, and had to employ hundreds of workers to copy, decorate, and bind together thousands of sutra scrolls.<sup>219</sup> Although the number of legitimate sutras varied by Buddhist canon, the Chinese *Kaiyuan Catalog* (開元釋教錄; 730) produced by Zhisheng 智昇 (669-740) was considered the authoritative model in Japan and included 5048 sutra scrolls.<sup>220</sup> Heather Blair argues that Emperor Murakami may have offered this embroidery in lieu of the

<sup>216</sup> The one-year memorial service was a significant event because it usually represented the final service for the official mourning period. After this ceremony, courtiers were permitted to shed mourning clothes and proceed with standard activities. See Gerhart, *The Material Culture of Death in Medieval Japan*, 39-40.

<sup>217</sup> Emperor Murakami writes in his dedicatory prayer that he bestowed “an image of the Lotus Sutra Assembly that was an embroidered mandala with a seated Tahō Nyorai” 「象法華会、繡曼荼羅、多宝如来、半坐分影」 See *Dai Nihon shiryō* 大日本史料, 6 series, ed. Shiryō hensanjo. (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku).

<sup>218</sup> Emperor Seiwa's (850-881) memorial service in 881 is the first recorded example of a canon commissioned for an imperial memorial service. See Heather Blair, “Peak of Gold: Trace, Place and Religion in Heian Japan” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2008), 67-77.

<sup>219</sup> On the production process of sutra-copying and its means of demonstrating political power and religious authority see Sakaehara Towao 栄原永遠男, *Nara jidai shakyō shi kenkyū* 奈良時代写経史研究 (Tokyo: Kōshonbō, 2003).

<sup>220</sup> Bryan Lowe, *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2017), 122-29.

canon because Onshi already commissioned the canon for Hosshōji where the memorial service was performed in 945, along with a pagoda, six statues of Kannon 觀音 (Sk. Avalokiteśvara), and a golden image of Fugen.<sup>221</sup> Another plausible reason why Emperor Murakami selected an embroidery is because members of the imperial court were beginning to depend on visualizing images, over reciting texts, to attain enlightenment. This gradual shift from a reliance on texts to a reliance on images for enlightenment impacted the ways death rituals and funerary services were performed in subsequent decades.

Why did Emperor Murakami select an image of the *Lotus Sutra mandala* to memorialize his mother? The *Lotus Sutra mandala* was particularly apt for female soteriology because the text of the *Lotus Sutra* endorsed the belief that even women could attain enlightenment. In Buddhist doctrine, women were believed to be unable to achieve Buddhahood due to the Five Obstructions (*goshō* 五障). These obstructions were five states of existence—Brahma, Indra, Mara, Chakravartin, and the Buddha—which women could not attain due to their impurity. In the twelfth chapter (the *devadatta*) of *The Lotus Sutra*, however, the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king attains enlightenment by transforming herself into a man. Preeminent monks such as Kūkai and Saichō wrote commentaries on the *devadatta* chapter, but the text did not gain a wider non-monastic audience until the tenth century. Courtiers such as Ōe no Asatsuna 大江朝綱 and Yoshihige no Yasutane 慶滋保胤 (931-1002), for instance, reference the dragon princess in prayers for their recently deceased daughters in the hopes that they will similarly be reborn into the Pure Land.<sup>222</sup> By showing that women were able to attain Buddhahood in the afterlife, the

<sup>221</sup> Blair, “Peak of Gold: Trace, Place and Religion in Heian Japan,” 70-71.

<sup>222</sup> For a description of the twelfth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* and its reception and interpretation in medieval Japan, see Yoshida Kazuhiko, trans. Margaret H. Childs, “The Enlightenment of the Dragon King’s Daughter in *the Lotus*

*Lotus Sutra* gained wider acceptance by courtiers during Onshi's lifetime. Emperor Murakami, then, may have commissioned the *Lotus Sutra Mandala* for his deceased mother in hopes that she, like the dragon princess in the sutra, would be reborn into the Pure Land as a man.

The *Lotus Sutra mandala* may have also been commissioned because the image was the main icon in Lotus Sutra rites including the Lectures on the Lotus Sutra. This mandala, depicting an eight-petaled lotus flower in the center with Shaka 釈迦 (Sk. Sākyamuni Buddha) and Tahō Nyorai 多宝如来 (Sk. Prabhūtaratna) flanking a many-jeweled pagoda (*tahōtō* 多宝塔) in the center of the lotus was used as a focal point for visualization practices during sutra recitation.<sup>223</sup> The Lectures on the Lotus Sutra became one of the most prominent Heian Buddhist rituals conducted by the elite class for personal merit. The ritual was first used for religious teachings of laymen and women, but by the ninth century it was incorporated into memorial services and became a suitable platform for displaying and aggrandizing the patron's political power.<sup>224</sup> The Fujiwara family were the first to sponsor this ritual for the memorial services of non-monastic courtiers, but the imperial family soon followed suit in 826 and began sponsoring the rite for the memorial services of emperors and empresses.<sup>225</sup>

Although the Lectures on the Lotus Sutra had been performed countless times for Fujiwara aristocrats and the imperial family, the sheer number of monks—sixty-five in total—who were

*Sutra*,” in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), 297-324.

<sup>223</sup> For a discussion on the iconography and ritual use of the *Lotus Sutra Mandala* see Komine Michihiko 小峰弥彦, *Zukai: mandara no mikata* 図解・曼荼羅の見方 (Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1997); George J. Tanabe and Willa Jane Tanabe, *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).

<sup>224</sup> Willa Jane Tanabe, “The Lotus Lectures. Hokke Hakko in the Heian Period,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 39, no. 4 (1984): 393-395.

<sup>225</sup> The first Rite of Eight Discourses for the memorial service of an emperor was held in 826. Emperor Junna 淳和天皇 (786-840) held the service for his father, Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇 (736-806) who died twenty years earlier. See Tanabe, “The Lotus Lectures. Hokke Hakko in the Heian Period,” 396.

summoned to participate in Onshi's memorial service was unprecedented.<sup>226</sup> A lavish ceremony was likely performed because the Fujiwara family accrued significant power through Onshi's role as royal mother. Women were not able to hold political offices during the Heian period, yet, Onshi exerted profound influence by ruling through her young sons—Emperor Suzaku 朱雀天皇 (923-952) and Emperor Murakami—and privately influenced matters of imperial successions. She became the consort of Emperor Daigo in 901 and was given the title of royal mother when her son, Emperor Suzaku, took the throne in 931. Suzaku became the emperor at the age of eight when both his father and grandfather, Emperor Uda 宇多天皇 (867-931), passed away. Because Suzaku was a mere child, Onshi governed through him and became the unofficial head of the imperial household.<sup>227</sup> Onshi was also instrumental in appointing her brothers, Fujiwara no Nakahira 藤原仲平 (875-945) as Minister of the Right and Fujiwara no Tadahira as regent after her husband's death and her nephews, Saneyori 実頼 (900-970), Morotada 師尹 (920-969), and Morosuke 師輔 (909-960) all served as either Minister of the Left (*sadaijin* 左大臣) or Minister of the Right.<sup>228</sup> Onshi's memorial service then took place at a moment when the Fujiwara clan dominated the Heian court.

<sup>226</sup> The *Fusō ryakki* claims that some of these monks included 4 judges, 8 lecturers, 20 interrogators, and 16 chanters.

<sup>227</sup> According to the *Great Mirror* (*Ōkagami* 大鏡; 1119), a historical chronicle concerning the Fujiwara family, Onshi particularly favored her younger son, Prince Nariaki, and appealed to Suzaku to allow him to ascend the throne. Nariaki, thus, became Emperor Murakami in 946 and Onshi continued to dictate the succession line between these two sons and their children to ensure stability of the imperial lineage. While Emperor Suzaku did not have any sons, Onshi feared the possibility of Emperor Suzaku appointing a future child rather than his younger brother. Fukutō and Watanabe argue that Onshi appealed to Emperor Suzaku because she feared a falling out would occur due to imperial lineage issues. See Fukutō and Watanabe, "From Female Sovereign to Mother of the Nation: Women and Government in the Heian Period," 26-29; *Ōkagami* 大鏡, in *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 日本古典文学全集, vol. 22 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1974).

<sup>228</sup> All four of Onshi's nephews sent their daughters to court to become consorts of her son, Emperor Murakami. They married off their daughters in the hopes that one would attain the rank of Royal Mother. See *Ōkagami*.

The one-year memorial service took place at Hosshōji, a temple constructed by Onshi's brother, Tadahira, in 925, as a means to associate Onshi's prestige with her patrilineal relatives rather than her husband's imperial family. Hosshōji was a family temple (*ujidera* 氏寺) for the Fujiwara clan and gained prominence during the mid-tenth century.<sup>229</sup> Many Fujiwara family members including Onshi dedicated halls and images at the temple, cloistered themselves there when they were ill, and chose to be buried at the site after death.<sup>230</sup> Although Emperor Murakami was the patron of the memorial service, the offerings, the ritual procedures, and the place of Onshi's memorial service all signaled the sovereign's reverence for and even dependence on the economic and political strength of the Fujiwara clan and their royal women.

### 3.3.3 Fujiwara no Anshi's Twenty-Fourth Memorial Service

A Buddhist embroidery was also commissioned for Fujiwara no Anshi's memorial service on 987.4.29, twenty-three years after her death, but her son, Emperor Enyū 円融天皇 (959-991), selected an *Amida's Pure Land mandala* (*Amida jōdo mandara* 阿弥陀浄土曼陀羅) rather than an esoteric Buddhist image despite the fact that the Lectures on the Lotus Sutra were performed during the ceremony. This shift in the genre of the Buddhist embroidery likely reflects Anshi's personal religious inclinations. Beginning in the late tenth century in Japan, it was believed that the Degenerate Age of the Buddhist Law (*mappō* 末法) was imminent and people devoted

<sup>229</sup> As can be seen through this example, kinship ties during the Heian period were connected to a woman's patrilineal relatives rather than her husband's household. The practice of burying women with their patrilineal relative began around the tenth century concurrently with the establishment of family temples. An *ujidera* was frequently constructed at the site of a mother's residence when she retired to become a nun. See Hank Glassman, "Chinese Buddhist Death Ritual and the Transformation of Japanese Kinship," in *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, eds. Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 378-404.

<sup>230</sup> Blair, "Peak of Gold: Trace, Place and Religion in Heian Japan," 63-67.



themselves to a new type of teaching that held that one could simply recite Amida Buddha's name (*nenbutsu* 念仏) to attain salvation.<sup>231</sup> Anshi was a convert to this new Buddhist ideology and supported Ryōgen 良源 (912-985), a Tendai monk from Enryakuji 延暦寺, who wrote the Pure Land Buddhist treatise *Gokuraku jōdo kubon ōjōgi* 極樂浄土九品往生義 concerning the requirements for attaining salvation and entering one of the nine grades of rebirth (*kuhon ōjō* 九品往生) in the Pure Land.<sup>232</sup> During her lifetime, Anshi offered one hundred *oku* of rice to Ryōgen so he could construct Enryakuji's Shingondō 真言堂 on Mt. Hiei and also commissioned a *Pure Land Amida* handscroll to enshrine within the hall.<sup>233</sup>

The *Shōyūki* describes the ceremonial procedure for Anshi's memorial service and specifies that an *Amida's Pure Land Mandala* was dedicated to her, but the specific iconography of this embroidery remains unclear. While the *Taima mandara* 当麻曼荼羅 is a depiction of Amida's Paradise, this textile was not rediscovered until 1212 by the monk, Shōkū 証空 (1177-1247), so Anshi's Pure Land Mandala of 987 likely did not depict Amida seated in a palace behind the sacred lotus pond surrounded by jeweled trees. Amida imagery, however, was painted on the walls of Image Halls in Buddhist temples such as the Muryōjuin 無量寿院 of Hōjōji 法成寺 as

<sup>231</sup> Buddhist monks interpreted the frequent natural disasters and fires that plagued the capital during the Heian period as a sign that humanity would enter the third and corrupt stage of Buddhist teachings and practices. Japanese Buddhists calculated that this age would begin in 1052. Buddhist monks such as Ryōgen and Genshin 源信 (942-1017) preached that the recitation of the *nenbutsu* (Amida Buddha's name) allowed one to attain salvation. Genshin's text, the *Teachings Essential for Rebirth* (*Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集; 985), inspired artists to paint the six realms of rebirth (hells, hungry ghosts, demons, animals, human beings, and heavenly beings) and Ryōgen's texts inspired paintings of the Nine Grades of Rebirth into Amida Buddha's Pure Land.

<sup>232</sup> Some scholars have questioned the authenticity of this text because the first citation of this text appears nearly 85 years after Ryōgen's death. Kakehashi Nobuaki argues that the text may have originated from notes for a lecture that Ryōgen gave to members of the Fujiwara clan. See Kakehashi Nobuaki 梯信暁, "Ryōgen *Kubon ōjōgi* no ikkōsatsu," in *Shinran no Bukkyō: Nakanishi Chikai sensei kanreki kinen ronbunshū* 親鸞の仏教・中西智海先生還暦記念論文集 (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1994).

<sup>233</sup> Fujiwara no Anshi's patronage practices are discussed in a will that Ryōgen wrote in 972. See Paul Groner, *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei: Japanese Tendai in the Tenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2002): 313-326.

early as the mid-ninth century. The Muryōjuin no longer survives, but murals on the doors and walls of the Phoenix Hall (Byōdōin 平等院), a Pure Land Buddhist temple constructed by Fujiwara no Yorimichi 藤原頼通 (990-1074) in 1053 can offer clues concerning the composition and iconography of Anshi's embroidered *Pure Land Mandala*.<sup>234</sup> Each of the doors and panels depict one of the nine degrees of rebirth from the *Contemplation Sutra* (*Kanmuryōjyū* 觀無量壽經).<sup>235</sup> For the upper levels of rebirth, the Amida Buddha, along with a retinue of bodhisattvas and musicians, are depicted welcoming the deceased into the Pure Land whereas for the lower levels, only the bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi 勢至 (Sk. Mahāsthāmaprāpta) are depicted. The embroidered image for Anshi, then, likely depicted a similar but not identical scene of Amida Buddha's descent onto a landscape.

Emperor Enyū likely sponsored this memorial service for personal reasons to assure an advantageous rebirth for Anshi due to the circumstances of her death. Anshi died on 964.4.29 in the Palace Provisions Office (*tonomoryō* 主殿寮), five days after giving birth from complications during delivery.<sup>236</sup> It was believed that Anshi was possessed by a malign spirit during her pregnancy which caused hemorrhaging, a difficult childbirth, and ultimately, death.<sup>237</sup> Unlike

<sup>234</sup> Pure Land Buddhist priests promoted the practice of walking meditation while reciting the *nenbutsu*. As early as 851, specific halls for walking meditation were built to accompany this ritual. These spaces tend to illustrate images of Amida on the walls and pillars. See *Mochizuki bukyō daijiten*.

<sup>235</sup> For the iconographical template and artistic innovations of the murals of the Phoenix Hall, see Akiyama Terukazu 秋山光和, "Byōdōin Hōdō kaiga no kenkyū 平等院鳳堂絵画の研究," in *Byōdōin taikain* 平等院大観, 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992); Mimi Yiengpruksawan, "The Phoenix Hall at Uji and the Symmetries of Replication," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 4 (1995): 647-672.

<sup>236</sup> *Ōkagami*.

<sup>237</sup> In medieval Japan, women were considered to be especially susceptible to spirit possession during pregnancy. The *Tale of Genji*, for example, describes the physical pain and psychological suffering that Aoi endures during her pregnancy due to spirit possession. Hemorrhaging, in particular, was believed to be the main symptom of spirit possession. See Doris G. Barden, *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997): 87-90; Kunimoto Keikichi 國本恵吉, *Sanikushi: Osan to kosodate no rekishi* 産育史・お産と子育ての歴史 (Morioka: Morioka Times, 1996).

Emperor Daigo and Emperor Murakami, Emperor Enyū had already retired from his official duties as emperor when this memorial service for his mother took place and therefore, the purpose of the ceremony was not to reinforce Anshi's status as royal mother. Rather, an elaborate embroidered Buddhist image was likely dedicated to Anshi because it was believed she required extra help to attain a good rebirth because of her cause of death.

Death in childbirth was considered impure in medieval Japan and this belief that childbirth caused spiritual as well as physical trauma was reinforced in Heian-period images and tales. The *Scroll of Hungry Ghosts* (*Gaki zōshi* 餓鬼草子; late-twelfth century) depicts a woman who has just given birth and a Hungry Ghost with his arms outstretched towards the newborn infant as if attempting to devour the baby and the mother's afterbirth. To assure a safe childbirth and rescue the infant from the Hungry Ghost's hands, a shamaness (*miko* 巫女) and a Buddhist priest are depicted in a corner room performing exorcisms and chanting sutras.<sup>238</sup> The *Miraculous Tales of Japan* (*Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記) also describes the unfortunate consequences for women who die in childbirth. In this tale, a husband attempts to save his wife who died in childbirth and is suffering for eternity in the Buddhist hells. When the wife sees her husband, she exclaims that, as the father of the unborn child, he too should suffer a similar fate. The husband, however, manages to rescue both himself and his wife from hell by copying the *Lotus Sutra* on her behalf and praying to the bodhisattva Jizō 地藏菩薩 (Sk. Kṣitigarbha).<sup>239</sup> Emperor Enyū was likely deeply apprehensive about Anshi's soteriological fate due to her death in childbirth and commissioned a

<sup>238</sup> Scholars have examined "The Scroll of Hungry Ghosts" as a visual source to reconstruct the rituals, professionals, and knowledge systems surrounding childbirth and women's health. See Yui Suzuki, "Twanging Bows and Throwing Rice: Warding off Evil in Medieval Japanese Birth Scenes," *Artibus Asiae* 74, no. 1 (2014): 17-41; Anna Andreeva, "Childbirth in Aristocratic Households of Heian Japan," *Dynamis* 34, 2 (2014): 357-376.

<sup>239</sup> Hank Glassman, "At the Crossroads of Birth and Death: The Blood Pool Hell and Postmortem Fetal Extraction," in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*, eds. Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 175-206.

costly Buddhist embroidery to help her achieve an auspicious rebirth. This concern could also explain why Anshi's descendants continued to carry out memorial services for her over 210 years after her death.<sup>240</sup>

### 3.4 DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PATRONAGE AND MATERIALITY OF KAMAKURA-PERIOD BUDDHIST EMBROIDERIES

Beginning in the Kamakura period, there was a drastic change in the patronage of Buddhist embroidered images. No longer posthumous recipients, women became active patrons directly involved in the production of embroideries by donating their own hair. Diaries, historical chronicles, and Buddhist tales from this period reveal that women with various titles—from empress consorts and noblewomen, to wives of Kamakura shoguns—became the patrons of Buddhist embroideries and donated their hair to be worked into these images (Appendix C).<sup>241</sup> Men also continued to commission embroideries for women, but during the Kamakura Period, husbands and fathers, rather than sons, donated Buddhist embroideries for their deceased wives and daughters. Although the most common iconography of extant Kamakura-period Buddhist embroidered images depict Pure Land Buddhist themes such as the *Welcoming Descent of Amida Buddha* (*Amida raigozu* 阿弥陀来迎図) and *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triads* (*Shuji Amida*

<sup>240</sup> The last memorial services for Fujiwara no Anshi is recorded in the *Chūyūki* 中右記, the court diary of Fujiwara no Munetada 藤原宗忠 (1062-1141), and occurred on Tennin 1 (1108).4.28. See *Dai Nihon shiryō* 大日本史料, 6 series, ed. Shiryō hensanjo. (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku).

<sup>241</sup> These sources include *Shaseki shū* (沙石集; 1283), *Gyokuyō* (玉葉; 1313-1314), *Genkō shakusho* (元亨釈書; 1332), *Azuma kagami* (吾妻鏡; late thirteenth century), *Masukagami* (増鏡; mid-fourteenth century), and *Taiheiki* (太平記; late-fourteenth century). Not all of these sources will be discussed in this chapter.

*sanzonzu* 種子阿弥陀三尊図), documentary evidence suggests that Esoteric genres of images were also widely produced.<sup>242</sup>

Kamakura-period Buddhist embroideries were most commonly dedicated in memorial services and for a special type of pre-mortem death ritual called *gyakushū* 逆修.<sup>243</sup> The ritual procedure for *gyakushū* ceremonies varied by practitioner, but the main function of this rite was to bestow ritual offerings to the Ten Kings who judge the deeds of the dead. Believers aimed to perform this ceremony themselves before death as it was believed to be seven times more effective than when relatives commissioned the rite after one's death.<sup>244</sup> *Gyakushū* rituals rose in popularity among all classes during the Kamakura period and were embraced by the warrior class as a preemptive strategy to assure a safe rebirth if killed in battle. Buddhist embroideries, like *gyakushū* rituals, then were commissioned by non-courtiers during the Kamakura period and were accepted by a wider audience.

Another crucial development in Buddhist embroidery during the Kamakura period was the incorporation of the patron's or the deceased's hair into the image as a means to memorialize,

<sup>242</sup> Ishida Mosaku has categorized extant Kamakura embroideries based on the iconography of the image. Out of twenty-one embroideries thought to be created during the Kamakura period, thirteen illustrate Pure Land Buddhist themes, such as the Amida triad, while eight depict Esoteric iconography, such as the *Mandala of the Two Realms*. Ishida argues that the overwhelming majority in Pure Land imagery shows that believers in the Pure Land sect were the primary patrons of Buddhist embroideries. By examining patronage records in this article, however, it seems more likely that both Pure Land and Esoteric images were equally produced. See Ishida and Nishimura, *Shūbutsu*, 8-9. For a discussion on the doctrinal justification for the creation of esoteric Buddhist hair embroideries, see Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, "Collapsing the Distinction Between Buddha and Believer: Human Hair in Japanese Esotericizing Embroideries," in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, eds. Charles Orzech et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011): 876-92.

<sup>243</sup> The *gyakushū* ritual is a pre-mortem service conducted by aristocrats to prepare themselves for an auspicious rebirth. As mentioned previously in the case of Michinaga, an individual may clasp onto and venerate images of the Amida Buddha. They may also copy and recite the Lotus Sutra and/or the Amida Sutra for several days. On death rituals, see Jacqueline Stone, "By the Power of One's Last *Nenbutsu*: Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha*, eds. Richard Karl Payne and Kenneth Ken'ichi Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004): 77-119.

<sup>244</sup> Quitman E. Phillips, "Narrating the Salvation of the Elite: The Jōfukuji Paintings of the Ten Kings," *Ars Orientalis* 33 (2003): 120-45.

honor, and accrue merit for the recipient. As mentioned previously, these strands of hair were used to stitch only the deity's hair, monastic robes, and Sanskrit seed-syllables. For example, an embroidery of the *Welcoming Descent of Amida Buddha* from the Cleveland Museum of Art depicts two adults and a child near the bottom right-hand-corner of the image kneeling in prayer. While two or three strands of human hair are bundled together to stitch the Amida Buddha's snail-shell curls and Kannon and Seishi's long flowing black hair, only black silk floss is used for the hair of the adults and child.<sup>245</sup> It is likely that the parents stitched the hair of their deceased child into the triad so that she could attain salvation into the Pure Land. This practice of incorporating hair within embroideries was so widespread that it is more unusual to find extant Kamakura embroideries without human hair.<sup>246</sup> Buddhist hair embroideries, thus, physically merged the patron or deceased with the divine and collapsed the distinction between this world and the other world.

### 3.5 THE POWER OF HAIR IN BUDDHIST EMBROIDERIES

In many cultures, hair of the deceased is cherished and preserved in memory of the departed. Hair, as a durable material outlasting a person after death, can serve as a reminder of a loved one's lost presence. The most well-known examples of hair art come from England and America during the second half of the nineteenth century, where hair of the deceased was frequently worn as jewelry in the form of a locket or pasted onto watercolor paintings depicting

<sup>245</sup> Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, "Visions of a Transcendent Realm: Pure Land Images in the Cleveland Museum of Art," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 78, no. 7 (1991): 274-300.

<sup>246</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Tokubetsuten josei to bukkō: inori to hohoemi* 特別展女性と仏教・いのりとほほえみ (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2003), 173.

scenes of mourning.<sup>247</sup> Human hair embroidery, however, appears to be a distinctly Buddhist and East Asian practice since examples of these works are incredibly rare outside of China, Korea, and Japan. Hair within a Buddhist and native Japanese context was believed to be simultaneously regenerative and impure, enlivening yet wild.

### 3.5.1 Hair in a Buddhist Context

Buddhists venerated the hair of the Shaka Buddha by interring strands of his hair along with relics beneath stūpas across India. It is believed that the Buddha offered locks of his own hair and fingernail clippings to two merchants who encountered him meditating in Deer Park.<sup>248</sup> According to the Chinese monk Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602-664) retelling of the story, the two merchants, Trapusa and Bhallika, kindly offered nourishment of grain and honey to the Buddha, and in return, they received the Buddha's teachings of the Five Precepts and the Ten Virtuous Acts.<sup>249</sup> Before the merchants embarked on their journey home, they asked the Buddha to provide them with an item that they could use to worship him and recall his teachings. The Buddha cut off

<sup>247</sup> Substantial research has been conducted on the topic of hair art and the symbolism of female hair during the Victorian Era. These works are beneficial for bringing a theoretical lens to the study of hair. See Penny Howell Jolly, *Hair: Untangling a Social History* (Saratoga Springs: Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2004), Elizabeth G. Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA* 99, no. 5 (1984): 936-954; Sarah Erina Gold McBride, "Whiskerology: Hair and the Legible Body in Nineteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017). Studies on the symbolism of hair in an Asian and Japanese context, however, remain sparse. See Alf Hiltebeitel, Barbara D. Miller, and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Itō Hideo 伊藤秀雄, *Kami no rekishi 髪の歴史* (Tokyo: Hokusōsha, 1997).

<sup>248</sup> Versions of this tale can be found in stories such as *Lalitavistara*, *Buddhacarita*, *Mahāvastu*, *Nidānakathā*, *Manorathapūraṇī* among others. I selected the account by Xuanzang because this is likely the version that spread to Japan. See Anna Maria Quagliotti, "Again on Siddhārtha's Hair," *East and West* 55, no. 1 (2005): 217-242.

<sup>249</sup> The five precepts include abstaining from 1) harming living things 2) taking what is not given 3) sexual misconduct 4) false speech and 5) intoxication. The ten virtuous acts include perfection, generosity, proper conduct, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, honesty, determination, good-will, and equanimity. See Maxine Freed, "The Interrelationship of Buddhist Ethics, Interdependence, and Mindfulness," in *Perspectives on Culture, Values, and Justice* eds. Chandana Chakrabarti and Tommi Lehtonen (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015): 87-96.

a few locks of hair, clipped his fingernails, and offered these materials to the merchants. Once the merchants arrived at their destination, they buried the Buddha's precious materials into the ground and constructed stūpas over his hair and nails.

Hair was also considered a worthy female offering in a Buddhist context as it symbolized one's sacrifice of the corporeal body and relinquishment of worldly pleasures. The sixth-century Chinese Buddhist encyclopedia, *Different Forms of Sutra and Vinaya* (*Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相), discusses impoverished women dedicating their long hair to the Buddha as an offering.<sup>250</sup> After these women bestowed their shorn hair upon the Buddha, their hair miraculously grew back to its original length. During the Heian and Kamakura periods, women's long, smooth hair was fetishized and associated with beauty, sexuality, and fertility.<sup>251</sup> Cutting one's long locks and incorporating them into embroideries, then, represented one's renunciation of this world and served as the ultimate sacrifice for women.

Incorporating hair into a Buddhist icon was also believed to animate the image and manifest the divine. In an anecdote from early China, Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (464-549) commissioned a craftsman to create a statue of the monk Baozhi 寶誌 (418-524) from sandalwood.<sup>252</sup> The wooden sculpture appeared to be a true likeness of the monk, but the image lacked hair, so the emperor placed a few strands of his own hair on top of the icon's head. At that

<sup>250</sup> Yuhang Li, "Sensory Devotions: Hair Embroidery and Gendered Corporeal Practice in Chinese Buddhism," in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): 355-74.

<sup>251</sup> There are frequent references to the long hair of aristocratic women in early medieval Japanese poetry and literature such as the *Tale of Genji*. At a time when women could only show their faces to their fathers, brothers, and immediate kin, long and thick hair became a way for women to stand out and attract the attention of potential lovers.

<sup>252</sup> Yuhang Li, "Gendered Materialization: An Investigation of Women's Artistic and Literary Reproductions of Guanyin in Late Imperial China" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2011), 135-140.



moment, hair miraculously grew on the statue's head because it was believed that the gift of human hair had the capacity to activate life and transform the icon into an embodied image.

Although Buddhist hair embroideries were created in China as early as the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the practice of donating hair for Buddhist textiles in Japan is thought to derive from twelfth-century Pure Land Buddhist teachings concerning quick enlightenment.<sup>253</sup> Buddhist priests like Shōkū preached that the recitation of Amida Buddha's name was sufficient to attain enlightenment.<sup>254</sup> Patrons of Buddhist hair embroideries may have felt compelled to express this union between their deceased wife or daughter and the Amida Buddha in more visual terms and thus, began to incorporate their hair into images.

### **3.5.2 Hair in a Native Japanese Context**

In Japanese legends, folktales, and myths, female hair was considered to have regenerative properties. It was believed that female hair had the ability to attract the *kami* for both good and evil purposes. For example, in 720, a sumptuary law was enacted which required all women under 40 years-old to tie up their hair since long hair was thought to entice spirits.<sup>255</sup> In medieval and early modern Japan, women also donated their hair to temples to create human hair ropes. These ropes had both a practical and religious function; they were used for construction projects at

<sup>253</sup> On Chinese examples of hair embroidery in medieval and late imperial China, see Li, "Sensory Devotions: Hair Embroidery and Gendered Corporeal Practice in Chinese Buddhism," 355-74

<sup>254</sup> Ten Grotenhuis, "Collapsing the Distinction Between Buddha and Believer: Human Hair in Japanese Esotericizing Embroideries," 884-86.

<sup>255</sup> Gary L. Ebersole, "'Long Black Hair Like a Seat Cushion': Hair Symbolism in Japanese Popular Religion," in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, eds. Alf Hiltebeitel and Barbara D. Miller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998): 86.

temples and also allowed women to acquire spiritual merit.<sup>256</sup> The belief that female hair could attract good fortune persisted even in the twentieth century, when, for example, Japanese women sent locks of hair and created hair ropes for their sons and husbands at war to assure their safety.<sup>257</sup>

Female hair was also associated with wild and untamed energy in Japan. Disheveled and unkempt hair, in particular, served as a sign of psychic turmoil or spiritual possession and was even considered even dangerous. In a collection of poems from the *Manyōshū* (万葉集; 759), for example, disheveled hair is associated with women crazed with love and wishing for their lovers' return.<sup>258</sup> Patrons of Buddhist hair embroideries likely incorporated their own hair or the hair of the deceased into images to transform this negative energy associated with female hair into something positive. As Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis writes,

“since hair often suggests wild, untamed, sexual energy, its use in embroideries can be seen as an attempt to control or transform that ‘negative’ power and to make the imperfect into the perfect. Hair, signifying the human body, undergoes a purifying metamorphosis... Thus, the distinction between Buddha and believer collapses and they become one.”<sup>259</sup>

By incorporating women's hair into embroideries, patrons attempted to disentangle the unruly biological state of their loved one and figuratively merge them with the Buddha so that they could attain salvation.

In the following sections, I will examine the circumstances in which hair embroideries were created for and by women to understand the social and soteriological significance of hair in

<sup>256</sup> The female hair ropes at Higashi Honganji are the most famous extant example. The temple collected the hair of female patrons throughout Japan to create 53 ropes, the longest standing at 69 meters long. See Ebersole, “‘Long Black Hair Like a Seat Cushion’: Hair Symbolism in Japanese Popular Religion,” 75-104.

<sup>257</sup> The Japanese Military and War Museum (*Yūshūkan* 遊就館) within Yasukuni Shrine 靖国神社 has many examples of women's hair donated to Japanese soldiers during the Sino-Japanese War and World War II. The most famous example is a rope of hair collected from 10,000 women. Ujiie Naoko 氏家直子 sent letters to women across Japan asking for their hair and it took her one year to complete the project.

<sup>258</sup> Ebersole, “‘Long Black Hair Like a Seat Cushion’: Hair Symbolism in Japanese Popular Religion,” 95.

<sup>259</sup> Ten Grotenhuis, “Collapsing the Distinction Between Buddha and Believer: Human Hair in Japanese Esotericizing Embroideries,” 891.

Buddhist embroideries. These examples reveal that only female hair was incorporated into Buddhist images. When a husband or father commissioned a Buddhist embroidery, he used the hair of the deceased woman. When a widow commissioned a Buddhist embroidery for her deceased husband, she incorporated her own tonsured hair into the image in order to mark her close association with her deceased husband. This shift in patronage practices from the Heian to the Kamakura period, then, reflects changes in the status of women from one connected to their lineage to that based on their husband's household.

### 3.6 FEMALE RECIPIENT OF BUDDHIST HAIR EMBROIDERIES

Husbands and fathers who commissioned Buddhist hair embroideries were motivated by a desire to help their deceased wives and daughters embody the Buddha in the afterlife. The *Sand and Pebbles* (*Shasekishū* 沙石集; 1279-1283), a compilation of tales written by the Buddhist monk Mujū 無住 (1227-1312), as well as the *Clear Mirror* (*Masukagami* 増鏡; mid-fourteenth century), a historical tale of the court during the Kamakura period, both describe the creation of Buddhist hair embroideries for the memorial services of women.<sup>260</sup> The *waka* poet, Fujiwara no Tameie 藤原為家 (1198-1275), commissioned a Sanskrit seed-syllable hair embroidery for his daughter, Tameko 為子 (?-1263), who preceded him in death.<sup>261</sup> Emperor Go-Uda 後宇多天皇 (1267-1324)

<sup>260</sup> The *Shasekishū* consists of ten books which discuss themes of Buddhist tale literature such as the power of dharani and poetry, dangers to worldly attachment, and Shinto-Buddhist syncretism. For a study of this text, see Robert E. Morrell, *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien, A Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Japan* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985).

<sup>261</sup> Fujiwara no Tameie is renowned for compiling two imperial poetry anthologies—the *Shoku gosenshū* (続後撰集; 1251) and the *Shoku kokinshū* (続古今集; 1265). *Shasekishū* 沙石集, in *Iwanami bunko* 岩波文庫, vol. 1-2 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1943).

also commissioned a Sanskrit seed-syllable embroidered image for his imperial consort, Yūgimon'in 遊義門院 (1270-1307), on her one-year death anniversary in 1308.<sup>262</sup> The *Clear Mirror* claims that the emperor gathered Yūgimon'in's hair from her combs to embroider this seed-syllable and also copied the *Lotus Sutra* on the back of letters that she had written to connect Yūgimon'in's body and soul with the divine.<sup>263</sup>

Both of these embroidered icons were likely images of the Sanskrit Seed-Syllable 'A' as a majority of surviving Buddhist embroideries with Sanskrit seed-syllables depict this particular syllable. The Sanskrit Seed-Syllable 'A' symbolizes Dainichi Nyorai and was linked to the deity's three aspects: beginning, universality, and emptiness.<sup>264</sup> The 'A' syllable, as the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet represented the origin of all things and was believed to be the source of all sound. The syllable also represented emptiness, like the letter 'a' in Greek, as it functioned as a negative prefix in Sanskrit. Kūkai was the first to discuss the benefits of meditating on the Sanskrit Seed-Syllable 'A' (*ajikan* 阿字觀) in the *Hizōki* 秘藏記 and, as the meditation practice developed into a ritual sequence, images of the syllable became widely produced.<sup>265</sup> The Seed-Syllable 'A' is frequently painted in gold for paintings on silk or paper whereas the seed-syllable is black and stitched with human hair for embroideries. Furthermore, there are two iconographical types of A-

<sup>262</sup> *Imakagami; Masukagami* 今鏡・増鏡, in *Kokushi taikēi* 国史大系, vol. 21 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2007).

<sup>263</sup> The *Masukagami* uses the term 「遊義門院の御ぐしにて」 to describe how Emperor Go-Uda accumulated Yūgimon'in's hair. See *Imakagami; Masukagami*. Aristocrats began transcribing scriptures onto personal letters during the ninth century. The sutras could be written on the surface or reverse side of the loved one's letter. The letter was also sometimes distilled to make new paper and sutras were copied onto that material. Occasionally, the hairs of the deceased were added into the paper during the distillation process. This was a method of connecting the deceased with the divine, but also uniting two lovers who were separated by death. See Halle O'Neal, "Written Stupa, Painted Sutra: Relationships of Text and Image in the Construction of Meaning in the Japanese Jeweled-Stupa Mandalas" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2011), 227-228.

<sup>264</sup> On the symbolic significance of the Sanskrit Seed-Syllable 'A' and meditation practices related to these images, see Richard K. Payne, "Ajikan: Ritual and Meditation in the Shingon Tradition," in *Re-Visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1998): 219-48.

<sup>265</sup> Bogel, *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision*, 199-200.

syllable icons based on whether the image is associated with the *Diamond World Mandala* or the *Womb World Mandala*. For a *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable A* embroidery referring to the *Diamond World mandala*, both the lotus pedestal and the syllable are depicted within a moon disk whereas for the *Womb World mandala*, the lotus pedestal rests outside of the moon disk.<sup>266</sup>

The Shingon Buddhist monk Kakuban 覚鑁 (1095-1143) expanded on Kūkai’s teachings of the *ajikan* to argue that meditating on the Sanskrit Seed-Syllable ‘A’ also acquired soteriological benefits such as the achievement of rebirth into the Pure Land and oneness with Amida Buddha.<sup>267</sup> Since visualization practices of the ‘A’ syllable required a level of literacy in Sanskrit and an investment of time, wealth, and energy that was unattainable by non-elites, commoners aimed to manifest these benefits by embodying the syllable. The *Hōjōki* 方丈記 written by Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 in 1212, for example, claims that the monk Ryūgyō 隆暁 (1135-1206) from Ninnaji 仁和寺 copied the Sanskrit Seed-Syllable ‘A’ on the foreheads of believers who passed away from the famines and natural disasters that struck the capital so that they could attain rebirth.<sup>268</sup> Mujū also wrote in the *Zōtanshū* (雑談集; 1305) that one could acquire the same benefits as visualizing the Sanskrit Seed-Syllable ‘A’ if their hair was incorporated into an image of this syllable.<sup>269</sup>

<sup>266</sup> A majority of Sanskrit seed-syllable paintings and embroideries depict the seed-syllables within the moon disk. The moon disk is another object used for meditation practices. See Ten Grotenhuis, “Collapsing the Distinction Between Buddha and Believer: Human Hair in Japanese Esotericizing Embroideries,” 888-89.

<sup>267</sup> Nakano Genzō 中野玄三, “Raigōzu ronsō: “raigōzu no bijutsu” sairon 来迎図論争・「来迎図の美術」再論,” in *Hōhō to shitenō bukkyō bunkashi: Hito mono imēji no rekishigaku* 方法としての仏教文化史：ヒト・モノ・イメージの歴史学, eds. Nakano Genzō, Kasuya Makoto, and Kamikawa Michio (Tokyo: Benseishuppan, 2010), 184-186.

<sup>268</sup> Nara National Museum, *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten*, 284.

<sup>269</sup> *Zōtanshū* 雑談集, in *Koten bunko* 古典文庫 (Tokyo: Koten bunko, 1950), 347.

Fujiwara no Tameie and Emperor Go-Uda incorporated the hair of their daughter and wife respectively into Sanskrit Seed-Syllable ‘A’ embroideries to help them attain the same benefits as meditating on this seed-syllable. During the Kamakura period, it was believed that one could communicate with the deceased and attain their presence through corporeal remains. Hair, in particular, was thought to possess the essence of the deceased and became a marker of their lost presence.<sup>270</sup> At the end of Tameie’s dedicatory text to Tameko, he writes, “even after my tears dry, my heart is filled with sadness to see the black hair of my own child.”<sup>271</sup> The Sanskrit Seed-Syllable ‘A’ embroidery created with Tameko’s hair, then, functioned as a reminder of her lost presence and aimed to assure Tameie that his daughter achieved rebirth.

### 3.7 HŌJŌ MASAKO’S BUDDHIST HAIR EMBROIDERY FOR MINAMOTO NO YORITOMO

Kamakura-period women also incorporated their own hair into Buddhist embroideries and dedicated such icons to their deceased husbands. One of the most famous Buddhist hair embroideries is a *Lotus Sutra mandala* created by Hōjō Masako 北条政子 (1156-1225) for her husband, Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147-1199), a year after his death. The *Mirror of the East* (*Azuma kagami* 吾妻鏡), a historical chronicle of the Kamakura government, records that, on 1200.1.13, Masako held a lavish one-year memorial service for her husband, the founder of the

<sup>270</sup> On the practice of venerating the bodily remains of the deceased and the religious justification for creating bodily art, see Patricia Fister, “Creating Devotional Art with Body Fragments: The Buddhist Nun Bunchi and Her Father, Emperor Gomizuno-o,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (2000): 213-238.

<sup>271</sup> *Shasekishū*.

Kamakura government (*bakufu* 幕府), and provided many offerings including a painted image of Shaka flanked by two attendants, six gold-leaf *Lotus Sutra* scrolls, five *Mahayana Sutra* scrolls, and an embroidery depicting Sanskrit seed-syllables which incorporated Masako's own hair from when she took the tonsure after her husband's death.<sup>272</sup>

The embroidery commissioned by Masako may be one of the rare examples in which both the Kamakura-period material object and patronage record remain. Izusan Shrine 伊豆山神社 owns a *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Lotus Sutra mandala* that is thought to incorporate Masako's hair. This mandala is actually a painting on silk; blue, green, and red pigment are used for the background while gold paint and gold leaf is used for the many-jeweled pagoda in the center of the lotus flower and vajras illustrated throughout the image. Instead of figural representations of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, Sanskrit seed-syllables are depicted to signify each deity of the mandala. The forty-six seed-syllables are not written with black ink, but carefully stitched with human hair. An inscription on the back of the *Lotus Sutra mandala* reads, "Hōjō Masako dedicated this mandala to Yoritomo. She used her own hair for the mandala to benefit Yoritomo in the afterlife. This image is also the main icon of the Lotus Hall (*Hokkedō* 法華堂). It was restored by the temple administrator, Teijaku 定寂, in 1848."<sup>273</sup>

One of the problems with claiming that the Izusan Shrine *Lotus Sutra* mandala is the same embroidery mentioned in the *Mirror of the East* is that the image's current location does not match

<sup>272</sup> The *Azuma kagami* was written between 1268 and 1301 to record the Kamakura administration's policies and legitimize Hōjō rule. The text covers events from 1180 to 1266 and was compiled using a source of administrative documents, correspondences, reports, house records, diaries, and literary narratives. *Azuma kagami* 吾妻鏡, in *Kokushi taikei* 国史大系 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1995).

<sup>273</sup> The inscription of the *mandala* is as follows, 「種子繡仏法華曼荼羅図・右一軸、右大將頼朝公御台平氏政子、法名如実尼為大將菩提自髮毛以所繡法華曼荼羅也、是即法華堂之本尊也、嘉永元申歳、寺務定寂修補之」. See Ishida and Nishimura, *Shūbutsu*, 43.

with where it was originally dedicated at the Lotus Hall. Nevertheless, Yoritomo's earnest devotion towards Izusan Shrine could explain why the mandala was bestowed here at a later date. Yoritomo was a frequent visitor of Izusan Shrine from 1181 to 1197; he sponsored abbreviated sutra readings of the *Great Perfection of the Wisdom Sutra* (*Daihannya haramittakkyō* 大般若波羅蜜多經), granted the Mamiya 馬宮 estate to Izusan shrine's landholdings, and, in 1197, donated pillars to reconstruct one of the shrine's halls which burned down in a fire.<sup>274</sup> The mandala may have been moved there after the Lotus Hall was destroyed or bestowed on the shrine during the Meiji restoration due to the separation of Shinto and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離).<sup>275</sup>

It is also difficult to confirm whether or not this mandala was dedicated by Masako because the *Mirror of the East* does not specify the iconography of the textile. The record only states that Sanskrit seed-syllables were depicted on the embroidery.<sup>276</sup> The term *aji* 阿字 can refer specifically to the Sanskrit Seed-Syllable “A,” the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, but it was also a term used in medieval documents to mean any Sanskrit seed-syllable which substituted for a figural representation of a Buddhist deity. Although it is impossible to have conclusive evidence that this *Lotus Sutra* hair embroidery was donated by Masako, the fact that the image has survived without decay, unlike a majority of Heian- and Kamakura-period embroideries, indicates that it was considered special and was safely protected for hundreds of years.

The location of Yoritomo's memorial service, the genre of the hair embroidery, and the priest officiating at the ceremony all served to express the political might of the Hōjō family who

<sup>274</sup> *Nihon rekishi chimei taikēi* 日本歴史地名大系, s.v. “Izusan jinja 伊豆山神社.” (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2000).

<sup>275</sup> In 1868, the Meiji government enacted an anti-Buddhist policy that led to the closure of many temples, destruction of Buddhist images, and confiscation of monastic land. In 1872, images of the Hokkedō were moved to other shrines in the area due to this policy.

<sup>276</sup> The *Azuma kagami* states 「阿字一鋪（以御臺所御除髮被奉縫之）」. See *Azuma kagami*.



became the successors of the Kamakura *bakufu*. Yoritomo's memorial service deviated from Heian-period precedent because Masako did not sponsor the ceremony where Yoritomo's patrilineal relatives were buried. Although Yoritomo constructed four other Buddhist temples in eastern Japan, including the Shōchōjuin 勝長寿院, a mortuary temple for his father Minamoto no Yoshitomo 源義朝 (1123-1160), Masako deliberately chose to hold his memorial service at the Lotus Hall which was constructed by Yoritomo in 1189 instead of at temples associated with his patrilineal family.<sup>277</sup> She may have selected this Lotus Hall to honor Yoritomo's personal religious inclinations. It is believed that Yoritomo was devoted to the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* during his lifetime as he recited the *Lotus Sutra* daily for his father and once pardoned the life of a warrior when he discovered that the man also followed the text's teachings.<sup>278</sup> Yet, these choices benefitted Masako as well, as the *Lotus Sutra* offered a powerful message concerning the equality of men and women in the afterlife and the ability of women to attain enlightenment. The Zen Buddhist priest, Eisai 栄西 (1141-1215), who was selected to officiate the service, was also a close religious figure in Masako's life to whom she turned to many times for guidance after the death of both her daughter and husband.<sup>279</sup>

The *Mirror of the East* also records the quality of offerings, the quantity of mourners, and the frequency in which Yoritomo's memorial services were performed to express the strength of the *bakufu* even after Yoritomo's death. The record claims that Masako gave lavish gifts such as silk, cloth, and gold dust to Eisai and the twelve monks who officiated the ceremony.<sup>280</sup> These

<sup>277</sup> This hall was originally called the Hall Containing Buddhas (Jibutsudō 持仏堂) but later became a center for *Lotus Sutra* devotion and a mortuary temple for Yoritomo.

<sup>278</sup> Martin Colcutt, "Religion in the Formation of the Kamakura Bakufu: As Seen through the 'Azuma kagami,'" *Japan Review* 5 (1994): 55-86.

<sup>279</sup> Masako held over a dozen meetings with Eisai after the death of her daughter and husband. She also held a memorial service for her daughter's betrothed husband at the Lotus Hall.

<sup>280</sup> *Azuma kagami*.

offerings were meant to act as payment for the memorial service, but the quantity of the goods was also thought to have a positive impact on Yoritomo's afterlife. Masako's father, Hōjō Tokimasa 北条時政 (1138-1215), who later controlled the *bakufu* as the first Hōjō regent, attended Yoritomo's service along with a large number of *daimyō* who supported the Hōjō clan. In addition to Yoritomo's memorial service held at the Lotus Hall, all temples and shrines in the surrounding provinces—Suruga, Izu, Sagami, and Musashi—were ordered to conduct a service for Yoritomo on that day and perform meritorious acts in order to accrue merit for the late shogun and bolster the sovereignty of the *bakufu*.<sup>281</sup>

Sources such as the Tenshō 天正 version of the *Chronical of Great Peace* (*Taiheiki* 太平記) show that, even when hair of a deceased husband was available, widows incorporated their own tonsured hair into Buddhist images to display their grief and loyalty towards their husbands.<sup>282</sup> In this text, the unnamed wife of Emperor Go-Daigo 後醍醐天皇 (1288-1339)'s advisor, Hino Toshimoto 日野俊基 (?-1332), created a *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroidery for the forty-ninth day memorial service of her husband who was executed for plotting against the Kamakura *bakufu*.<sup>283</sup> Before his execution, Toshimoto cut off a lock of his hair and sent it to his wife in the capital as a memento, so even though Toshimoto's wife already possessed her husband's hair, she chose to incorporate her own hair into the Buddhist image to memorialize her husband.

Kamakura-period women like Masako not only incorporated their own hair into embroideries, but also within Buddhist sculpted images to memorialize deceased relatives. Two

<sup>281</sup>*Azuma kagami*.

<sup>282</sup> This historical epic concerns the demise of the Hōjō shoguns and Emperor Go-Daigo's reassertion to the throne from 1319 to 1367.

<sup>283</sup> There are multiple versions of the *Taiheiki*. The story concerning Toshimoto's wife creating an embroidery is only featured in the Tenshō version. See *Taiheiki* 太平記, in *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集 (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1998).

locks of hair and a dedicatory text were discovered inside Shuzenji 修善寺's Dainichi Nyorai statue; a wooden sculpture thought to have been commissioned to memorialize Masako's son, Minamoto no Yoriie 源頼家(1182-1204). These locks of hair were scientifically tested to show that they belonged to two different women—one with blood type O and the other with blood type B. Since the blood type of one of the donors matches the blood type of the woman's hair incorporated within Izusan Shrine's *Lotus Sutra Mandala* embroidery, scholars suggest that Masako is one of the patrons and Yoriie's wife, Tsujidono 辻殿, is the other.<sup>284</sup> Tsujidono received the tonsure on 1210.7.8, about fifty days before the Dainichi Nyorai image was completed by the sculptor Jikkei 実慶 (1117-1207) on 8.28.<sup>285</sup> Since it likely took two months or so to complete the statue, Yoriie's wife is thought to be the second donor. These examples indicate that incorporating hair into Buddhist images enabled women to attain social and spiritual merit for themselves that was independent from their husband's soteriological needs. In the following section, I will consider two theories as to why the patronage practices of Buddhist embroideries became a female-dominated practice in the thirteenth century.

### **3.8 BUDDHIST HAIR EMBROIDERIES REFLECTING THE NEW ROLE OF KAMAKURA-PERIOD WOMEN**

The rediscovery of the *Taima mandara* in 1212 is considered the event that ushered in the widespread production of embroidered Buddhist images by women. As will be discussed in

<sup>284</sup> Collcutt, "'Nun Shogun': Politics and Religion in the Life of Hōjō Masako (1157-1225)," 180.

<sup>285</sup> Nara National Museum, *Tokubetsuten Josei to Bukkyō: Inori to Hohoemi*, 252.

Chapter Four, Shōkū discovered the four-hundred-year-old *Taima mandara*, which was a woven tapestry most likely originating in China. He was so impressed by the lavish visual expression of the Pure Land that he requested artists to copy the imagery in case the mandara was destroyed by fire and disseminated thirteen facsimiles to Pure Land Buddhist temples so that the image could be venerated outside of Taimadera.<sup>286</sup> While the iconography was easily replicable in painting, the specific weaving technique used to create the *Taima mandara* was long lost by the early thirteenth century. Devotees, thus, attempted to replicate the tapestry through embroidery instead.

At the same time, legendary origin stories began to appear concerning a young noblewoman, Chūjōhime 中将姫 (753?-781?), and her involvement in the creation of the *Taima mandala*. Literary and pictorial works, such as the *Records of an Imperial Pilgrimage of the Kenkyū Era* (*Kenkyū gojunrei kei* 建久後巡礼記; 1191) and the *Handscroll Concerning the Origin of the Taimadera Mandala* (*Taimadera mandara engi emaki* 當麻寺曼荼羅縁起絵巻; mid-thirteenth century), claim that a manifestation of Kannon appeared to Chūjōhime and wove the mandala of lotus threads for her overnight. After Chūjōhime contemplated this image, she successfully attained rebirth in the Pure Land. Aristocratic women and nuns commissioned *Taima mandara* textiles from the late thirteenth-century onward in an attempt to emulate the practices of Chūjōhime and attain merit in the afterlife.<sup>287</sup>

Kamakura-period women may have also taken an active role in commissioning Buddhist embroideries due to the reorganization of the family structure as women were now identified with

<sup>286</sup> Fujisawa Takako 藤澤隆子, "Kamakura jidai ni okeru taima mandalazu no juyō: juyōsou, kaenrituzō amida raigō nado 鎌倉時代における當麻曼荼羅図の受容—受容層・下縁立像阿弥陀来迎など—," *Bukkyō geijutsu* 328 (2013): 25-80.

<sup>287</sup> For a list of these patrons who commissioned reproductions of the Taima mandara during the Kamakura period, see Fujisawa, "Kamakura jidai ni okeru taima mandalazu no juyō: juyōsou, kaenrituzō amida raigō nado," *Bukkyō geijutsu* 328 (2013): 45-50.

their husband's household rather than their natal family.<sup>288</sup> Since widows could no longer rely on their patrilineal families for inheritance and economic security, memorial services became platforms for them to mark themselves as heirs of their husband's property. This shift in family structure is reflected in how memorial services were performed and where women were buried. Yūgimon'in who received a Buddhist hair embroidery from her husband, for example, was not buried with her patrilineal family like other Fujiwara women but at the Imabayashi Mausoleum (*Imabayashi no misasagi* 今林陵) where Emperor Go-Uda's father and mother were buried, thus linking her to her husband's royal family.<sup>289</sup>

Kamakura-period widows often took the tonsure after their husband's death to display their loyalty towards their husbands and secure his inheritance.<sup>290</sup> This action, in theory, removed women from the sexual economy and signified their role as the primary inheritor of their husband's property and even authority. Women who became nuns received a widow's portion (*goke bun* 後家分) and controlled their son's property until he reached adulthood. They were prohibited from remarrying and were required to demonstrate full devotion to their husband in the afterlife or surrender their husband's property rights to his children. The *Goseibai shikimoku* (御成敗式目; 1232), a legal code for Kamakura warriors states, "as long as a widow has received the husband's

<sup>288</sup> On the inheritance rights of women during the Kamakura period, see Jeffrey P. Mass, *Lordship and Inheritance in Early Medieval Japan: A Study of the Kamakura Soryō System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 49; Hitomi Tonomura, "Women and Inheritance in Japan's Early Warrior Society," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 3 (1990): 592-94.

<sup>289</sup> The Imabayashi mausoleum is located to the east of Shōryōji 清涼寺 in Kyoto. On 1307.3.25, the day after Yūgimonin's death, her body was taken here and cremated. On the 26<sup>th</sup> day, Emperor Go-Uda took the tonsure and built a Lotus Sutra Hall in her memory. *Nihon jinmei daijiten* 日本人名大辞典, s.v. "Yūgimonin 遊義門院." (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001).

<sup>290</sup> Medieval Japanese widows rarely shaved off their hair but cut it to shoulder length or longer to represent their renunciation of this world. See Katsuura Noriko, trans. Virginia Skord Waters, "Tonsure Forms for Nuns: Classification of Nuns according to Hairstyle," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002).

property, she should devote herself exclusively to praying for his afterlife. Should she quickly forget chastity and remarry, the deceased husband's bequest should pass to his children."<sup>291</sup> Buddhist embroideries incorporating a widow's hair like Masako's *Lotus Sutra* mandala embroidery, then, served as a costly and deeply personal marker of her devotion to Yoritomo after death.

Although many women like Masako took the tonsure in the Kamakura period after their husband's death, this action did not necessarily mean that they renounced the world and sequestered themselves in convents. Widows occasionally resided in nunneries to devote their lives to praying for their deceased husbands, but more often than not, they continued to have sexual liaisons and enjoyed very public lives. Masako continued to remain heavily involved in political affairs after her husband's death. For example, even though her son, Yoriie, was appointed shogun in 1202, Masako exiled him to Shuzenji, appointed her second eleven-year-old son, Sanetomo 実朝 (1192-1219) as shogun, and governed through him as a surrogate.<sup>292</sup> In this way, Masako exercised total control over her sons and subsequent shoguns.

Under these social conditions during the Kamakura period, when the primary method for women to attain power was to demonstrate loyalty to their deceased husbands, Buddhist hair embroideries served as powerful symbols. Hair embroideries functioned as visual markers that a widow was her husband's primary mourner. Furthermore, the image served as a contract binding the widow to his inheritance. When considering Masako's *Lotus Sutra mandala* within this socio-political lens, the hair embroidery represents Masako's capacity to serve as Yoritomo's proxy on

<sup>291</sup> Tonomura, "Women and Inheritance in Japan's Early Warrior Society," 602.

<sup>292</sup> Masako's elder son, Yoriie, turned against his mother and favored the advice of his wife's family, the Hiki 比企 clan. This is why Masako preferred the rule of her younger son, Sanetomo. Collcutt, "'Nun Shogun': Politics and Religion in the Life of Hōjō Masako (1157-1225)," 174.

earth and displayed her right to rule in his stead. Buddhist hair embroideries, then, were not simply about merging oneself with the divine, but were powerful tools used by women for social and political advancement in this life.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

By examining Heian- and Kamakura-period records, this chapter sheds new light on the female recipients and patrons of Buddhist embroideries and considers their ritual function as well as the soteriological significance of these images. During the Heian period, Buddhist embroideries were commissioned for the memorial services of royal mothers to reinforce the prestige of the Fujiwara clan and aid these women in attaining auspicious rebirths. The development of hair embroideries in the Kamakura period, however, can be understood as a unique female innovation which benefitted women both in this life and the afterlife. By sewing their tonsured hair into Buddhist embroideries, widows marked themselves as the main benefactors and inheritors of their husband's property and also literally and figuratively merged themselves with the body of the Buddha. In this way, Buddhist embroideries enabled women to subvert religious doctrine concerning the impurities of their sex and form a bond with the Buddha.

This chapter takes medium and materiality as central questions to offer a gendered approach to the study of Buddhist visual culture. Embroidered Buddhist images, as we have seen, were considered more auspicious than painted Buddhist images due to their time-consuming production and the costly material of silk. Materials such as silk and hair also had certain symbolic associations in medieval Japan that, when incorporated in Buddhist images, transformed the meaning and reception of the work. Buddhist textiles were considered ideal offerings for and by

women because embroidering and sericulture were considered virtuous female activities. Female hair was also associated with regenerative properties, the ability to attract deities, and bring good fortune. By focusing on the materials in art, then, we are able to reconstruct the reception of these images and the social implications that these works accrued in their cultural context.

As will be explored in Chapter Four, Buddhist hair embroideries were frequently created in the subsequent Muromachi and Edo periods, but their function shifted from a private memorial object to an image marking a collective identity. By the sixteenth-century, it was not unusual for commoners, regardless of gender, to donate a few strands of hair or make a stitch or two in embroideries at a local temple to attain merit. For example, a hair embroidered *Taima mandara* from 1692 includes an inscription that 8,963 people donated strands of hair to incorporate their matter in a devotional work that would be displayed on the walls of Shōhanji 昌繁寺 in Miyagi Prefecture.<sup>293</sup> Buddhist hair embroideries, then, became a vital tool for social cohesion. These images united a community of Pure Land Buddhist believers, particularly in rural areas, who lacked the means and opportunities to see lavish paintings of the Amida Buddha in person near the capital. While this study examines a sample of primary records, I am hopeful that more sources concerning the production and dedication of embroideries can be discovered in temple records. These documents can potentially flesh out the ritual function surrounding devotional embroideries and may even restore the identity of the patron, even another name or two, back into these sacred objects.

<sup>293</sup> From 1678 to 1692, a monk named Kūnen 空念 created sixty-nine large-scale hair embroideries for temples across Japan. A majority of these images were of the *Taima mandara* but some consisted of the Buddha's scene of Nirvana (*Nehanzu* 涅槃図) and *Descent of Amida and Twenty-Five Bodhisattvas embroideries* (二十五菩薩来迎図). See Chapter Four.



## 4.0 THE CHŪJŌHIME CULT AND THE VENERATION OF HER BODY IN EARLY MODERN EMBROIDERIES

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines Buddhist hair embroideries attributed to a legendary eighth-century woman named Chūjōhime 中将姫 (753?-781?) in order to understand how these textiles became central to establishing and expanding her cult.<sup>294</sup> Chūjōhime, or Princess Chūjō, is thought to have become a nun at Taimadera 當麻寺 and achieved rebirth in Amida Buddha's 阿弥陀 (Sk. Amitābha) Pure Land by commissioning the *Taima mandara* 當麻曼荼羅 textile. There is no surviving literary source that claims that Chūjōhime incorporated her own hair into embroidered images of the Buddha, yet over a dozen pre-modern textiles survive in temples and shrines across Japan with inscriptions located on their backs attributing her as their creator (Appendix D). After examining these inscriptions, which describe the creator, donor, and use of these embroideries, I argue that this group of Buddhist hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime served the distinct purpose of furthering her cult and transforming ideas concerning the impurity of the female body. Furthermore, I show that the images attributed to Chūjōhime were used in picture recitation

<sup>294</sup> The term “cult” here is used in a similar manner as Kevin Carr’s use in his analysis of veneration practices related to Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (574-622). Carr defines a cult in medieval Japan as a “constellation of devotional practices, material culture, and shared narrative communities.” Buddhist cults of Shōtoku Taishi and Chūjōhime heavily relied on images to proselytize teachings. Furthermore, the collective identity of worshipers frequently transcended sectarian, class, and even geographical boundaries. See Kevin Carr, *Plotting the Prince: Shōtoku Cults and the Mapping of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012), 6-7.

performances (*etoki* 絵解き), displayed in temple exhibitions (*kaichō* 開帳), and incorporated in reenactment rituals of Chūjōhime's rebirth into Amida's Western Paradise (*mukaekō* 迎え講).<sup>295</sup>

The veneration of Buddhist hair embroideries associated with Chūjōhime in the sixteenth century coincided with the widespread proselytization of the *Blood Bowl Sutra* (*Ketsubon kyō* 血盆經), a religious text that claimed the female body was polluted and that women required monastic intervention to be saved from their impending fate in the Blood Hells.<sup>296</sup> I argue that temples associated with Chūjōhime used hair embroideries attributed to her in rituals to counter the popularization of this sutra. Moreover, Buddhist monks and nuns encouraged female devotees to replicate Chūjōhime's practices of incorporating hair into Buddhist images as a method of attaining enlightenment and a connection (*kechien* 結縁) with the Buddha.

After examining beliefs concerning the defilement of the female body in the early modern period, I will discuss how the *Blood Bowl Sutra* transformed ideas concerning female piety, and ultimately altered stories about how Chūjōhime attained enlightenment. While older stories such as the *Taimadera ryūki* 当麻寺流記 (1231) and images, such as the mid-thirteenth century *Illustrated Story of the Miraculous Origin of the Taima mandara* handscroll (*Taima mandara engi emaki* 当麻曼荼羅縁起絵巻), assert that Chūjōhime attained enlightenment through meditation and the renunciation of the female body, beginning in the sixteenth century, this noblewoman's rebirth was credited to her active involvement in the creation of Buddhist images. The second part of this chapter will examine the iconography and materiality of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries to

<sup>295</sup> There are many terms used to describe this reenactment ritual into the Western Paradise including the *raigōe* 来迎会, the *nerikuyōshiki* 練供養式, and the *nijūgo bosatsu mukaekō hōe* 二十五菩薩迎講法会. In this chapter, I will refer to this ritual as the *mukaekō* ceremony.

<sup>296</sup> The *Ketsubon kyō* has also been translated to English as the *Blood Pool Sutra*.

support my theory concerning their ritual use and religious significance. Finally, I will discuss concurrent Pure Land Buddhist ritual practices to consider how and why both female and male believers began to imitate Chūjōhime by creating their own embroideries with human hair.

#### **4.2 THE *BLOOD BOWL SUTRA* AND DEFILEMENT OF THE FEMALE BODY**

The practice of venerating hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime became prevalent around the late sixteenth century when beliefs concerning the *Blood Bowl Sutra* spread to Japan and added another hinderance to female salvation. Founders of pre-modern Buddhist sects, such as Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212) and Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1263), had long preached the *Lotus Sutra*, the Five Obstacles, and the Three Hindrances to justify the impurity of women.<sup>297</sup> By the sixteenth century, however, the *Blood Bowl Sutra* added a physiological impediment to female salvation, as this text claimed that women could not attain enlightenment alone but had to rely on monastic intervention through rituals to save them from their impending destinies in the Blood Hells.

The *Blood Bowl Sutra* originated in China at the end of the twelfth century and was circulated in Japan around the early fifteenth century.<sup>298</sup> This sutra discusses the arhat Mokuren's 目連 (Ch. Mulian Sk. Maudgalyāyana) journey into the fiery hells to rescue the soul of his mother. Mokuren discovers his mother in hell among a group of women drowning in a pool of blood. The demon guardian explains to the horrified Mokuren that these women are destined to drink the

<sup>297</sup> For a discussion on the *Lotus Sutra*, the Five Obstacles, and the Three Hindrances and its connection with female soteriology see the Introduction.

<sup>298</sup> Momoko Takemi, "'Menstruation Sutra' Belief in Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 10, no. 2 (1983): 236-239.

blood of the Blood Pool Hell for all of eternity as retribution for defiling the earth with parturitive and menstrual blood.<sup>299</sup> In the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, the female body is perceived as inherently deplorable because, if women's blood touches the earth, it contaminates the earth god and if women wash their blood-stained garments, they pollute water used for the Buddha's offerings.<sup>300</sup> According to this sutra, then, regardless of whether or not women had children, they were destined to desecrate and anger the gods due to their inherent physiology.

By the sixteenth century, the *Blood Bowl Sutra* was central to the teachings, sermons, and rituals of the Shin Pure Land 浄土真宗 and Sōtō Zen 曹洞禅 sects of Buddhism. In Shin Buddhist devotional hymns, women chanted about the inescapable Blood Hells while in Sōtō Zen funerary rites for women, copies of the *Blood Bowl Sutra* were placed in coffins as it was believed that the sutra functioned as an amulet to protect the souls of deceased women in the Blood Hells.<sup>301</sup> Buddhist priests from temples such as Chūgūji 中宮寺 in Tateyama performed rituals that involved throwing copies of the *Blood Bowl Sutra* into the river to save the souls of women. This ritual was also depicted in hell paintings such as the *Tateyama mandara* 立山曼荼羅 in which priests are illustrated tossing sutras into the Blood Pools filled with drowning women.<sup>302</sup>

Blood pollution was also considered a serious threat to the purity of sacred mountains and became another justification for *nyōnin kekkaï* 女人結界, the exclusion of women from holy sites.

<sup>299</sup> At least sixteen versions of the *Blood Bowl Sutra* circulated in Japan. The blood pools described in Chinese and early Japanese versions of the *Blood Bowl Sutra* initially only contained parturitive blood. By the seventeenth century, however, menstrual blood was also added to this polluted category. Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> The *Blood Bowl Sutra* was also used in Chinese Daoist practices and the earth god described here refers to a Daoist deity who later became popular in Japan. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, *Dōkyō kenkyū* 道教研究 (Tokyo: Shōshinsha, 1965), 132-138. For an English translation of one of the versions of the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, see Duncan Ryūken Williams, *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 125-28.

<sup>301</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 76-77.

<sup>302</sup> Caroline Hirasawa, *Hell-bent for Heaven in Tateyama Mandara: Painting and Religious Practice at a Japanese Mountain* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 123.

Since the early Heian period, women were prohibited from entering sacred pilgrimage sites, such as Mt. Hiei 比叡山 and Mt. Kōya 高野山, because they were considered beings with heavy karmic burdens and possible temptresses to the celibate monks who lived on these mountains. The tenth-century *Kanke bunsō* 菅家文草, a collection of writings by Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845-903), offers proof that women were forbidden from visiting temples like Enryakuji 延暦寺 on the summit of Mt. Hiei, and legendary tales discuss the punishments dispensed from the gods to women who disobeyed these commands.<sup>303</sup> The twelfth-century *Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatarishū* 今昔物語集), the late twelfth-century *Hieizan ryakki* 比叡山略記, and *Japan's First Comprehensive History of Buddhism* (*Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書; 1322), for example, all include stories concerning a nun named Toran who believes that the concept of *nyōnin kekkai* did not apply to her because of her magical abilities. When Toran attempts to ascend to the top of a sacred mountain, she turns into stone.<sup>304</sup> In later versions of the tales of Toran, however, Buddhist monks order the nun to leave the sacred mountain simply due to blood pollution.<sup>305</sup> The *Blood Bowl Sutra*, then, added a physiological justification for the exclusion of women from sacred spaces.

The *Blood Bowl Sutra* also furthered the belief that women's pollution was not a temporary state during menstruation or childbirth that could be eradicated after a period of time, but rather a permanent and continuous form of defilement that endangered the purity of all Buddhist sites. The illustrated tale from the *Karukaya* (刈萱 ca. 1596-1615) describes an incident in which the

<sup>303</sup> Nishiguchi Junko 西口順子, *Onna no Chikara: Kodai no Josei to Bukkyō* 女の力：古代の女性と仏教 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987), 116-119.

<sup>304</sup> For further discussion on the legend of Toran, see D. Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 203-208.

<sup>305</sup> Barbara Ambros, *Women in Japanese Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 89.

postmenopausal mother of Kūkai 空海 (774-835) unexpectedly begins to menstruate upon entering the sacred mountain of Mt. Kōya. In this account, Kūkai's eighty-three-year-old mother vows to visit her son at the Shingon Buddhist headquarters that he constructed on the summit of Mt. Kōya. During her ascent up the mountain, the ground shakes and lightning strikes, nevertheless, she persists. When Kūkai discovers his mother on top of the mountain, he urges her to return back, but his mother argues that she is exempt from menstrual pollution due to her postmenopausal state. At that moment, Kūkai takes off his seven-paneled surplice (*kesa* 袈裟), places the garment on the ground, and asks his mother to step over the sacred object. His mother "boldly stepped across, whereupon the blood of her monthly obstruction began to fall in tiny drops. It had ceased when she was forty-one, but now, at the age of eighty-three, it began anew. The *kesa* burst into flame and flew up into the sky."<sup>306</sup> This story among other sources perpetuated the belief that a woman's defiled state could never be wholly eradicated.

Itinerant nuns of Kumano, referred to as Kumano *bikuni* 熊野比丘尼, preached the *Blood Bowl Sutra* to a primarily female audience and popularized this sutra's teachings. Located near the Kii peninsula, Kumano was a popular pilgrimage site that welcomed female believers. Kumano *bikuni* performed picture recitation rituals along the pilgrimage routes as well as at religious festivals in surrounding temples and shrines to raise funds for temple constructions. These itinerant nuns used a wide array of literary and pictorial sources as tools for their teachings including the *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* (*Nachi sankei mandara* 那智参詣曼荼羅), the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, the

<sup>306</sup> Portions of the *Karukaya* tale have been translated into English. See Keller Kimbrough, *Preachers, Poets, Women, and the Way: Izumi Shikibu and the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Japan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2008), 202-205.

*Blood Bowl Sutra engi* (*Ketsubon kyō engi* 血盆経縁起), and the *Origins of Kumano* (*Kumano no honji* 熊野の本地).

The *Kumano Heart Visualization and Ten World Mandala* (*Kumano kanshiin jikkai mandara* 熊野勧心十界曼荼羅), though, which survives today in considerable numbers was likely the most common tool for proselytization.<sup>307</sup> This complex mandala depicts numerous female hells including the aforementioned hell for parturition and menstrual blood where women are illustrated drowning in pools of blood, a hell for barren women in which women are forced to dig out bamboo shoots with flimsy candlewicks, and a hell for jealous women where women are half-transformed into snakes.<sup>308</sup> The Kumano nun's proselytization, no doubt, caused fear and panic among its audience and promoted the belief that women's only escape from these hells came from monastic intervention. As the Buddha explains to Mokuren in the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, women can only be saved from these hells if they "respect the three treasures of filial piety, call on Mokuren, hold a Blood Pool Liberation service, hold a Blood Pool Feast, read sutras, commission an esoteric ceremony, then, make a boat and float it off."<sup>309</sup>

The irony of the Kumano itinerant nuns' teachings has not escaped scholars; although Kumano was one of the few sacred mountains that welcomed women and, as Hagiwara Tatsuo

<sup>307</sup> Extant examples of the *Kumano Heart Visualization and Ten World Mandala* have fold lines which indicate that these paintings were not mounted like a hanging scroll but were carried along in traveling cases. These *Kumano* mandalas must have also been frequently used because most surviving examples are incredibly worn. See Barbara Ruch, "Woman to Woman: *Kumano bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), 566-575.

<sup>308</sup> For an extensive visual and iconographical analysis of the *Kumano Heart Visualization and Ten World Mandala*, see Kuroda Hideo 黒田日出男, *Kaiga shiryō de rekishi o yomu* 絵画史料で歴史を読む (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2004), 177-216.

<sup>309</sup> This is an excerpt from an English translation of the *Bussetsu Mokuren shōkyō ketsubon kyō* 仏説目連正教血盆経, an undated woodblock print example of a *Blood Bowl Sutra* discovered from Sōkenji 宗賢寺 in Niigata Prefecture. Takemi, "'Menstruation Sutra' Belief in Japan," 230-232.

notes, the pilgrimage site enabled a religious discourse “by and for women” to flourish, this site further solidified women’s dependence on men.<sup>310</sup> Max Moerman writes, “the liberative qualities of the [Kumano bikuni’s] discourse remains questionable. As the headquarters of women who preached to women the terms of their iniquity, the place of women’s religious freedom was also, paradoxically, the place of their bondage.”<sup>311</sup> Through constant reminders of their inescapable corporeal impurity, female pilgrims were taught that the requirements for achieving salvation were different for women. Pure Land Buddhist priests preached that men could attain rebirth simply by chanting Amida Buddha’s name, but this was not enough to assure women’s salvation in the Pure Land; women had biological hindrances that impeded their path towards enlightenment. The popularization of the *Blood Bowl Sutra*, then, promoted the belief in women’s inferior physical nature, reinforced the ban of women in Buddhist activities and sites, and required women to depend on monastic institutions for deliverance.

### 4.3 CHŪJŌHIME AS A SAINTLY WOMAN

The problem of female salvation was discussed as early as the Heian period in Japan, but the methods offered to mitigate these concerns shifted through time. Images and tales concerning Chūjōhime reflect the changes in these strategies to bypass ideas and doctrines that problematized the female body and women’s enlightenment. While Kamakura-period texts and images simply discuss Chūjōhime’s involvement in commissioning the *Taima mandara* tapestry, stories and

<sup>310</sup> Hagiwara Tatsuo 萩原龍夫. *Miko to bukyōshi: Kumano bikuni no shimei to tenkai* 巫女と仏教史：熊野比丘尼の使命と展開 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1983), 38-50.

<sup>311</sup> Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 231.



paintings from the Muromachi period onward include scandalous details of her earlier life. In tales from the fifteenth century and beyond, Chūjōhime suffers from physical ailments as a karmic consequence of her sexual transgressions, yet still attains enlightenment through her religious labor. These stories of Chūjōhime's sufferings became widespread and were recited on pilgrimage routes, compiled in anthologies of tales known as *otogizōshi* 御伽草子<sup>312</sup>, performed in Nōh 能 theatre-plays, and proselytized at temples through picture recitation performances.<sup>313</sup> Buddhist hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime gained popularity at this moment when this saintly woman was transformed within the popular imagination into a “fallen woman.”

The earliest texts and images concerning Chūjōhime did not originate during her lifetime but emerged some four hundred years later. The *Kenkyū gojunrei ki* (建久御巡礼記; 1191), a record of imperial pilgrimages that took place during the Kenkyū era (1190-1198), was written by the Kōfukuji 興福寺 monk Jitsuei 実叡, and is the earliest known manuscript to mention an unnamed female donor involved in the miraculous creation of the *Taima mandara*.<sup>314</sup> The earliest visual account of Chūjōhime is the mid-thirteenth century *Illustrated Story of the Miraculous*

<sup>312</sup> *Otogizōshi* is a literary genre of short stories written from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. The common features of this genre are that these texts originate from an oral tradition and that they were used for both entertainment purposes and moral instruction. See Tokuda Kazuo 徳田和夫, *Otogizōshi kenkyū* 御伽草子研究 (Tokyo: Miyai shoten, 1988), 523.

<sup>313</sup> For a list of literary, theatrical, and visual sources concerning Chūjōhime, see Monica Dix, “Writing Women into Religious Histories: Re-reading Representations of Chūjōhime in Medieval Japanese Buddhist Narratives” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2006), 291-302.

<sup>314</sup> Texts from the Kamakura period that mention a female patron involved in the creation process of the *Taima mandara* are listed below in chronological order: *Kenkyū gojunrei ki* 建久御巡礼記 1191, *Taima mandara chūki* 當麻曼荼羅注記 1223, *Taimadera ryūki* 當麻寺流記 1231, *Taimadera konryū no koto* 當麻寺建立事 1237, *Kokin mokurokushō* 古今目録抄 1238, *Yamatokuni Taimadera engi* 大和國當麻寺縁起 1253, *Kokin chakumonshū* 古今著聞集 1254, *Shishu hyakuin ensū* 私聚百因縁集 1257, *Washū Taimadera gokuraku mandara engi* 和州當麻寺極樂曼荼羅縁起 1262, *Zokukyō kunshō* 續教訓抄 1270, *Tohazugatari* とはづがたり 1290, *Ippen hijirie* 一編聖絵 1299, and *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書 1322. The female patron is referred by name for the first time in the *Ippen Hijiri-e* where she is called the Princess-Consort Chūjō (*Chūjō no kisaki* 中将の妃). See Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, “The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1980), 154-55.

*Origin of the Taima mandara* handscroll (*Taima mandara engi emaki* 当麻曼荼羅縁起絵巻) from the Kōmyōji 光明寺 temple collection. Accompanied by six pictorial sections, the text of the scroll explains that a young woman named Chūjōhime wished to envision the Amida Buddha in human form. As Chūjōhime meditates, Amida Buddha, disguised as a nun, appears to her and instructs her to gather one hundred loads of lotus stems, spin the fibers into threads, and dye these threads into the five Buddhist colors of blue, black, white, red, green, and yellow. Chūjōhime orders a group of conscripted laborers to complete these tasks and subsequently, the bodhisattva Kannon 観音 (Ch. Guanyin Sk. Avalokiteśvara) appears disguised as a nun and weaves the dyed lotus threads together to create the *Taima mandara* tapestry overnight. The next morning, the two transfigured nuns reveal their identities as the Amida Buddha and the bodhisattva Kannon to Chūjōhime and explain the significance of the *Taima mandara*'s iconography. They claim that the mandara is a visual representation of the glories of Amida's Pure Land and preach that all beings can attain rebirth by visualizing its formal features. The handscroll concludes with an image of Chūjōhime diligently contemplating the *Taima mandara* as Amida Buddha and a crowd of dancing bodhisattvas descend from the Pure Land to welcome her into the Buddha's paradise.

Scholars have not been able to identify the historical persona of Chūjōhime and most likely, she is a legendary figure meant to stand-in as a Japanese model for the Indian Queen Vaidehī (J. Idaike 韋提希) from the *Contemplation Sutra* (*Kanmuryōju kyō* 観無量寿経).<sup>315</sup> The narrative of

<sup>315</sup> Scholars have four theories concerning the historical model for Chūjōhime, yet none have been proven as factual. One theory holds that Chūjōhime refers to the daughter of the nobleman, Fujiwara Toyonari 藤原豊成 (704-765), while another theory claims that she is the wife of Toyonari, named Momoyoshi 百能 (720-782), who commissioned a sculpture of Amida Buddha for the benefit of her husband, her mother, and her father at Kōfukuji. A third theory states that she is Taima no Yamashiro 當麻山背, the daughter of Taima Mahirō 當麻真人老 who later married Prince Toneri 舍人親王 (676-735) and gave birth to the future Emperor Junnin 淳仁天皇 (733-765). For the fourth theory, scholars argue that she is Akirakeiko 明子 (829-900), who married Emperor Montoku 文徳天皇 (826-858) and gave birth to Empero Seiwa 清和天皇 (850-878). Akirakeiko was a fervent supporter of Enchin 円珍 (814-891), a Tendai

the *Contemplation Sutra* is depicted in eleven vertical scenes on the *Taima mandara*'s left panel and as monks from Taimadera explained to viewers how Queen Vaidehī achieved enlightenment, a Japanese version of this saintly woman likely emerged.<sup>316</sup> In the *Contemplation Sutra*, Queen Vaidehī is imprisoned by her son, Prince Ajātaśaru (Ajase 阿闍世), for thwarting his plans of murdering his father and taking his place as king. The historical Buddha, Shaka 釈迦 (Sk. Śākyamuni), sends two monks to Queen Vaidehī in prison who help her attain deliverance through sixteen meditations of Amida's Pure Land that include contemplating physical details such as the jeweled trees and the lotus ponds of this Western Paradise as well as the body of the Amida Buddha himself.<sup>317</sup> The tales of Chūjōhime and Queen Vaidehī are similar in that both women attain rebirth by visualizing Amida's Pure Land and they both aim to transmit these revelations to others.

Unlike Queen Vaidehī, who serves as a model of virtue and loyalty in the *Contemplation Sutra* by smuggling food into prison to sustain her husband, however, stories concerning Chūjōhime from the sixteenth century onward were filled with details of her personal transgressions and sufferings.<sup>318</sup> Although the locations and timing of events differ in each

Buddhist monk who traveled to China and received several Buddhist embroideries that were commissioned by Empress Wu Zeitan 武則天 (624-705). It has been suggested that Enchin brought back the *Taima mandara* to Japan and Akirakeiko may have introduced this tapestry to the Japanese court. See Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, "The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan," 174-77.

<sup>316</sup> Hank Glassman, "'Show Me the Place Where My Mother Is!' Chūjōhime, Preaching, and Relics in Late Medieval and Early Modern Japan," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha*, eds. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 150-51.

<sup>317</sup> The sixteen meditations can be divided into two categories. The first category called the Thirteen Meditations includes features of the Pure Land that one should meditate upon at the moment of rebirth: 1) the sun 2) water 3) the ground 4) jeweled trees 5) the pond 6) pavilions 7) Amida's Lotus Throne 8) the image of Amida Buddha 9) the body of Amida 10) the bodhisattva Kannon 11) the bodhisattva Seishi 12) the devotees achieving enlightenment in the Pure Land and 13) smaller images of the Amida Buddha. The second category of the Sixteen Meditations includes a description of each of the three levels of rebirth. The Thirteen Meditations are depicted on the right panel while the levels of rebirth are illustrated in nine panels on the bottom register of the *Taima mandara*.

<sup>318</sup> These tales include the *Chūjō hōnyo bikuni denki* 中将法如比丘尼伝記 (1704), the *Zenzen taiheiki* 前々太平記 (1715), and the *Chūjōhime gyōjōki* 中将姫行状記 (1730). See Tanaka Mie 田中美絵, "Chūjōhime setsuwa no kinsei: kangebon 'Chūjōhime gyōjōki' o jikuni 中将姫説話の近世・勸化本「中将姫行状記」を軸に," *Denshō bungaku kenkyū* 53 (2004): 87-92.

storyline, the tales generally follow the same sequence. Chūjōhime loses her mother at a young age and copes with a jealous stepmother. At age thirteen, she is accused of an illicit affair with a monk and brings chaos to her family. Due to this sexual transgression, Chūjōhime's family abandons her at Hibariyama 雲雀山 and orders a retainer to kill her at this mountain. The retainer takes pity on Chūjōhime, however, and raises her on Hibariyama with his wife. Chūjōhime eventually reunites with her father who urges her to return home, but she ultimately decides to take the tonsure at Taimadera and pray for the soul of her deceased mother in the hopes that they will meet again in the Pure Land. In the end, the Amida Buddha appears to Chūjōhime after she takes the tonsure and orders her to create the *Taima mandara* to achieve this goal.

These later tales concerning Chūjōhime did not focus on the problem of female enlightenment, but more specifically, on physical ailments of the female body and overcoming the burdens of bodily pollution caused by menstruation. For example, in the Kabuki play, *Hibariyama hime sutematsu* (雲雀山姫捨松; 1690), Chūjōhime suffers from prolonged menstruation and venereal diseases as karmic punishments for her sexual transgressions with the monk and travels to Awashima Shrine 淡島神社 in order to purify and cure herself from these afflictions (*shimo no yamai* 下の病).<sup>319</sup> It is also believed that Chūjōhime planted a cherry tree at Gangōji in Gifu Prefecture in honor of the bodhisattva Kannon who cured her of a venereal disease. This tree is considered to have salvific powers to heal other women suffering from gynecological conditions. In fact, one of the most popular medicines offered to women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to alleviate menstrual difficulties was known as Chūjō's Hot Water (*Chūjōtō* 中将湯).

<sup>319</sup> Tanaka Takako 田中貴子. *Seinaru onna: saigū, megami, Chūjōhime* 聖なる女：斎宮・女神・中将姫 (Tokyo: Jinbun Shoin, 1996), 53-56.

Tsushima Jūsha 津村重舎 (1871-1941) founded the medicine company in 1893 but claimed that Chūjōhime taught his ancestors the secret formula for this treatment over a thousand years ago and the concoction was passed down from one generation to another.<sup>320</sup>

In early modern *setsuwa* 説話 tales, Chūjōhime personified a figure who was able to overcome the worldly sufferings experienced by women. Despite her female bodily impurity, she cleanses and establishes herself within sacred spaces prohibited to women due to beliefs concerning *nyōnin kekkai*. In the tale, *Otogizōshi Chūjōhime no honji* 御伽草子中将姫の本地 from the early Edo period (1603-1868), monks reprimand Chūjōhime for entering the area of the main altar at Taimadera and order her to pray outside the temple because she is a woman. Chūjōhime refuses to concede and claims that, “before the Buddha, there is neither male nor female.”<sup>321</sup> No storms emerge from the sky nor does Chūjōhime turn into stone like the Toran figure in tales of *nyōnin kekkai* mentioned previously, so the temple officiants allow the noblewoman to remain within the temple precinct. A boulder with a footprint of Chūjōhime can be found at Taimadera to this day, believed to have been created by the noblewoman in anger when she refused to leave the site.<sup>322</sup> Although there are tales and material objects like these which show Chūjōhime challenging the practice of *nyōnin kekkai*, there is no historical proof that Taimadera ever excluded women from entering the temple, as was the case at Mt. Hiei’s Enryakuji and Mt. Kōya’s Kongōbuji 金剛峯寺, because Taimadera is a Pure Land Buddhist temple and it is not

<sup>320</sup> Susan L. Burns, “Marketing Health and Beauty: Advertising, Medicine, and the Modern Body in Meiji-Taisho Japan,” in *East Asian Visual Culture from the Treaty Ports to World War II*, eds. Hans Thomsen and Jennifer Purtle (Chicago: Paragon Books, 2009), 179-202.

<sup>321</sup> The doctrine of nonduality in the *Vimalakirti Sutra* (*Yuimakyō* 維摩經) describes this non-binary identity and claims that there is neither an absolute male nor absolute female identity. For a brief English translation and further discussion on this text, see Kimbrough, *Preachers, Poets, Women, and the Way*, 195.

<sup>322</sup> Jakushōdō kokkyōshū: jakushōdō kokkyō zokushū 寂照堂谷響集：寂照堂谷響續集. By Unshō (1614-93), *Dai Nihon Bukkyō Zensho* 大日本教全書 vol. 149 (Tokyo: Bussho kankokai, 1912), 252-53.

located on top of a sacred mountain like the former two institutions. Nevertheless, “Chūjōhime in Her Original Form” casts the noblewoman as an advocate for female devotees and discusses her facing similar prohibitions encountered by those of early modern women. Chūjōhime, then, is portrayed as a saintly figure capable of empathizing with the challenges faced by women and an agent who actively sought to remove misogynistic prohibitions.

As Bernard Faure has noted, Chūjōhime is a rare sexed bodhisattva in a long Asian Buddhist tradition of sacred women as sexless beings.<sup>323</sup> Not only does Chūjōhime herself suffer from the physical ailments associated with women, but her suffering leads to her attaining enlightenment. Early modern tales and images instruct that even a transgressive woman like Chūjōhime can achieve purity and awakening by partaking in pilgrimages and commissioning devotional images for temples. The connection between Chūjōhime and concerns of the female body became explicit by the Muromachi period, yet why she became associated with the creation of hair embroideries specifically remains unclear. Scholars suggest that, as tales of Chūjōhime creating the *Taima mandara* tapestry developed, she slowly began to be associated with another form of prominent Buddhist textiles—images embroidered with hair.<sup>324</sup> If that is the case, how can we interpret the meaning and significance of hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime, especially as they relates to the soteriological needs of early modern Buddhist women?

<sup>323</sup> Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 198-201.

<sup>324</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke: kokuhō tuzureori Taima mandara to shūbutsu: shūri kansei kinen tokubetsuten* 糸のみほとけ：国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏：修理完成記念特別展 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2018), 13-14.

#### 4.4 GENRES OF HAIR EMBROIDERIES ATTRIBUTED TO CHŪJŌHIME

There are over a dozen surviving Buddhist hair embroideries with inscriptions on the back of the textile or on the embroidery's wooden box claiming that Chūjōhime donated her hair to create the image.<sup>325</sup> In 1964, the art historian Ishida Mosaku examined the motifs and stylistic features of these Buddhist embroideries and dated a majority of them to the Kamakura and Muromachi periods.<sup>326</sup> Even if Chūjōhime was a historical person, the embroideries date at least four hundred years after her alleged death; thus, the attribution is illogical and the inscriptions are fallacious. My concern with these hair embroideries, however, is not in their legitimacy, but rather, with how early modern viewers came to see these images as objects created by Chūjōhime and why they considered these embroideries as worthy of devotion.

Among the hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime, images depicting the Amida Buddha in multiple forms (figural, Sanskrit seed-syllable, and Chinese characters) are most common. These include *The Descent of Amida Triad* (*Amida sanzō raigōzu* 阿弥陀三尊来迎図), *The Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* (*Shuji Amida sanzonzu* 種子阿弥陀三尊図), and the Six Letter *Myōgōs* 名号—six Chinese characters that form the invocation, “I put my trust in the Amida Buddha” (*Namu Amida butsu* 南無阿弥陀仏). It is not surprising that a majority of the embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime are of Amida Buddha because the *Taima mandara* serves as a physical representation of this Buddha's Western Paradise. A stark difference between the

<sup>325</sup> While additional Buddhist hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime survive today, I did not include these objects in this study because they lack inscriptions and other textual evidence that indicate that she was believed to be the maker. The prevalence of these legends attests to the widespread pre-modern belief in Japan that Chūjōhime was linked to the creation of hair embroideries.

<sup>326</sup> Ishida Mosaku was the first art historian who attempted to date Buddhist embroideries in the 1964 Nara National Museum exhibition on this topic. Since this exhibition, the dates of some images have been altered. On the methods and challenges of dating Buddhist embroideries, see the Introduction.

original *Taima mandara* and these hair embroideries, however, is that the former is a tapestry: the eighth-century Chinese weaving technique used for the *Taima mandara* was likely lost by the time the textile was rediscovered in the early thirteenth century and this could be one of the reasons why the mandara has long been conflated with an embroidery.<sup>327</sup> In this section, I will discuss the iconography of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries in greater detail and in the following section, I will examine the formal features of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries to better understand how these images elicited a bodily response from viewers.

#### 4.4.1 The *Descent of Amida Triad*

The *Descent of Amida Triad* is the most popular genre of the pre-modern Buddhist embroideries, regardless of whether or not they are attributed to Chūjōhime. This image depicts Amida Buddha and the bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi 勢至 (Sk. Mahāsthāmaprāpta) welcoming the soul of the deceased into Amida's Pure Land. Amida is flanked by Seishi on the left, with hands folded in a prayer gesture, and Kannon on the right, who holds a lotus throne for the deceased to sit on and be transported to the Pure Land. The iconography originated from the ninth visualization of the *Contemplation Sutra*, which is depicted on the lower register of the *Taima mandara*. This image later became an independent Pure Land Buddhist genre with the popularity of the Tendai monk Genshin's 源信 (942-1017) text, *Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集; 985), in which he explains the proper deathbed practices and describes the

<sup>327</sup> A famous example of this misclassification is the Bayeux Tapestry; although the textile is referred to as a tapestry, the object is actually an embroidery. For discussion on the creation and origin of the *Taima mandara*, see Bunkazai Hogo Īnkai 文化財保護委員会, *Kokuhō tsuzureori Taima mandara* 国宝綴織当麻曼荼羅 (Tokyo: Benridō, 1963); Ten Grotenhuis, "The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan."



moment Amida Buddha welcomes the deceased into the Pure Land.<sup>328</sup> Genshin also comments on the appearance of Amida Buddha's brilliant rays of light and the performance of music by the accompanying host of twenty-five bodhisattvas. *Descent of Amida* paintings from the late Heian period frequently depict Amida surrounded by several dancing bodhisattvas playing string and wind musical instruments, but this image was later condensed to only Amida, Kannon, and Seishi as a result of the popularization of Hōnen's teachings, which claimed that all bodhisattvas besides Kannon and Seishi were inconsequential when visualizing the Pure Land.<sup>329</sup> Since Chūjōhime's *Descent of Amida* embroideries depict only the triad of Amida, Kannon, and Seishi, these textiles date no earlier than the fourteenth century when Hōnen's teachings became widespread.

#### 4.4.2 The Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad

In *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* embroideries, Sanskrit syllables are depicted as substitutes for anthropomorphic representations of the Amida Buddha, the bodhisattva Kannon, and the bodhisattva Seishi. The three seed-syllables are usually embroidered with human hair and depicted on lotus pedestals.<sup>330</sup> A canopy above the syllables and an altar in the center—adorned with flowers and an incense burner—indicate the sacredness of these Sanskrit characters.<sup>331</sup> The

<sup>328</sup> On the origin of *raigō* imagery, see Sudō Hirotohi 須藤弘敏, *Kōyasan Amida shōju raigōzu: Yume miru chikara* 高野山阿弥陀聖衆来迎図：夢見る力 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1994), 23-24.

<sup>329</sup> Jōji Okazaki and Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1977), 132.

<sup>330</sup> There are many variations within this genre which suggests that there were multiple iconographical sources. For example, the lotus pedestals on which the syllables rest could be depicted either within or outside the moon disk (*gachirin* 月輪) based on their doctrinal source. The number of draping pendants on the canopies also differ with 7, 9, 11, or 13 pendants. Even the type of incense burners vary from a covered brazier known as a *kasha* 火舎 that is used in esoteric practices to even an anthropomorphized brazier in the shape of a lion.

<sup>331</sup> On the role of Sanskrit seed-syllables signifying deities, see E. D. Saunders, *Mūdra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 23, 209.

monk, Mujū 無住 (1226-1312), claimed in his *A Collection of Casual Digressions* (*Zōtanshu* 雑談集; 1305) that a person's soul could attain deliverance from transmigration (*tokudatsu* 得脱) if their hair was incorporated within embroidered Sanskrit seed-syllables and *dharani* spells (mantras) were recited in front of the images. He also professed that those who sew Sanskrit seed-syllables could achieve enlightenment in this life (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏).<sup>332</sup> While *The Descent of Amida Triad* is a popular subject for both paintings and embroideries, the *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* is limited to embroidery and funerary stele (*itabi* 板碑) indicating that the medium of embroidery did not carry the same meaning and significance as that of painting.<sup>333</sup>

#### 4.4.3 The Six Letter *Myōgō*

The third most widespread genre of hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime is the six-letter *myōgō* in which the previously mentioned phrase honoring the Amida Buddha is embroidered with female hair in the center of the textile.<sup>334</sup> The phrase, *Namu Amida Butsu*, was frequently chanted by Pure Land Buddhist believers to attain enlightenment at the time of death.<sup>335</sup> *Myōgō* images from the pre-modern period are often embodied devotional objects: male and female patrons alike formed these six letters by pasting their fingernail clippings onto silk or

<sup>332</sup> *Zōtanshū* 雑談集, in *Koten bunko* 古典文庫, vol. 42 (Tokyo: Koten bunko, 1950) 347.

<sup>333</sup> The *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triads* were probably exclusively used for mediums in which carving or sewing figural forms of the Buddhas were considered time-consuming. Furthermore, *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* embroideries depict devotional offerings, such as flowers and incense burners, which are never depicted in paintings. These details offer further proof that the function and meaning of Buddhist embroideries differed from those of Buddhist paintings. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 111.

<sup>334</sup> *Myōgō* refers to the invocation of the Buddha's name and it means to entrust oneself to the Amida Buddha.

<sup>335</sup> For sources concerning deathbed practices related to the *nenbutsu*, see Jacqueline I. Stone, "By the Power of One's Last Nenbutsu: Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amithābha*, eds. Richard Payne and Kenneth Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 77-119.

writing the Chinese characters with their own blood to attain closeness with the divine in this life.<sup>336</sup> In the case of six-letter *myōgō* attributed to Chūjōhime, however, these images only contain hair.

#### 4.4.4 Uncommon Genres of Hair Embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime

While most of the hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime depict imagery concerning the Amida Buddha, there are a few exceptions including two images with esoteric Buddhist subject matter—a *Dainichi nyorai* (*Dainichi nyorai zō* 大日如来像) hair embroidery originally from Itsukushima Shrine 厳島神社 and a *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable A* (*Ajizu* 阿字図) hair embroidery from Shōchi'in 正智院. The *Dainichi nyorai* hair embroidery depicts the deity Dainichi (Sk. Mahāvairocana) seated on a lotus pedestal with his left index finger clasped inside his right hand forming the mudra of the Wisdom Fist (*chikenin* 智拳印). Dainichi Nyorai is considered to be the central Buddha in the esoteric Shingon Buddhist faith and is not one of the primary deities venerated within the Pure Land Buddhist sect. These sectarian differences could explain why there is only one other surviving embroidered image of Dainichi Nyorai since Pure Land Buddhist temples primarily commissioned and used Buddhist hair embroideries.<sup>337</sup> The *Dainichi nyorai* hair

<sup>336</sup> On the creation of *myōgo* objects incorporating body fragments practiced by Emperor Go-Mizunoo 後水尾 (1596-1680) and his daughter, the nun Bunchi's 文智 (1619-1697), see Patricia Fister, "Creating Devotional Art with Body Fragments: The Buddhist Nun Bunchi and Her Father, Emperor Gomizuno-o," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (2000): 216-235.

<sup>337</sup> The other surviving *Dainichi nyorai* embroidery is held in a private collection and its provenance remains unknown. The *sashi-nui* 刺縫い technique is predominately used on this textile, in which both long and short stitches are used to create a pictorial figure. The style and sewing techniques of this *Dainichi nyorai* embroidery are much more simplified compared to the *Dainichi nyorai* embroidery from Itsukushima. Furthermore, the Itsukushima *Dainichi nyorai* embroidery incorporates gold thread which is highly unusual until the Muromachi period. See Ishida Mosaku 石田茂作 and Nishimura Hyōbu 西村兵部, *Shūbutsu* 繡佛 (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1964), 44.

embroidery survives in pristine condition which suggests that it may have been rarely removed from its container for use in ritual ceremonies. In contrast, an inscription on Shōchi'in's *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable A* hair embroidery attributed to Chūjōhime, claims that this image had to be repaired and remounted in 1658. Shōchi'in owns another *myōgō* hair embroidery attributed to Chūjōhime that was also remounted by the same craftsmen (*hyōgushi* 表具師) five years later in 1663. This indicates that, during these decades, embroidered Buddhist images attributed to Chūjōhime gained increased interest and may have been widely viewed at the temple.<sup>338</sup>

Another unusual genre of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries is a *Descent of Shaka Triad* embroidery from Shinshū-Gokurakuji 真正極樂寺. This textile, however, was likely mistaken as a *Descent of Amida Triad* because the sixteenth-century inscription on the box claims that it is an image of Amida and not Shaka.<sup>339</sup> At first glance, the iconography between the two are quite similar. Like the *Descent of Amida Triad*, the central Buddha (Shaka) of the *Descent of Shaka Triad* is flanked by two bodhisattvas, but the deities are frontal facing rather than the common three-quarter view used in the *Descent of Amida Triads*. Furthermore, the accoutrements held by the bodhisattvas differ from those of Kannon and Seishi: the bodhisattva on the left, which would have been Seishi in a *Descent of Amida Triad*, holds a sword and is thought to be the bodhisattva Monju (*Monju bosatsu* 文殊菩薩 Sk. Mañjuśrī), and the figure on the right, which would have been Kannon, holds a scepter (如意 *nyōi*) and is likely the bodhisattva Fugen (*Fugen bosatsu* 普賢菩薩 Sk. Samantabhadra). There are no other surviving *Descent of Shaka Triad* embroideries,

<sup>338</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ : 国宝綴織當麻曼荼羅と繡仏 : 修理完成記念特別展, 283-285.

<sup>339</sup> The inscription on the wooden box states, 「中将姫縫之阿弥陀」, which can be translated as “An Amida Buddha sewn by Chūjōhime.” The inscription also claims that, in 1556, the embroidery miraculously appeared at the temple and it was repaired and mounted four years later by Chōsuke 長助, the 22<sup>nd</sup> chief priest of Shinshū-Gokurakuji.

but a mid-Kamakura period painting from Unpenji 雲辺寺 illustrates a combination of an Amida triad and a Shaka triad. Amida, Kannon, and Seishi are depicted on the left side of the painting descending towards earth while Śākyamuni, flanked by Monju and Fugen, stands above the residence of a newly deceased person. Since Śākyamuni was considered the Buddha of this world, it is likely that the deities of the Shaka Triad were perceived as the dispatchers of the dead while Amida and his retinue were believed to be deities welcoming the deceased into the Pure Land.<sup>340</sup> Both *Descent of Amida Triad* and *Descent of Shaka Triad* hair embroideries may have been displayed together in certain funerary rituals to represent the multiple deities responsible for assisting the deceased's transition from this life into the next.

The *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Pentad* (*Shuji Amida Gozonzu* 種字阿弥陀五尊図) from Chionji 智恩寺 is another rare genre of embroidery attributed to Chūjōhime. In this image, Amida, Seishi, and Kannon are represented as Sanskrit seed-syllables along with two other deities—Śākyamuni and Yakushi Nyorai 薬師如来 (Sk. Bhaisajyaguru)—which are depicted as seed-syllables at the top of the embroidery. This iconography differs from painted Amida Pentads because the textiles feature the bodhisattvas Jizō (*Jizō bosatsu* 地藏菩薩 Sk. Ksitigarbha) and Ryūju (*Ryūju bosatsu* 竜樹菩薩 Sk. Nāgārjuna) in figural form instead of Śākyamuni and Yakushi Nyorai.<sup>341</sup> The *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroidery from Chūgūji 中宮寺 may have served as

<sup>340</sup> This belief concerning the soteriological roles of Shaka and Amida comes from the Chinese monk, Shandao's 善導 (613-681) interpretation of the "Two Rivers and the White Path" (*niga byakudō* 二河白道) parable from the *Contemplation Sutra*. See Mochizuki Bukkyō daijiten 望月佛教大辞典, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Sekai Seiten Kanko Kyokai, 1954), 4020-21.

<sup>341</sup> Ōhara Yoshitoyo 大原嘉豊, "Tendai Jōgyōdō Amida gosonzō no genkei to henyō 天台常行堂阿弥陀五尊像の原型と変容," in *Hōhō to shitenō bukkyō bunkashi: Hito mono imēji no rekishigaku* 方法としての仏教文化史：ヒト・モノ・イメージの歴史学, eds. Nakano Genzō, Kasuya Makoto, and Kamikawa Michio (Tokyo: Benseishuppan, 2010), 49-79.

iconographical source for this *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Pentad* embroidery because two small Sanskrit seed-syllables of Śākyamuni and Yakushi Nyorai are depicted above the figure of Amida Buddha descending to earth in this textile as well. Tendai Buddhists regard Śākyamuni as the Buddha of the past, Yakushi Nyorai as the Buddha of the present, and Amida as the Buddha of the future, so this doctrinal source may be the religious justification for this unusual composition.<sup>342</sup>

#### 4.5 FORMAL FEATURES OF HAIR EMBROIDERIES ATTRIBUTED TO CHŪJŌHIME

As explored in Chapter Three, many Buddhist hair embroideries were commissioned for mortuary rituals to assist the deceased in manifesting an auspicious rebirth. For example, the second scroll of the *Illustrated Biography of Hōnen* (*Hōnen shōnin eden* 法然上人絵伝; fifteenth century) depicts the moment in which the man who killed Hōnen's father attains enlightenment despite his transgressions by reciting the *nenbutsu* in front of an image of the *Descent of Amida Triad*. The Buddhist hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime contain certain formal elements that suggest the images were used not to memorialize the deceased but, rather, had a crucial performative, commemorative, and didactic function. Three unique visual characteristics include the position of the Amida Buddha's rays of light, the inclusion of a portrait of Chūjōhime, and references to texts central to the *Taima mandara*. For example, in the Dannō-Hōrinji 檀王法林寺 and Tenshōji 天性寺 *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime, Amida's rays of light extend towards the embroidery's border as if to reach into real space. This visual

<sup>342</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 283.

detail effectively dissolves the boundary between picture plane and viewer, and it appears as if Amida Buddha's light directly shines onto the audience. These embroideries required an intellectual and bodily response from viewers and may have been used by female believers to reenact the moment of entering the Pure Land. Devotees likely chanted the *nenbutsu* in front of these embroideries as their bodies turned westward, their fingers counted prayer beads (*juzu* 数珠), and the scent of incense filled the Buddhist hall. Chūjōhime's *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroideries then required a more somaesthetic and corporeal response from viewers.<sup>343</sup>

Another major characteristic of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries is that many of the textiles also functioned as portraits of the aristocratic woman. Two hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime—the *Descent of Amida Triad* at Kōrinji 高林寺 and the *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* at Tenshōji—depict kneeling figures on the right side of the image. Unlike the dying figures illustrated within dwellings in other *Descent of Amida Triad* embroideries, the individuals depicted in Chūjōhime's hair embroideries hover in space. The *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* attributed to Chūjōhime at Tenshōji, for example, incorporates a figure seated on a raised woven reed mat adorned with green diamond-flower (花菱 *hanabishi*) crests. The woman's head is covered with a purple shawl and she is depicted holding prayer beads as if in the midst of prayer. Both the *makiogami* 巻緒紙, a protective paper placed over the textile, and the wooden container

<sup>343</sup> Somaesthetics is a theoretical concept and emerging methodology that considers the ways in which the mind-body connection heightened one's experience of art. As can be seen in many Buddhist ritual practices involving religious images, the devotee's experience and appreciation of Buddhist images was not purely visual but included multiple senses including sound, smell, touch, and even taste. See Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 177.

for this embroidery claim that the image was sewn by Chūjōhime and that the figure is a self-portrait.<sup>344</sup>

Portraits, referred to as *shin'ei* 真影 meaning “true shadow” in pre-modern Japan, were commissioned not simply to preserve the likeness of a figure, but to stand-in for the individual as these images were perceived to be living manifestations of the deceased.<sup>345</sup> Portraits of holy figures like Chūjōhime were thought to embody the person after death. For example, sculpted portraits of Buddhist patriarchs often contain their ashes as a method of injecting the spirit of the master within the image.<sup>346</sup> Similarly, the purpose of incorporating what was believed to be Chūjōhime’s hair into the portraits mentioned above was not to create a hyper-realistic likeness of her. Rather, since Chūjōhime’s hair is not stitched onto the human figure, but only the deity’s hair, robes, and Sanskrit seed-syllables, the embroidery served to complete her transformation into an enlightened being. As both of the portraits of Chūjōhime show the figure venerating the deity through gestures of prayer, the portrait may have also served to signal to the viewer how to appropriately respond to and venerate the embroidery.

The third characteristic of many hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime is that they reference texts that are an iconographical source for the *Taima mandara* and that are fundamental to the teachings associated with this image. While hair embroideries used in funerary contexts may include Sanskrit seed-syllables, passages from religious texts are rarely used; the Sanskrit seed-syllable for the Amida Buddha is either repeated multiple times or the Sanskrit seed-syllables of

<sup>344</sup> The inscription reads 「中将姫三尊種子附自織自画之真影」 and can be translated into English as “Three Sanskrit seed-syllable image with embroidery and self-portrait woven by Chūjōhime.”

<sup>345</sup> On the role of portraits in Buddhist mortuary rituals, see Karen Gerhart, *The Material Culture of Death* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 147-177.

<sup>346</sup> Willa Jane Tanabe, “The Persistence of Self as Body and Personality in Japanese Buddhist Art,” in *Self as Image in Asian Theory and Practice*, eds. Roger Ames, Wimal Dissanayake, and Thomas Kasulis (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 406-420.



each of the twenty-five bodhisattvas are embroidered onto the textile to allude to their presence.<sup>347</sup> On the upper right and left corners of the *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* embroidery attributed to Chūjōhime at Tenshōji, however, a description concerning the ninth contemplation of the *Contemplation Sutra* is sewn with hair.<sup>348</sup> The ninth contemplation from the *Contemplation Sutra* discusses the benefits of visualizing Amida Buddha and offers a guarantee that those who meditate on the image of this Buddha will be reborn into his paradise after death.<sup>349</sup> Another six-letter *myōgō* hair embroidery attributed to Chūjōhime from Tenshōji also includes an excerpt concerning this ninth contemplation as well as a description of the eighteenth vow of the Amida Buddha.<sup>350</sup> The actual creators of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries then were likely female members of the monastic community who were knowledgeable of Buddhist scriptures and aimed to proselytize the message of these sutras to her devotees.

While the formal aspects of these embroideries are an important factor in determining how a viewer approached the images, equally important are the image's scale and materiality. Iconography alone cannot determine the ritual use of an image. For example, *Descent of Amida* paintings range from 90 centimeters to 130 centimeters, whereas Chūjōhime's hair embroideries of the same genre vary in height from 23 centimeters to 118 centimeters.<sup>351</sup> Each embroidery was

<sup>347</sup> On the doctrinal significance of the twenty-five bodhisattvas, see Fusae C. Kanda, "Hōnen's *Senchaku* Doctrine and His Artistic Agenda," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31, no. 1 (2004): 3-27.

<sup>348</sup> This embroidery is badly frayed and the first Chinese character sewn at the beginning of each column was cut off during a restoration process.

<sup>349</sup> For an English translation of the *Contemplation Sutra*, see Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1994).

<sup>350</sup> The eighteenth vow of the Amida Buddha from the *Hymns in Praise of Birth in the Pure Land* (*Ōjō Raisan* 往生礼讃) was considered central to Hōnen's teachings. The Tenshōji *myōgō* hair embroidery depicts this vow, 「彼仏今現在世成仏 当知本誓 重願不虛 衆生称念 必得往生」, on the left side of the embroidery. The English translation for this vow is, "If, when I am to attain buddhahood, all sentient beings in the ten directions who hold faith with genuine hearts and who wish to be born in my land are not born there with just ten moments of being mindful of me, I will not realize enlightenment. Excluded only are those who have committed the five grave offenses and those who have abused the true Dharma." Jōji Atone and Yōko Hayashi, *The Promise of Amida Buddha: Hōnen's Path to Bliss* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011), 411.

<sup>351</sup> On the scale of embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime, see Appendix D.

created for a distinct audience and purpose. In the following section, I will examine inscriptions on the backs of hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime to show that the materials that comprise the textile also determined the image's efficacy.

#### 4.6 MATERIALITY OF HAIR EMBROIDERIES ATTRIBUTED TO CHŪJŌHIME

Many of the inscriptions on embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime claim to incorporate two materials: Chūjōhime's hair and remnants of lotus threads from the *Taima mandara* tapestry. As explored in Chapter Three, human hair was reserved for depicting the most sacred parts of the Buddhist embroidery such as the deity's hair and robes, Sanskrit seed-syllables, and excerpts from sutras. Using female hair to portray the divine was paradoxical since, in pre-modern Japanese literature, hair was considered a sexualized material, both wild and impure, and became a trope for sexual passion and love. For example, when the poet Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部 (970-1030) describes her longing for a past lover, she writes:

*Kurokami no* as I lay down  
*Midare mo shirazu* oblivious of my black hair  
*Uchifusebain* a state of wild disarray  
*Mazu kakiyarishi* I longed for him who earlier,  
*Hito zo koishiki* had stroked it smooth.<sup>352</sup>

Long, thick hair in pre-modern Japan was perceived as a sign of female beauty, but it was also considered the medium through which women's desires and internal thoughts could be communicated.<sup>353</sup> Women in *monogatari* tales and *waka* poems were described as having tangled

<sup>352</sup> Rajyashree Pandey, *Perfumed Sleeves and Tangled Hair: Body, Woman, and Desire in Medieval Japanese Narratives* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 49.

<sup>353</sup> On the meaning of hair in medieval Japanese literature, see *Ibid.*, 45-54.

hair to signify not only sexual desire but also grief, chaos, and loss, and women cut their hair when they sought to withdraw from the world. In a similar manner, Chūjōhime's hair in these hair embroideries figuratively communicates her desire to renounce the world and attain oneness with the Buddha.

Because female hair was considered impure, materials such as fibers from lotus stems and gold thread may have been incorporated within Buddhist embroideries to purify it. Scientific testing is necessary to determine whether fibers from lotus stems were actually sewn within the embroidery, and it is more likely that silk floss was used. Indeed, it was once widely believed that the original *Taima mandara* tapestry also contained threads from lotus stems, but a scientific investigation in 1951 revealed this idea to be false and proved that silk threads were used instead.<sup>354</sup> Lotus flowers are an emblem of purity in a Buddhist context because, just as the lotus rises from the mud of the pond, so too, it was believed, does the enlightened being also rise above the impurity of this world. Hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime, then, were perceived to consist of materials on opposite ends of the spectrum; the hair of a transgressive woman and lotus threads from the purest plant. Even though actual lotus stems may not be incorporated within these embroideries, the symbolism here is clear—even the degenerate female body can achieve rebirth through the purifying substance of lotus threads.

Gold thread was also widely used in hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime as a purifying substance. The six-letter *myōgō* attributed to Chūjōhime at Hōkyōji 宝鏡寺, for example, is embroidered with hair on top of a ground entirely covered in golden floss. As an imperial

<sup>354</sup> The Intha people of Myanmar continue to create woven textiles and clothing from the fibers of lotus stems. Concerning scientific testing conducted on the Taima mandara tapestry, see Ōga Ichirō 大賀一郎, “Taima mandara wa tsuzureori de aru 当麻曼荼羅は綴織である,” *Kobunkazai no kagaku* 1, no. 1 (1951): 4-11.

convent (*bikuni gosho* 比丘尼御所), Hōkyōji had the economic means for lavish devotional objects, but the use of gold demonstrated more than the nunnery's affluence and had religious significance. It was believed that the Amida Buddha's body was golden and that the use of this color to ornament Buddhist images and sanctuaries could further activate the divine. Gold was also believed to counteract the polluting effects of death and the impurity of the body. For example, the mummy of Fujiwara no Kiyohira 藤原清衡 (1056-1128) within Chūsonji's 中尊寺 Golden Hall (*kondō* 金堂) was interred within a golden casket inside an altar adorned in gold.<sup>355</sup> The material of gold thread, thus, like lotus fibers, was believed to have the capacity to purify the negative powers attributed to female hair.

As these examples show, the materials greatly shaped the meaning imbued in Buddhist hair embroideries and determined the efficacy of the image. Textiles believed to incorporate the hair of a saintly figure or the purifying substance of lotus stems were attributed with magical powers that could heal the body. For example, Pure Land Buddhist believers ingested lint fibers from Tenshōji's *Taima mandara* textile, referred to as "Taima mandara jewels" (*Taima mandara shu* 当麻曼荼羅珠), in order to collapse the distinction between their body and the Buddha.<sup>356</sup> There are no surviving records that indicate that devotees also consumed fibers of Chūjōhime's embroideries. However, as Tenshōji also owns three hair embroideries attributed to her, and both

<sup>355</sup> Sudō Hirotohi 須藤弘敏, "Chūsonji konjigidō 中尊寺金色堂," in *Chūsonji to Mōtsūji* 中尊寺と毛越寺, eds. Sudō Hirotohi and Iwasa Mitsuharu (Osaka: Hoikusha, 1989), 66-130; Mimi Yiengpruksawan, "The House of Gold: Fujiwara Kiyohira's Konjigidō," *Monumenta Nipponica* 48, no. 1 (1993): 33-52.

<sup>356</sup> The *setsuwa* tale, *Shincho monjū* 新著聞集 (1749), and a collection of biographies of people who attained rebirth in the Amida Buddha's Pure Land, the *Shinsen ōjōden* 新撰往生伝, discuss the practice of ingesting fibers from the image of the *Taima mandara* in order to achieve rebirth. The *Mandarasan Tenshōji engi narabi hōmotsu raiyu* 曼荼羅山天性寺縁起並宝物来由, a text concerning the origin of Tenshōji's treasures, claims that the temple had three large grains and thirty-seven small grains of fibers of their *Taima mandara* image. These lint fibers were collected and later consumed by believers for their magical powers. Gangōji Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 元興寺文化財研究所, *Chūjōhime setsuwa no chōsa kenkyū hōkokusho* 中将姫説話の調査研究報告書 (1983), 103.

the *Taima mandara* and these embroideries are connected to her legends, it is possible that devotees aimed to venerate her embroideries in similar ways that engaged multiple senses, not simply sight and sound, but also taste and touch.

#### 4.7 THE PROCESS OF CREATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HAIR EMBROIDERIES ATTRIBUTED TO CHŪJŌHIME

How did hair embroideries become linked with Chūjōhime and why was hair considered to be the crucial material for signifying her rebirth into the Pure Land? Although bodily relics of preeminent Japanese Buddhist male figures, like Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574-622) and the monk Eison 叡尊 (1201-1290), were frequently venerated in pre-modern Japan, it would be inadequate to consider these embroideries in the same category as hair relics.<sup>357</sup> Unlike hair embroideries, most of the relics of saintly Buddhist figures—bones, ashes, and occasionally hair—are not made visible, but interred within pagoda-shaped reliquaries or Buddhist sculptures.<sup>358</sup> Chūjōhime's hair embroideries do not merely commemorate her religious devotion or serve to signify her presence, but are inextricably linked to her act of taking the tonsure because it was believed that she used her own cut hair for these images. Chūjōhime taking the tonsure was a pivotal moment in the stories about her. The act was illustrated or discussed in most of her stories

<sup>357</sup> On relic veneration practices in medieval Japan, see Brian D. Ruppert, *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1-15; Kevin Gray Carr, "Pieces of Princes: Personalized Relics in Medieval Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 38, no. 1 (2011): 93-127.

<sup>358</sup> For a discussion on the formal qualities of pre-modern Japanese reliquaries and their use in ritual ceremonies, see Naitō Sakae 内藤栄, *Shari shōgon bijutsu no kenkyū* 舍利莊嚴美術の研究 (Tokyo: Seishi shuppan, 2010).

and a subtemple named Naka no Bō 中之坊 was even constructed in the 1670s over the site where it was believed that she cut her hair within Taimadera.<sup>359</sup>

What is commemorated through Chūjōhime's hair embroideries is not only the *act* of removing marks of her gender, but *how* she repurposed this gendered material of long black hair into a devotional object. Beginning in the seventeenth century, Chūjōhime's tales and images began to emphasize religious labor rather than meditation practices as the means for her to attain enlightenment. For example, in the *Taima mandara sho* (当麻曼荼羅疏; 1436), a list of sermons concerning the *Taima mandara* compiled by the priest Shōsō 聖聡 (1366-1440), the Amida Buddha appears to Chūjōhime directly after the noblewoman takes the tonsure, but in texts from the seventeenth century onwards, such as the *Taima byakki* 当麻白記 (written in 1614 and published in 1648), the *Mirror for Women of Our Land* (*Honchō jōkan* 本朝女鑑; 1661), a compilation of female biographies for the edification of women, and the *Earlier Pre-Taiheiki* (*Zenzen taiheiki* 前々太平記; 1715), a tale concerning the events of the Nara-period court, Chūjōhime devotes herself to writing a thousand copies of the *Sutra in Praise of the Pure Land* (*Shōsan jōdo kyō* 称讃浄土經) for a full year before her encounter with the Amida Buddha.<sup>360</sup> Images of Chūjōhime from the early modern period also depict the noblewoman directly involved in the creation process of the *Taima mandara*. In the *Illustrated Stories of Chūjōhime* hanging scrolls (*Chūjōhime eden* 中将姫絵伝; 1767) from Taimadera, for example, Chūjōhime—and not the bodhisattva Kannon—is depicted weaving the *Taima mandara*.<sup>361</sup> Furthermore, while

<sup>359</sup> Hioki Atsuko 日沖敦子, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫 (Tokyo: Benseishuppan, 2010), 126.

<sup>360</sup> Tanaka Mie 田中美絵, “Chūjōhime setsuwa no kinsei 中将姫説話の近世,” 87-92.

<sup>361</sup> There are two versions of the *Illustrated Stories of Chūjōhime* hanging scrolls at Taimadera and I am referring to the work currently held at Taimadera's subtemple, Okunoin 奥院. Both of these *Illustrated Stories of Chūjōhime*

Kamakura-period texts claim that Chūjōhime ordered conscripted laborers to gather and prepare lotus stems, in early modern period paintings, Chūjōhime herself is depicted spinning lotus fibers and dyeing lotus stems into threads of five vibrant hues.<sup>362</sup>

Inscriptions on hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime also reinforce the idea that the noblewoman herself was directly involved in the labor and handiwork of these textiles. Phrases such as “sewn by Chūjōhime” 「中将姫縫」 or “woven by Chūjōhime herself” 「中将姫自織」 were used rather than the general expression of “created by Chūjōhime,” 「中将姫作」 used to refer to a patron not directly involved in the physical creation process of the image. The inscription on the *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* hair embroidery from Konbuin 興福院, for example, reads 「中将姫之御クシ之ケニテ御テツカラ御縫ヒ、蓮花其外ハ曼荼羅之糸ニテ御ヌイ也」 and provides further extensive details that “Chūjōhime sewed this image with her own hands using hair from her own comb and threads from the [Taima] mandara.” As Yuhang Li has noted in her study of hair embroidery practices in China, the creation process was incredibly laborious and highly ritualized.<sup>363</sup> After women acquired the hair, either through the painful process of plucking hair from their own heads or using sheared hair from a tonsure, a set of precise procedures were followed to prepare, clean, and soften the hair to be used as floss. For Japanese hair

hanging scrolls are said to be based on the text, *Chūjōhime gyōjōki* (中将姫行状記; 1730), but the images and inscriptions on the Okunoin version deviates from precedence. For example, the inscription states 「法如以藕絲織曼荼羅」 and the illustrations suggest that Chūjōhime, and not the bodhisattva Kannon, wove the Taima mandara tapestry. Ganjōji Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 元興寺文化財研究所, *Chūjōhime setsuwa no chōsa kenkyū hōkokusho* 中将姫説話の調査研究報告書, 40-41.

<sup>362</sup> Nara National Museum, *Taimadera: Gokuraku jōdo eno akogare tokubetsuten taima mandara kansei 1250 nen kinen* 当麻寺：極楽浄土へのあこがれ特別展当麻曼荼羅完成 1250 年記念 (Nara: Nara National Museum, 2013), 320.

<sup>363</sup> There are no oil stains on these hair embroideries, which indicates that the hair was treated or prepared in some way. Chen Chaozhi suggests that the hair was first washed to remove oils or dirt and then the hair was softened so that it could be easily used as thread. See Yuhang Li, “Sensory Devotions: Hair Embroidery and Gendered Corporeal Practice in Chinese Buddhism,” in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): 370.

embroideries, two or three strands of hair were then grouped together and added, stitch by stitch, into the silk ground.<sup>364</sup>

It is evident from the visual and textual accounts that the model of female piety in the early modern period had changed. Chūjōhime was no longer regarded as Japan's version of Queen Vaidehī who meditated quietly to attain salvation from the Amida Buddha. Instead, the early modern Chūjōhime tales and inscriptions on Chūjōhime's embroideries imply that it is through acts of religious labor, such as sewing images of the Buddha, and sacrificing one's body through the donation of hair, that one could achieve rebirth into the Pure Land. Furthermore, unlike earlier Buddhist female saints who were celebrated for denying their sexuality, Chūjōhime is commemorated precisely for her womanly work (embroidery) and her use of sexualized materials (long black hair). As Keller Kimbrough writes, "rather than sublimating or denying her sexuality... [Chūjōhime] uses [her sexuality] as her very means of overcoming the obstacles of her gender."<sup>365</sup> This model of female piety directly contrasts with the teachings of the *Blood Bowl Sutra*. The *Blood Bowl Sutra* claimed that women must rely on the saving grace of rituals and the monastic community at large, but Chūjōhime took her salvation into her own hands, literally, and achieved enlightenment as a woman.

<sup>364</sup> There are many technical differences between the creation process of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist hair embroideries. Hair was sewn into Chinese Buddhist hair embroideries by one of three methods: 1) strands of hair were grouped together as one 2) a single strand of hair was used as a single thread or 3) a single strand of hair was split into many finer pieces. Only the first method appears to have been used in Japanese Buddhist hair embroideries. Furthermore, many inscriptions on Chinese images embroidered with hair claim that the hair was acquired by plucking it off one's head. The term "pluck" (Ch. *bafa* 拔髮) does not appear on inscriptions for Japanese Buddhist hair embroideries, so it is more likely that only tonsured hair was used in Japan. On the techniques of Chinese hair embroidery, see Li, "Sensory Devotions," 361-367.

<sup>365</sup> Kimbrough, *Preachers, Poets, Women, and the Way*, 225.



## 4.8 THE PROVENANCE OF AND AUDIENCE FOR HAIR EMBROIDERIES ATTRIBUTED TO CHŪJŌHIME

The preceding sections examined the formal qualities, materiality, and religious significance of Buddhist hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime to show that these images served as evidence that women could follow Chūjōhime's example and attain enlightenment for themselves. This leads to the question of how hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime began to appear at temples all across Japan. Inscriptions located on the back of these textiles reveal that the monks of Taimadera distributed the images to two kinds of individuals: 1) wealthy pilgrims visiting Taimadera, who would later donate the embroideries to local temples, and 2) monks associated with Taimadera who received Chūjōhime's hair embroideries to use for ritual ceremonies and proselytization activities.

The earliest text concerning the origin of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries dates to 1492 and can be found on the back of Shōchi'in's 正智院 *Descent of Amida Triad* embroidery. The inscription claims that this image embroidered with Chūjōhime's hair is one of forty-eight embroideries made by her held within Taimadera's collection.<sup>366</sup> The earliest donation of one of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries is recorded in the *Midajirō hosshinden* 弥陀次郎発心伝 preaching text (*kangebon* 勧化本), written in 1765. This text explains that Shōkū 証空 (1177-1247), the monk who rediscovered the *Taima mandara* in 1212, received multiple copies of the *Sutra in Praise of the Pure Land* written by Chūjōhime herself, as well as a *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable* embroidery created with her tonsured hair from a Taimadera monk named Ken'a 顕阿 during a

<sup>366</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Ito no mihotoke* 糸のみほとけ, 13.

recent visit.<sup>367</sup> Upon returning to his temple at Zenrinji 禅林寺, the text claims that Shōkū stored Chūjōhime's sutras and embroidery there.<sup>368</sup> This story, however, was likely fabricated at a later date because Kamakura-period texts concerning Shōkū's visits to Taimadera do not record the bestowal of such gifts. Although the text may be apocryphal, it offers proof that images and texts said to be created by Chūjōhime were considered precious items during the early modern period.

Illustrated handscrolls from as early as the thirteenth century reveal that pilgrims and prominent monks received sutras believed to be copied by Chūjōhime after their visits to Taimadera. For example, the *Illustrated Biography of the Priest Ippen* handscroll (*Ippen Hijiri-e* 一遍聖絵), created in 1299, claims that the itinerant monk, Ippen, received a copy of the *Sutra in Praise of the Pure Land* written by Chūjōhime after his pilgrimage to Taimadera, noting that he cherished the object throughout his life.<sup>369</sup> Sutras purported to be copied by Chūjōhime are also found in temples across Japan and attest to her popularity. Pure Land Buddhist temples from Taimadera to Tanjōji 誕生寺 in Nara to Renshōji 蓮生寺 in Saga Prefecture, among many others claim to own sutras copied by Chūjōhime.<sup>370</sup> An entry from 1492.3.8 of the *Oyudono no ue no nikki* 御湯殿上日記 indicates that even imperial female attendants acquired sutras copied by

<sup>367</sup> Hioki 日沖, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, 369.

<sup>368</sup> This hair embroidery mentioned here may refer to the *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad* currently held at Zenrinji.

<sup>369</sup> Scroll Eight of the *Illustrated Biography of the Priest Ippen* handscroll discusses Ippen's visit to Taimadera. See Komatsu Shigemi 小松茂美, *Ippen Shōnin eden* 一遍上人絵伝 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981), 223-226.

<sup>370</sup> Tales concerning Chūjōhime, including the *Taimadera ryūki* 当麻寺流記 (1231), claim that she created one thousand copies of the *Sutra in Praise of the Pure Land*. Scholars suggest that Chūjōhime became associated with this particular sutra at a later date because numerous Nara-period copies were found in Taimadera's collection. The Nara-period copies in Taimadera are thought to originate to 760 CE and were initially created for the seventy-seventh memorial service of Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701-760) because records state that 1,700 copies of the *Sutra in Praise of the Pure Land* were created by the Sutra Scriptorium (*Shakyōjo* 写経所) of Tōdaiji 東大寺 and distributed to temples all across Japan. There is an inscription at the end of this *Sutra in Praise of the Pure Land* at Taimadera which claims that Chūjōhime wrote this text. Note that *Hōnyō* 法如 is Chūjōhime's Buddhist name. Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Taimadera* 当麻寺, 286.

Chūjōhime.<sup>371</sup> It is likely that, as the Chūjōhime cult spread, the objects pilgrims could attain from Taimadera expanded to include hair embroideries attributed to this noblewoman as well. The wide circulation of objects said to have been made by Chūjōhime reveals just how pervasive her cult had become and testifies that her popularity transcended class and even sectarian divides. In fact, embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime have been discovered even at temples with no association to her cult, such as at the imperial convent, Hōkyōji, the headquarters for the Ji sect of Pure Land Buddhism, Shōjōkōji 清浄光寺 and even Shōchi'in 正智院 an esoteric Shingon Buddhist temple at Mt. Kōya, the sacred mountain where women were forbidden to visit.

After a patron acquired one of these hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime, inscriptions on the back of some images suggest that they were used as personal Buddhist icons (*nenjibutsu* 念持仏). Personal Buddhas in pre-modern Japan were frequently installed in one's private living space for personal veneration or carried around as talismans for private use.<sup>372</sup> After the owner's death, the image was frequently donated to a local temple by a family member; this practice applies to Chūjōhime's embroideries as well. For example, the inscriptions on the Dannō-Hōrinji's *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroidery, as well as the Kōrinji's 高林寺 *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroidery, claim that these images were used as personal Buddhas by patrons Kimata Moriyasu 木俣守安 (1585-1673), the chief retainer (*karō* 家老) of Hikone 彦根, for the former, and the mother of Kikkawa Hiroyoshi 吉川広嘉 (seventeenth century) for the latter. Before these works were used in temples, the small-scale Kōrinji *Descent of Amida* (23 cm tall, 10.2 cm wide)

<sup>371</sup> Hioki 日沖, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, 327-330.

<sup>372</sup> Embroidered examples of personal Buddhas during the pre-modern period were quite unusual since most personal Buddhas were small-scale sculpted images carved from aromatic wood. Personal Buddhas could belong to an individual, a particular family, or the clan at large. For further discussion on the function of personal Buddhas, see Christian Matthias Boehm, "The Concept of *Danzō*: 'Sandalwood Images' in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture of the 8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries" (PhD diss., University of London), 95-101.

was likely carried around by Hiroyoshi's mother as an amulet whereas the larger Dannō-Hōrinji embroidery (118.7 cm tall and 39.2 cm wide) was likely hung and displayed within Moriyasu's residence. At some later date, the families of these individuals donated the embroideries to temples connected to Chūjōhime's legends, such as Kōrinji, and to temples with numerous images and rituals that celebrated Chūjōhime's enlightenment, such as Dannō-Hōrinji.

Kōrinji is one of the cult temples associated with the legends of Chūjōhime and owns a hair embroidery attributed to her. It is one of four temples including Tanjōji 誕生寺, Tokuyūji 徳融寺, and Anyōji 安養寺, clustered together within the Kitsuji 木辻 District of Nara. Tanjōji was believed to be a temple constructed on the place where Chūjōhime was born, Kōrinji is where Chūjōhime first received her Buddhist training, Anyōji is believed to have been founded by Chūjōhime, and Tokuyūji maintains a grave marker for Chūjōhime's father, Fujiwara Toyonari.<sup>373</sup> The *Abbreviated Origin Story of Kōrinji* (*Kōrinji ryaku engi* 高林寺略縁起), also claims that the original temple where Kōrinji was constructed burned down in 1180 and was rebuilt again as a nunnery in 1534.<sup>374</sup> The Kitsuji District where these four temples are located was known as Nara's red-light district as early as the seventeenth century. Records from 1678 claim that this area attracted many visitors each year as all four temples celebrated Chūjōhime's enlightenment on the fourteenth day of the fourth month.<sup>375</sup> It is likely that prostitutes located in this district empathized with Chūjōhime's karmic punishments and turned to her teachings and material objects to attain deliverance from their own worldly and soteriological concerns.

<sup>373</sup> Hioki 日沖, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, 76-79.

<sup>374</sup> Nara Shishi Henshū Shingikai 奈良市史編集審議会, *Nara-shi shi* 奈良市史 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1968), 168-169. For the history of Kōrinji, see Nakada Yuka 仲田侑加, "Naramachi no amadera: Kōrinji no rekishi to hōtō 奈良町の尼寺・高林寺の歴史と法灯," *Kansai daigaku hakubutsukan kiyō* 関西大学博物館紀要 24 (2018): 63-73.

<sup>375</sup> Hioki 日沖, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, 77.

Tenshōji and Daiunin 大雲院 in Kyoto are both temples that appointed head priests associated with Taimadera. Tenshōji has three hair embroideries attributed to this saintly woman—a *Descent of Amida Triad*, a *Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad*, and a Six Letter *myōgō*. The temple was founded by the monk Meyo 眼譽, who had received his training at Taimadera and traveled to the capital in 1528 to construct this temple and spread the tales of Chūjōhime.<sup>376</sup> Besides three of Chūjōhime's hair embroideries, Tenshōji also has two 170 centimeter-tall hanging scrolls depicting thirty-five scenes of Chūjōhime's life (*Chūjōhime eden* 中将姫絵伝; 1669), a wooden statue of Chūjōhime said to have been carved by the noblewoman herself, and an Eleven-Headed Kannon sculpture, known as the Weaving Princess Kannon (*Orihime Kannon* 織姫観音), which is believed to be the reincarnated figure of Chūjōhime.<sup>377</sup> Daiunin's monk, Kōyo (1629-1686), was also associated with Taimadera as he visited the temple in 1677 to oversee a restoration project of their mandalas including the *Taima mandara*.<sup>378</sup> Daiunin also has a *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroidery attributed to Chūjōhime, and it is likely that he acquired this image after one of these visits.

Patrons who owned Chūjōhime's hair embroideries also donated their personal Buddhist icons to cult temples that were related to Chūjōhime, such as Dannō-Hōrinji. For example, after the death of Kimata Moriyasu, his wife dedicated the *Descent of Amida Triad* hair embroidery attributed to Chūjōhime to this temple. Dannō-Hōrinji was founded by Taichū 袋中 (1552-1639),

<sup>376</sup> Tenshōji was originally constructed in Mandarachō 曼荼羅町 of Kyoto but was rebuilt in its current location near the Kamo River when Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊富秀頼 (1537-1598), the Imperial Regent (*kanpaku* 関白) of the time, rearranged the urban plan of the capital in 1590.

<sup>377</sup> Saitō Chōshū 斎藤長秋, ed. *Edo meisho zue* 江戸名所図会. Kadokawa Bunko 角川文庫, vol. 2522 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1968), 73.

<sup>378</sup> Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999): 130-134.

a monk who traveled across Japan to share the teachings of the Pure Land Buddhist sect and commissioned many images related to Chūjōhime's devotional practices.<sup>379</sup> These images include a painting of *Amida Buddha's Descent to Taima Temple* (*Taima nerikuyōzu* 当麻練供養図) in 1624, which illustrates Amida and his retinue welcoming Chūjōhime into the Western Paradise, and a *Taima mandara* wood carving from 1632.<sup>380</sup>

#### 4.9 RITUAL USE OF HAIR EMBROIDERIES ATTRIBUTED TO CHŪJŌHIME

This brings us to the question of how these Buddhist hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime were used and why these images were viewed and touched by so many believers within and outside the monastic communities. I argue that embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime were displayed for a variety of rituals including picture recitation performances, temple exhibitions, and *mukaekō* ceremonies to further her cult. All three ceremonies were generally held concurrently on the same day each year—on the fourteenth day of the fourth month—to commemorate the day it is believed that Chūjōhime attained rebirth.<sup>381</sup> These ritual services were also opportune moments for the monastic community to proselytize to large gatherings and solicit donations.

*Etoki*, or picture recitation, is a didactic storytelling performance held at many temples since the thirteenth century to proselytize Buddhist doctrine to a mainly illiterate audience. For picture recitations, temples frequently used paintings such as handscrolls, hanging scrolls, and

<sup>379</sup> Fujita Reio 藤田励夫 and Matsuo Kaoru 松尾かをる, *Ryūkyū to Taichū Shōnin ten: Eisā no kigen o tadoru* 琉球と袋中上人展：エイサーの起源をたどる (Dazaifu: Kyūshū Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, 2011), 64-70.

<sup>380</sup> Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館, *Taimadera* 当麻寺, 289-230.

<sup>381</sup> The *mukaekō* ritual continues to be performed every year at Taimadera but is now held on May 14. The date was changed when the official Japanese calendar switched from the lunisolar Chinese calendar to the Gregorian calendar in 1873.

mandalas that included scenes such as Buddhist hells, biographies of saintly figures, and legends concerning the founding of temples (*engi* 縁起).<sup>382</sup> *Etoki* was equally central to preaching Chūjōhime's legends. In fact, the first pictorialized example of an *etoki* performance comes from the previously mentioned mid-thirteenth century *Illustrated Story of the Miraculous Origin of the Taima mandara* handscroll.<sup>383</sup> In this image, Amida Buddha, transformed into a nun, explains the meaning behind the iconography of the *Taima mandara* in order to assist Chūjōhime in attaining enlightenment. The illustrated handscroll itself was also likely used in *etoki* performances due to its large size—most Kamakura-period scrolls are around 30 centimeters in height, but this handscroll, at 48.7 centimeters, could be seen by more viewers.<sup>384</sup>

In addition to the illustrated handscrolls mentioned above, there is evidence that temples used textiles such as the *Taima mandara*, to perform *etoki* related to Chūjōhime's teachings. For example, the *Taima mandala chū* 當麻曼荼羅註 (1223), a commentary on the work and use of the *Taima mandara* tapestry by Shōkū, states that the image was used in *etoki* performances.<sup>385</sup> During the *etoki* lecture, Shōkū writes that a monk kneeling in front of the *Taima mandara* used a feather pointer to draw attention to certain details of the image and explain its meaning to the viewers. Many temples with hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime acquired numerous images concerning the noblewoman's enlightenment, therefore, it is likely these artworks were treated as an ensemble during a single *etoki* performance; the handscroll was used to explain the life of

<sup>382</sup> Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 11-15.

<sup>383</sup> Ruch, "Woman to Woman," 561.

<sup>384</sup> Sugahara Futoshi 菅原毛布寿史, "Kōmyōji bon 'Taima mandara engi emaki' Hanmonogatari (Anchi naratibu) no gihō 光明寺本「当麻曼荼羅縁起絵巻」反物語 (アンチ・ナラティブ) の技法," *Ningen to Kankyō* 6 (2013): 39-43.

<sup>385</sup> Dix, "Writing Women into Religious Histories," 18.

Chūjōhime, the *Taima mandara* was used to describe Amida's Pure Land, and a hair embroidery created by Chūjōhime was used as an exemplary model of female devotion.

Hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime were also displayed in *kaichō* events alongside the temple's collection of other related images. A *kaichō*, literally meaning "opening of the curtain," is a temporary display of temple treasures to the general public in order to raise funds and proselytize Buddhist doctrine. The practice of holding a *kaichō* event reached its peak in popularity between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries and became a profitable platform for fundraising since an entrance fee was collected from the viewers.<sup>386</sup> *Kaichō* events at Pure Land Buddhist temples associated with Chūjōhime usually overlapped with the annual *mukaekō* ceremony that celebrated her enlightenment. The four temples mentioned previously as being located in Nara's Kitsuji red-light district, for example, held *kaichō* concurrently with *mukakeō* every year on the fourteenth day of the fourth month, usually outdoors, to accommodate large crowds.<sup>387</sup> During a *mukaekō* ceremony, participants wore special robes and masks to physically transform themselves into Buddhas and bodhisattvas as they reenacted the role of Amida Buddha's retinue in welcoming Chūjōhime into the Pure Land.<sup>388</sup> These performances took on the appearance of a three-dimensional representations of a *Descent of Amida* painting as participants marched in procession towards the western edge of the temple precinct.

<sup>386</sup> For details on the history and function of *kaichō* events at Buddhist temples, see Nam-Lin Hur, "Invitation to the Secret Buddha of Zenkōji Kaichō and Religious Culture in Early Modern Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 36, no. 1 (2009): 45-63; Yui Suzuki, "Temple as Museum, Buddha as Art: Hōryūji's 'Kudara Kannon' and Its Great Treasure Repository," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* No. 52, Museums: Crossing Boundaries (Autumn 2007): 128-140.

<sup>387</sup> Hioki 日沖, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, 79.

<sup>388</sup> Sarah Johanna Horton, "Mukaekō: Practice for the Deathbed," in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism* eds. Jacqueline I. Stone and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 44-53; Gail Chin Bryant, "The Mukaekō of Taimadera: A Case of Salvation Re-enacted," *Cahiers d'Extrême Asia* 8 (1995): 325-35.



Temples also displayed hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime in rural areas in the form of traveling exhibitions (*degaichō* 出開帳). The *Kaichō danwa* 開帳談話 (1829), an illustrated book by the *ukiyo-e* artist Kōriki Enkō'an 高力猿猴庵 (1756-1831), depicts a touring exhibition from Taimadera that was performed for five years throughout the countryside of Japan.<sup>389</sup> Tanenobu's illustration shows men, women, and children walking through an exhibition at a temple in Nagano Prefecture, as nuns direct the visitors' attention to the many images on view including Chūjōhime's hair embroideries. Hank Glassman has noted that all the handlers of the art objects in these illustrations are nuns, which implies that only women had the privilege to display and explain works connected to Chūjōhime.<sup>390</sup> Like the nuns proselytizing the *Blood Bowl Sutra* on the Kumano pilgrimage route, the discourse concerning Chūjōhime's enlightenment passed from one woman to another, yet, the content of what these nuns preached differed; Kumano *bikuni* claimed that women were bound to a polluted female body whereas nuns proselytizing Chūjōhime's teachings used her hair embroideries as evidence that the female body could be transformed into a vessel of purity.

#### 4.10 CREATING HAIR EMBROIDERIES AS A DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE

Legends of Chūjōhime from the early modern period portray her as a woman capable of overturning misogynistic precepts like *nyōnin kekkaï* and achieving enlightenment despite her female body. As such, early modern women began to take on the practice of hair embroidery in

<sup>389</sup> Hayashi Masahiko 林雅彦, *Edo o itoite, jōdo e mairamu: Bukkyō bungaku ron* 穢土を厭ひて浄土へ参らむ：仏教文学論 (Tokyo: Meicho shuppan, 1995), 277-340.

<sup>390</sup> Glassman, "'Show Me the Place Where My Mother Is!,'" 154-157.

the late seventeenth century not to memorialize the deceased, but to follow her example and transform their bodies into a pure vessel in this life. The creation of bodily devotional objects then became an exemplary method for women to attain closeness with Amida Buddha and eradicate the impurity of the female body. By the late seventeenth century, both men and women of the Pure Land Buddhist faith began to donate their hair for inclusion in embroideries. This practice was especially popular in rural areas because it was believed to confer the same benefits as traveling to Taimadera on a pilgrimage.

Many seventeenth-century hair embroideries survive in convents and were created by nuns not to memorialize the deceased, but as a devotional practice to attain oneness with the divine. Some nuns stored their long locks of hair, cut from when they took the tonsure, in carefully labeled boxes while others incorporated these locks into images.<sup>391</sup> The imperial convent, Jijūin 慈受院, for example, has a hair embroidery of the *Mantra of Light* (*Kōmyō shingon* 光明真言) that was likely created by one of the nuns. The sutra is depicted sixty times on a white hemp ground and each of the Chinese characters of the text is sewn with human hair. Emperor Go-Mizunoo's granddaughter, Abbess Daiki Songō 大規尊臬 (1674-1719) of Kōshōin 光照院, also created a six-letter *myōgō* by pasting her hair on a silk ground decorated with small cut strips of gold leaf (*kirikane* 切金).<sup>392</sup> It was believed that Daiki Songō, a fervent follower of Rinzai 臨濟 Zen, overcame the impurity of her female body and attained enlightenment by solving a koan 公案, or Zen riddle. The inscription on Daiki Songō's portrait reads, "[Daiki Songō made] the essential Zen

<sup>391</sup> Barbara Ruch, *Days of Discipline and Grace: Treasures from the Imperial Buddhist Convents of Kyoto* (New York, Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies, 1998), 18.

<sup>392</sup> Daiki Songō first began her monastic training in 1683 at Enshōji 円照寺 under the guidance of Abbess Bunchi and may have been inspired by Bunchi's own relic creation practices. See Patricia Fister, "Visual Culture in Japan's Imperial Rinzai Zen Convents: The Making of Objects as Expressions of Religious Devotion and Practice," in *Zen and Material Culture*, eds. Pamela Winfield and Steven Heine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 179-81.

teaching her sole standard, she reached the deepest subtleties of perfect and sudden attainment, acquiring Buddha-wisdom in all its forms. She soon received her teacher's sanction of enlightenment.”<sup>393</sup> The hair embroidery of Daiki Songō then does not simply represent her wish for enlightenment, but rather, confirms that she already achieved it.

By the late seventeenth century, the practice of creating Buddhist hair embroideries shifted from a personal ritual practice to a communal project that engaged both men and women of all socioeconomic classes from the imperial court, the monastic community, and especially commoners. A monk named Kūnen 空念 from Daijuin 大樹院 in Fushimi, Kyoto, traveled throughout Japan from 1678 to 1692 and sewed sixty-nine large-scale hair embroideries for Pure Land Buddhist temples from northern Kyūshū to northeastern Japan. While the first few embroidered images consisted of the *Buddha's Nirvana* (*Nehanzu* 涅槃図) and *Descent of Amida and Twenty-Five Bodhisattvas* embroideries (*Nijūgo bosatsu raigōzu* 二十五菩薩来迎図), most of the later hair embroideries were representations of the *Taima mandara*.<sup>394</sup> Unlike hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime which used a combination of both silk thread and hair, however, every stitch in Kūnen's embroideries incorporated human hair. Primarily using a simple backstitch technique, Kūnen differentiated between black and white hairs by using the latter for clouds and the silhouettes of the figures.

Kūnen often created embroidered images with hair for temples in rural areas right before reconstruction projects. Temples collected funds from donors who incorporated their hair into images. This was a lucrative fundraising method, as the *Okufuji monogatari* 奥富士物語, for

<sup>393</sup> Patricia Fister, *Amamonzeki: A Hidden Heritage – Treasures of the Japanese Imperial Convents* (Tokyo: Sankei Shinbunsha, 2009), 87.

<sup>394</sup> Hioki 日沖, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, 293.

example, claims that in 1691, 128,004 people donated their hairs to be incorporated into a *Taima mandara* hair embroidery that was 82 centimeters tall by 79 centimeters wide, at Sesshūin 摂取院 in present-day Aomori Prefecture. The number of contributors may be an exaggeration, but accounts retelling Kūnen's visits to Sesshūin remain that confirm just how momentous this event was in the lives of rural believers. The village headman (shōya 庄屋) of Goshogawara 五所河原 described Kūnen's visit in the *Hirayama nikki* 平山日記, written in 1691. The text states,

八月朔日より藤崎万日念仏堂ニ而旅僧参、曼荼羅繼申候、此僧ハ上方より行脚之僧ニ候由、男女不寄老若、人之髪毛を集、其髪毛を集、其髪毛ニ而縫申候間、是奇代之名人と申候。参詣之男女髪を抜れながら難有と申候而銭ヲ出、拝み申候。<sup>395</sup>

“From the First of August, a traveling monk from Kamigata (Kyoto region) visited [Sesshūin] to create a [*Taima*] *mandara*. Hair was collected from both men and women, both the young and the old, because Kūnen wanted to use hair as the material for [the embroidery]. People referred to Kūnen as a master of conspiring wonderful feats. I witnessed male and female visitors alike, in the midst of prayer, offering their thanks and coins, as their hairs were drawn [from their head].”<sup>396</sup>

Kūnen's hair embroideries also gained wide acclaim among feudal lords and the imperial court. The *Okufuji monogatari*, for example, includes an account of Tsugaru Nobumasa 津軽信政 (1647-1710), the feudal lord of the Hirosaki Domain, contributing three strands of hair to be used to portray a portion of Amida Buddha's neck in Sesshūin's *Taima mandara*.<sup>397</sup> In 1678, Emperor Go-Mizunoo also visited Usa Hachimangū 宇佐八幡 in Ōita Prefecture to view one of Kūnen's completed *Taima mandara* hair embroideries.<sup>398</sup> Kūnen preached that the merits of incorporating

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>396</sup> English translation by author.

<sup>397</sup> Hioki 日沖, *Taima mandara to Chūjōhime* 当麻曼荼羅と中将姫, 284.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 273-74.

hair into Buddhist embroideries extended to include benefits for this life as well. The *Sesshūin Hasshū Mandara no engi* 摂取院髮繡曼陀羅之縁起, an origin story concerning the Sesshūin Taima mandara hair embroidery claims that, “according to this act, your father and mother who precede you will find themselves in the Pure Land and the children and descendants you leave behind will enjoy longevity.”<sup>399</sup>

While hair embroideries were created in larger numbers during the late seventeenth century by both women and men, the connection between this devotional practice and Chūjōhime as well as its relationship to Taimadera remained unforgotten by participants. Kūnen was referred to as the “Second Coming of Chūjōhime Kannon” (*Chūjōhime Kannon bosatsu sairai* 中将姫観音菩薩再来) in texts and was celebrated as a reincarnated figure of Chūjōhime. Kūnen also preached that paying tribute to the *Taima mandara* hair embroidery acquired the same merit as conducting a pilgrimage to Taimadera which was likely an appealing teaching to rural commoners who could not make the arduous journey to visit the site where Chūjōhime attained rebirth and view in person the embroideries created by this woman.

#### 4.11 CONCLUSION

Hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime were crucial objects used to proselytize stories about this saintly woman at Pure Land Buddhist temples. Chūjōhime’s Buddhist hair embroideries were distributed by patrons who likely first received them as gifts for supporting Taimadara and

<sup>399</sup> The English translation comes from the following sentence, “此因縁によりて先立父母は浄土に往生し、残し子孫は寿命長生ならん”

by other temples connected to her legends. In religious ceremonies, these textiles were used for didactic and commemorative purposes and were displayed to the public during picture recitation performances, temple exhibitions, and reenactments of Chūjōhime's rebirth. In particular, hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime were considered material evidence that women were capable of achieving enlightenment in this life, despite the impurity of the female body.

By considering how early modern viewers responded to hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime, we can conclude that beliefs concerning the polluted female body were contentious at best; in some cases, the female body was celebrated, while in others it was an object of disgust. Although scholars have claimed that early modern society was preoccupied with notions about female pollution, we need to consider the multiple solutions that were also proposed by monastic communities to counteract defilement. Venerating Chūjōhime's hair embroideries and donating one's hair to be used in embroideries were likely just two of many devotional acts that developed in response to beliefs in blood impurity. Such acts began to permeate religious thinking during the late seventeenth century and gradually transformed conventional Pure Land Buddhist practices into a more embodied experience.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this investigation has been to demonstrate how Buddhist hair embroideries enabled women to intervene in ideological and social structures of medieval Japan and to talk past or sidestep patriarchal Buddhist doctrine. Through the pages of this dissertation, I have argued that Buddhist hair embroideries enabled women to construct their own alternative to the dominant discourse, allowing them to expand their power and societal roles. These textiles gave voice to women and enabled them to forge their own strategies for salvation and enlightenment. Each chapter of my dissertation focused on different ways that Japanese women used Buddhist embroideries to shape new attitudes towards female devotion. Chapter Two examined the adoption and adaptation of embroidered images depicting the bodhisattva Kannon from China to Japan to argue that the form, use, and meaning of these textiles differed by cultural context and even by Buddhist sect. Chapter Three traced the development of Buddhist hair embroideries to show how this medium was thought to accrue merit in this life and the afterlife for aristocratic women. Chapter Four analyzed hair embroideries attributed to Chūjōhime to consider why these textiles became central to her cultic practices.

I have introduced questions of agency, power, and patronage into the study of Japanese embroidered Buddhist icons by considering themes such as the process of embroidering, the circulation and networks of pilgrimage sites and devotional images, the materiality of embroidered icons, and ritual use. In doing so, my research has made contributions in three broad areas of study. First, it contributes to the study of women and Buddhism by revealing the central role that the body played in Buddhist gendered ritual practices in medieval Japan. Indeed, the allure of Buddhist hair embroideries stemmed from their visceral and sensory appeal as the material remains of a loved

one or holy figure became intertwined with the image of the Buddha. Second, my study furthers our understanding of how women made embroideries to express their soteriological and bodily agency and opens dialogue with works discussing the role of women and needlework across East Asia. Finally, through its focus on medium and materiality, my dissertation deepens our understanding of textile arts, which have generally been regarded as “low art” in the field of art history and demonstrates that these images are worthy of study.

And yet, there are many more questions that remain unanswered. One avenue for further research would be to consider Buddhist hair embroideries from a cross-regional perspective. The practice of women incorporating hair within embroidered Buddhist images thrived across China, Korea, and Japan, yet little is known about the transmission of this medium across time and space. Second, it is unclear precisely when the making of Buddhist hair embroideries shifted from a personal gendered devotional practice into a communal project that engaged and united both male and female parishioners in Japan. Examining this change can perhaps offer an explanation of why a majority of these monumental Buddhist hair embroideries that incorporate both male and female hair exist today in rural areas. Finally, another approach to Buddhist hair embroideries would be to examine these textiles along class lines. Most of the women described in this study were members of aristocratic families and represent a tiny fraction of the elite. Future research could potentially investigate how Buddhist textiles served to enrich the lives of women at all levels of society.

There are also many discoveries yet to be made concerning embroidered Buddhist icons. Previously unknown embroidered Buddhist images continue to be found particularly at temples in rural areas on the western coast and the northeastern region of Japan. Over the past decade, these rediscovered textiles include monumental early-nineteenth-century embroidered images of the



*Taima mandara*, the *Death of the Historical Buddha* (*nehanzu* 涅槃図), and a *Six Letter myōgō* 名号 discovered at Gokurakuji 極楽寺 in Kashiwazaki city of Niigata Prefecture. An embroidered image of the bodhisattva Monju (*Monju bosatsu* 文殊菩薩 Sk. Mañjuśrī) was also discovered in Yamagata Prefecture. An inscription embroidered on the upper portion of the textile claims this the image was created by the nun Eihoni 永浦尼, who was the mother of Mogami Yoshiaki 最上義光 (1546-1614), the daimyō of the Yamagata Domai, in 1563. As Japanese libraries, museums, and archives continue to digitize their collections, research on this topic will also become easier and scholars will have access to new information. Hair embroideries in temple collections will likely continue to remain inaccessible to the average lay person and will probably only periodically be displayed in temple *kaichō* exhibitions. Nevertheless, museums are more frequently showcasing obscure works from temple repositories. For the 2018 exhibition on Buddhist textiles at the Nara National Museum, temples had an incentive to share these valuable yet fragile textiles because woven and embroidered Buddhist icons were restored, meticulously surveyed, and photographed at the museum's expense.

In 2018, I had the opportunity to visit the Nara National Museum's major exhibition on Buddhist textiles and see all these embroideries that have miraculously stood the test of time together under one roof. I could make out the fine needlework—the hundreds of stitches contained within a single flower—that I was unable to see in photographic reproductions. Up close, the shapes dissolved into countless delicate threads, lines, and patches of color. Just the thought of the hours of work it took to stitch a single flower made me dizzy. Here is where I encountered a seventeenth-century embroidered image of Prince Shōtoku (574-622), the recipient of one of the oldest extant embroideries in Japan, now represented as the subject of an embroidered icon himself. Depicted in the prince regent form (*sesshō taishi* 摂政太子), Shōtoku is seated on a straw

mat holding a scepter with both hands that would have been carried by distinguished figures in government.<sup>400</sup> His face and hands are painted with cream-colored pigment on plain weave silk while the rest of the textile is embroidered using satin stitch. Gold twisted thread is also stitched on top to superimpose shimmering floral motifs on Shotoku's robes and crown. Black thread here however has replaced human hair to depict Shōtoku's own hair and moustache. The names of patrons, which were previously inscribed on the back of the embroidery, are now stitched on the front near the bottom of the image with black, green, and yellow threads. Did the patrons themselves stitch their names into the textile? The inscription lists the names of male and female donors who dedicated this embroidered image to Hōryūji 法隆寺 in 1690, the same temple founded by the prince in 607 CE.<sup>401</sup> No specific motivation for the icon's creation is given in the inscription, but it is perhaps safe to assume that embroidered Buddhist icons lost their gendered ritual function during this period.

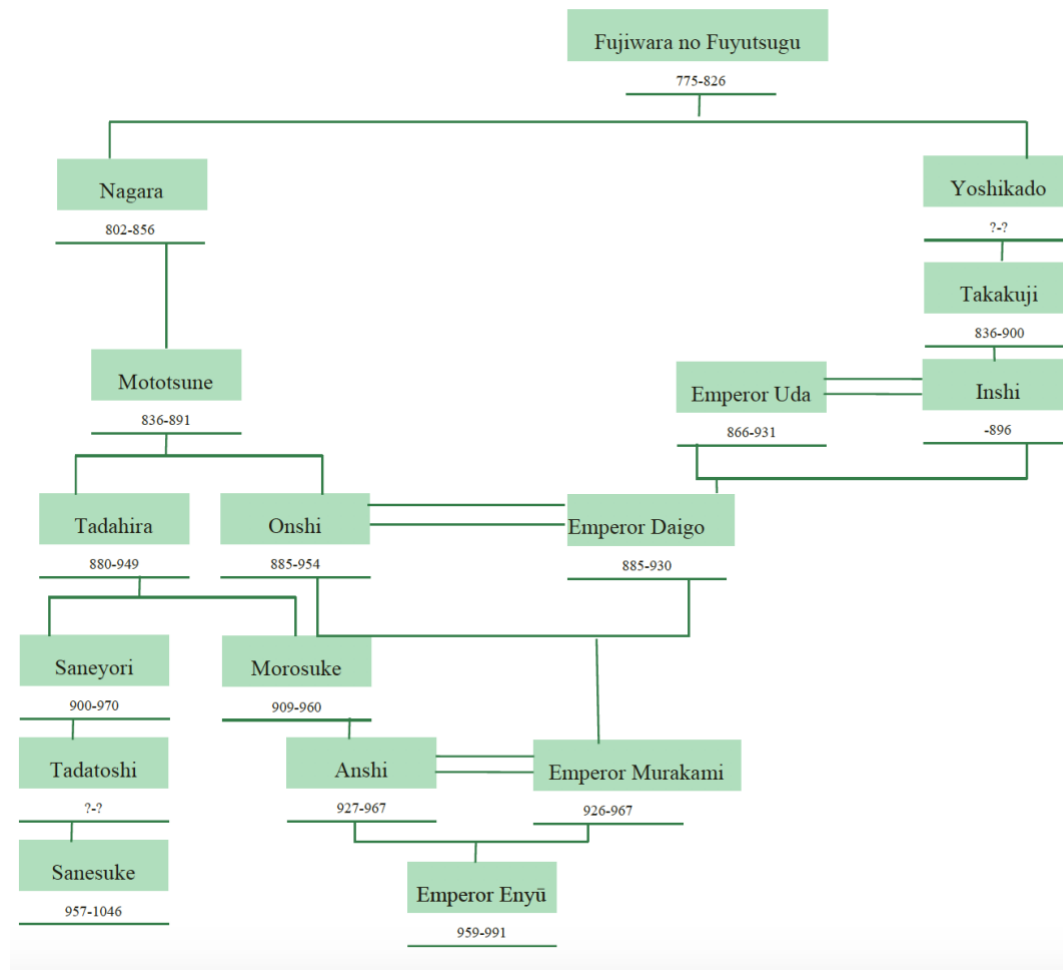
Up until this moment, however, Buddhist hair embroideries primarily concerned life and death. They were usually commissioned by women for a loved one's memorial service and often incorporated her hair to depict the most sacred parts of the image. Kamakura- and Muromachi-period women stitched their hair into embroideries to reenact a performance of bodily sacrifice and to transform female hair, a frequently aestheticized material, into sacred matter suitable for depicting the divine. Embroidered Buddhist images offer hidden stories of their makers and the world that they inhabited. The inscriptions on the back or a record about its production are sometimes all that we have to trace that woman's existence. Their stories are about heartbreak and

<sup>400</sup> Kevin Gray Carr, *Plotting the Prince: Shōtoku Cults and the Mapping of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>401</sup> These names include the monk Jōen 常円 from Shitennōji 四天王寺 who was involved in commissioning other embroidered Buddhist images, the monk Dōkō shinshi, 道香信士, the nun Nyokō shinnyo 如香信女 and others.

the loss of a mother or a daughter. They also signal anxieties that women had about their place in the afterlife. Yet the visuality of Buddhist hair embroideries also provide a sense of peace and hope that they too can achieve happiness in the afterlife. In a museum setting, the embroidery's faded color is pronounced. The ritual practice it was used for seems dated and obsolete. Yet the embroidery's subject about the fragility of life still speaks vividly to us even now.

## APPENDIX A GENEALOGY OF THE NORTHERN FUJIWARA FAMILY



Appendix Figure 1 Genealogy of the Northern Fujiwara Family

## APPENDIX B TEXTUAL RECORDS ON THE PRODUCTION OF HEIAN PERIOD EMBROIDERED IMAGES

**Appendix Table 1 Textual Records on the Production of Heian Period Embroidered Images**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Patron</b>	<b>Recipient</b>	<b>Ritual</b>	<b>Embroidered Image</b>
925.8.23 延長三年	Emperor Daigo 醍醐天皇 (885-930)	Mother, Fujiwara no Inshi 胤子 (- 896)	Memorial Service	Womb World Mandala 胎藏界曼荼羅
955.1.4 天曆九年	Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 (926-967)	Mother, Fujiwara no Onshi 穩子 (885-954)	One Year Memorial Service	Lotus Sutra Mandala 法華經曼荼羅
987.4.29 永延元年	Emperor Enyū 円融天皇 (959-991)	Mother, Fujiwara no Anshi 安子 (927-964)	Twenty-Fourth Memorial Service	Amida's Pure Land Mandala 阿弥陀浄土 曼荼羅
1028.1 万寿五年	Unknown	Fujiwara no Michinaga 道 長 (966-1028)	Forty-Ninth Day Memorial Service	Amida's Pure Land Mandala 極楽浄土 曼荼羅

1102.7.21 康和四年	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Image of a bodhisattva
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## APPENDIX C TEXTUAL RECORDS ON THE PRODUCTION OF KAMAKURA PERIOD EMBROIDERED IMAGES

**Appendix Table 2 Textual Records on the Production of Kamakura Period Embroidered Images**

Date	Patron	Recipient	Ritual	Embroidered Image	Hair
1185.5.29 文治四年	Hachijō-in no Sanmi no Tsubone 八条院三位局 (-1218)	Unknown deceased person(s)	Merit for the deceased	Amida Seed Syllable 阿弥陀の種字	Hair of the deceased person(s)
1200.1.13 平治二年	Hōjō Masako 北条政子 (1157- 1225)	Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147- 1199), Masako's husband	One-year memorial service	Sanskrit Seed- Syllable 阿字一鋪	Masako's hair
After 1263 弘長三年	The poet, Fujiwara no Tameie 為家 (1198- 1275)	Tameko 為子 (-1263), Tameie's daughter	Memorial Service	Sanskrit Seed- Syllable 梵字	Tameko's hair
1308 徳治三年	Emperor Go-Uda 後宇多天皇 (1267- 1324)	Wife, Yūgimon-in 遊義門院 (1270- 1307)	Memorial service	Sanskrit syllable 梵字	Yūgimon- in's hair
1332.6 元弘二年	Wife of Hino Toshimoto	Hino Toshimoto 日野俊基 (- 1332), retainer in	49th day Memorial Service	Amida raigo triad 来迎三尊	Wife of Hino Toshimoto's hair

		the service of Emperor Go-Daigo			
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## APPENDIX D BUDDHIST HAIR EMBROIDERIES ATTRIBUTED TO CHŪJŌHIME

Appendix Table 3 Buddhist Hair Embroideries Attributed to Chūjōhime

Iconography	Location	Date	Size
Descent of Amida Triad 阿弥陀三尊来迎図	Dannō-Hōrinji 檀王法林寺 Kyoto-shi	Muromachi Period	118.7 x 39.2 cm
Descent of Amida Triad 阿弥陀三尊来迎図	Tenshōji 天性寺 Kyoto	Muromachi Period	65 x 29.6 cm
Descent of Amida Triad 阿弥陀三尊来迎図	Daiunin 大雲院 Kyoto	13th-14th century	121.3 x 40.1 cm
Descent of Amida Triad 阿弥陀三尊来迎図	Shōchi'in 正智院 Wakayama Prefecture	14th-15th century	58.4 x 26.2 cm
Descent of Amida Triad 阿弥陀三尊来迎図	Nara National Museum 奈良国立博物館— originally Taimadera 當麻寺 Nara	14th-15th century	73.1 x 25.6 cm
Descent of Amida Triad with patron 阿弥陀三尊来迎図	Kōrinji 高林寺 Nara-shi	Late Muromachi Period	23 x 10.2 cm
Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad 種子阿弥陀三尊図	Taimadera 當麻寺 Nara-shi	14th-15th century	67.8 x 26.8 cm
Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad with patron 種子阿弥陀三尊図	Tenshōji 天性寺 Kyoto	Muromachi Period	83.7 x 32.4 cm
Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad 種子阿弥陀三尊図	Konbuin 興福院 Nara-shi	Muromachi Period	45.2 x 22.4 cm
Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad 種子阿弥陀三尊図	Zenrinji 禅林寺 Kyoto-shi	Kamakura Period	105.5 x 31 cm

Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Triad 種子阿弥陀三尊図	Dannō-Hōrinji 檀王法林寺 Kyoto-shi	14 <sup>th</sup> century	98 x 42.6 cm
Six Letter <i>Myōgō</i> 阿弥陀名号	Tenshōji 天性寺 Kyoto	Muromachi Period	99.2 x 37 cm
Six Letter <i>Myōgō</i> 阿弥陀名号	Hōkyōji 宝鏡寺 Kyoto-shi	Muromachi Period	92.5 x 20 cm
Six Letter <i>Myōgō</i> 阿弥陀名号	Shōchi'in 正智院 Wakayama Prefecture	14 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> century	69.5 x 19.4 cm
Standing Amida 阿弥陀如来立像	Shōjōkōji 清浄光寺 Kanagawa Prefecture	14 <sup>th</sup> century	112.9 x 40.3 cm
Descent of Shaka Triad 釈迦三尊来迎図	Shinshū-Gokurakuji 真正極楽寺 Kyoto-shi	Muromachi Period	108.7 x 38.2 cm
Sanskrit Seed-Syllable Amida Pentad 種子阿弥陀五尊図	Chionji 知恩寺 Kyoto-shi	14 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> century	71 x 32.7 cm
Sanskrit Seed-Syllable A 阿字図	Shōchi'in 正智院 Wakayama Prefecture	14 <sup>th</sup> century	69.5 x 29.4 cm
Dainichi nyorai 大日如来像	Hosomi Art Museum 細身美術館 – originally Itsukushima Shrine 厳島神社 Hiroshima Prefecture	Kamakura Period	49 25 cm

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