

SERPENTS AND SALVATION:  
FEMALE SNAKE TRANSFORMATION  
IN *SAYOHIME* AND *CHŪJŌHIME GOHONJI*

by

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B.A., University of Massachusetts-Amherst, 2008

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations  
2012

This thesis entitled:  
Serpents and Salvation: Female Snake Transformation in *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime Gohonji*  
written by Kelley E. Doore  
has been approved for the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations

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Serpents and Salvation: Female Snake Transformation in *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime Gohonji*

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Keller Kimbrough

This thesis examines the use of the female snake transformation trope, particularly in two *sekkyō* works, *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji*.

The woman who transforms into a giant serpent due to delusive attachment is an iconic figure with a long history in Japanese literature, and while it has often served as an expression of the inherent sinfulness of women, it has also been used to create a powerful message of salvation for women. *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji* are excellent examples of such a use, and by examining the ways the snake-woman trope affects the narrative in each of these works, we gain insight into how such a seemingly misogynistic trope can also have positive significance for women in Buddhism. The introductory chapter lays the groundwork necessary for an analysis of the trope, researching possible origins of the snake-woman from Buddhist and native Japanese influences and tracing the development of this trope through the medieval period by focusing on the most famous of snake-woman tales, the Dōjōji legend. Chapters two and three examine the trope as it is used in *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji*, exploring the foundational elements informing each work and examining the way the presence of female snake-transformation enriches the message of female salvation that is at the heart of both stories.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ACHIEVING HER ONE DESIRE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SNAKE-WOMAN TROPE

A woman, tormented by jealousy or overwhelmed by desire, finally reaches a breaking point. Thereupon, she transforms into a giant and menacing serpent, seeking to fulfill her terrible passion. This is a scene not unfamiliar in Japanese literature, one which appears in many different stories and dramas from as early as the eleventh century. In fact, it has been popular across genres, from traditional *nō* to street preacher's tales, and even in film and modern novels. It is certainly a captivating image in isolation, evocative of the frightening power of emotions. Yet in context, it is a much more complicated trope, with many influences and layers of symbolism. With its roots in Buddhist didactic literature and other, women-focused forms of popular Buddhist proselytizing, this trope has heavy implications regarding the inherent sinfulness of women and the unique problems of their salvation. Conversely, the way in which the trope is fitted to a story is often quite revealing of society's views on women. Throughout its many incarnations, this trope has changed and expanded through the ages, its symbolism at times potent and at other times seemingly forgotten. Though there are interesting differences among the many portrayals of these cursed women, the impetus for their transformation is always the same – intense, passionate attachment. What we are witnessing is not truly a transformation, but rather a manifestation of the perceived spiritual weakness of women and the danger of their passions to their own salvation and the salvation of others. While this idea can be powerfully misogynistic, it has also in many instances been used to deliver a powerful message of salvation to women.

Though it might be worthwhile to try to fully understand this fascinating literary

phenomenon throughout history by looking at every single instance of and reference to the snake-woman trope, such a task would be daunting. Instead, this introductory chapter will be devoted to the essential history of and scholarship on the snake-woman trope, and the later chapters will center around instances of snake-woman transformation that occur in late medieval fiction. Some of the most intriguing uses of this trope come from the *sekkyō*, *jōruri*, and *otogizōshi* of this period. While still heavily infused with Buddhist morality, when compared to the simpler and more straightforward *setsuwa* of the earlier medieval period there is a level of ideological complexity which allows for a subtler use of this trope and therefore a richer analysis. By focusing on the works *Chūjōhime gohonji* and *Sayohime*, I hope to probe further into the ways female transformation was understood and used in literature.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE SNAKE-WOMAN TROPE

The snake-woman transformation trope has many roots and many branches. The late medieval works we will examine in chapters two and three are merely branches, so what then is the trunk? It would seem to be the Dōjōji legend, which first appeared in the c.1040 *setsuwa* collection *Dainihonkoku Hokekyō genki* 大日本国法華経験記.<sup>1</sup> The story appears in slightly variant versions in *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 ca. 1120 and in *Genkō shakusho* 元亨 積書 in 1332, with the *Konjaku monogatari shū* version being perhaps the most famous.<sup>2</sup> In context, these *setsuwa* were part of larger collections of tales relating miraculous occurrences

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1 Also known as the *Honchō Hokke genki* 本朝法華験記 and *Hokke genki* 法華験記. Translated in Yoshiko Dykstra, *Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra from Ancient Japan: The Dainihonkoku Hokekyōgenki of Priest Chingen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

2 Virginia Skord Waters, "Sex, Lies, and the Illustrated Scroll: The Dōjōji Engi Emaki," *Monumenta Nipponica* 52, no. 1 (1997): 59. The *Konjaku monogatari shū* version is translated in Marian Ury, *Tales of Times Now Past: Sixty-two Stories from a Medieval Japanese Collection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 93-96. The *Genkō shakusho* version is translated in Marian Ury, "Genkō shakusho: Japan's First Comprehensive History of Buddhism," Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1971. 337-339.

connected with the Lotus Sutra. These versions all contain the same basic elements. Two traveling priests, one old and one young, are on a pilgrimage to Kumano and take rest at the home of a young woman in Kii province. All three *setsuwa* describe this woman as a *yamome* 寡婦, which means a single woman but can refer to either an unmarried woman or a widow.<sup>3</sup> Either way, this woman propositions the attractive young monk, which he rebuffs by evoking his pilgrimage vow of celibacy. He promises to comply with her wishes on his return journey, but this is a lie. Upon realizing this, she encloses herself in her chambers for two weeks, reemerging as a giant serpent. In her serpentine form, she pursues the monk to Dōjōji, a temple located on the Hidaka river. Though the temple monks have hidden the terrified pilgrim under the temple's large bell, the serpent coils around the bell and strikes it repeatedly, shooting flames everywhere. Once the snake departs, all that is left of the monk is ashes. The *setsuwa* then explains that the man and woman, now both snakes, appear to an old monk at Dōjōji and beseech him to copy the Lotus Sutra for their benefit. He does, and the man and woman are reborn in separate (and unequal) heavens.<sup>4</sup> The didactic message of this story is fairly straightforward – the Lotus Sutra is powerful enough to save anyone, even a woman so overwhelmed by her passions that she transforms into a great serpent and burns a monk to death. The other messages encoded in the tale are perhaps more grim, with the snake transformation suggestive of a dangerous secret nature lurking within women. In this way, the legend complies with the conventions of didactic *setsuwa*, tales often focused on warning monks about the dangers of women and sex.<sup>5</sup> Yet it

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3 Waters, “Sex, Lies, and the Illustrated Scroll,” 64, footnote 19.

4 The monk was reborn in the Tuṣita heaven (j. *tosotsuten* 兜率天), which is the second heaven above Mt. Sumeu and the home of Maitreya Buddha. The woman was reborn in the Trayastriṃśa heaven (j. *tōriten* 忉利天), which is on the plane atop Mt. Sumeru and is the highest heaven that still maintains a connection to the human world. Waters, “Sex, Lies, and the Illustrated Scroll,” 83. Ury, “*Genkō shakusho*,” 339.

5 There are positive instances of female snake transformation, such as the tale of Gishō and Zenmyō found in the

stands out among the large corpus of *setsuwa*, both for its influence on Japanese literature and for the tremendous and widespread popularity it enjoyed.

#### BEFORE DŌJŌJI: SHINTŌ, SUTRAS, AND SERPENTS

Before considering the evolution of the tale and, along with it, the trope, there must be some analysis of those elements informing the transformation that are at the heart of the tale. Of particular importance are the syncretic snake symbolism of Japan and the enlightenment of the dragon girl in the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra, as well as the conflation of serpents and demons. Snakes have symbolized many things in many different cultures throughout human history, signifying treacherous evil for some and great virtue for others. Even if there could be some universal psychological symbolism ascribed to snakes and serpents, it would not be of particular relevance to this endeavor. Instead, it will be more valuable to look at those verifiable sources of influence, which are by no means straightforward or simple in their own right. While the infamous Dōjōji legend underlies other tales of women transforming into serpents due to attachment, that particular serpent-woman was by no means the only symbolic serpent in circulation, and she certainly was not created entirely independent of those other snakes, nor of demons. Truthfully, there are many different kinds of serpents inhabiting the Japanese supernatural realm, with their origins in the traditions of India, China and Japan itself.

In his “Salvation of the Snake, the Snake of Salvation,” W. Michael Kelsey attempts to

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early-thirteenth-century *Kegonshū sōshi eden* 華嚴集草子絵伝. The tale is similar to the Dōjōji legend – the Tang maiden Zenmyō falls for the Silla monk Gishō, and he rebuffs her advances. Ultimately she transforms into a great dragon, not to harm him, but to protect his ship on the sea voyage back to Silla. Klein speculates that this story was a Kegon Sect rebuttal to the negative portrayal of women in the Dōjōji story, showing that sometimes a woman's strong emotions could serve as an aid to enlightenment and not a hindrance. Susan Blakely Klein, “When the Moon Strikes the Bell: Desire and Enlightenment in the Noh Play *Dōjōji*,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 17, no. 2 (1996), 301. For more on Gishō and Zenmyō, see Karen L. Brock, “Chinese Maiden, Silla Monk: Zenmyō and Her Thirteenth-Century Japanese Audience,” in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 185-218.

create a framework by which to categorize the many snakes found in *setsuwa* collections and assorted *fudoki*. His categories are: 1) the mythical snake, which refers to the snake deities of folk Shintō; 2) the mythical snake saved/defeated by Buddhism, wherein malevolent snake deities are subdued as proof of the power of Buddhism; 3) the Buddhist snake, which Kelsey says relates to rebirth stories and often appears when a person is too attached to this-worldly things;<sup>6</sup> 4) the mytho-Buddhist hybrid, and 5) the snake of salvation, wherein a snake is actually an arbiter of salvation.<sup>7</sup> While this is a remarkably useful tool for understanding the snake as a symbol divided between two religious frameworks, it does not include Dōjōji in its analysis of *Konjaku monogatari shū*'s snake tales, nor does it take into account the influence of Chinese and Indian dragon symbolism. Also, his framework does not take into account female snakes.

Interestingly, Kelsey identifies the mythological snake deity as primarily male and notes that its victims are often female.<sup>8</sup> In that sense, a possible interpretation of a woman transforming into a snake could be that she is manifesting the aggressive male sexuality previously attributed to Japanese snake deities. But Japanese snake deities cannot explain everything, especially the dragon-like form snake-women are often depicted as taking, nor the demon horns.<sup>9</sup> DeVisser

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6 W. Michael Kelsey, "Salvation of the Snake, the Snake of Salvation: Buddhist-Shintō Conflict and Resolution," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 8, no. 1 (1981): 84, 98-99.

7 Kelsey, "Salvation of the Snake, the Snake of Salvation," 84.

8 Kelsey, "Salvation of the Snake, the Snake of Salvation," 94. He refers specifically to the *hitoyozuma* 一夜妻 (one-night bride) construction, wherein a snake deity disguised as a man marries a woman and consumes her on their wedding night. Moreover, stories of the second type often feature a woman being saved from a snake deity by Buddhism.

9 The appearance of horns on these serpents is curious – not a single serpent native to Japan has horns. Yet horns are a definitive feature of snake and serpent imagery, and brides in Japan today often wear *tsuno kakushi* 角隠し, a cloth hat designed to hide their horns of jealousy and ego. Also, the length of horns in *nō* masks for both demons and full serpents indicates the level of their depravity. For more on *nō* masks and horns, see Erika Ohara Bainbridge, "Women's Madness in Three Major Dramatic Traditions: Greek, Elizabethan, and Japanese Noh" (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991).

points out that in Japan, three different types of dragon seem to exist side-by-side – the Indian *Nāga*, the four-legged Chinese dragon, and the native serpent deity – all seemingly connected by their relation to water.<sup>10</sup> As Buddhism spread to China and then Japan, a connection was established between these three mythological figures, and the results of this intermingling are especially evident in Japan. For example, though the Chinese character describing the woman in the fifteenth century picture-scroll *Dōjōji engi emaki* is clearly *ja* 蛇 “snake,” the accompanying pictures show a bearded and horned Chinese-style dragon.<sup>11</sup> And though Kelsey speculates that the association between the Lotus Sutra and snakes originates in the *Dainihonkoku Hokekyō genki*, the connection in fact originates in the Lotus Sutra itself – with the enlightenment of the *Nāga* dragon girl in the Devadatta chapter.<sup>12</sup>

One of the best-known passages in the Lotus Sutra is contained in the Devadatta chapter. The Buddha and Mañjuśrī are discussing the unusually virtuous eight-year-old daughter of the *Nāga* king Sagara when all of a sudden she appears. While the Buddha had expressed doubts about her near-enlightened state because of her young age, his disciple Śāriputra doubts her “because a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel for the Law.”<sup>13</sup> He then goes on to list the infamous five obstructions, whereby women cannot achieve rebirth in any of the following five forms: Brahma heavenly king, king Shakra, devil king, wheel-turning sage king, and Buddha. The dragon girl simply presents the Buddha with a precious jewel,<sup>14</sup> instantly

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10 M.W. DeVisser, *The Dragon in China and Japan*, (Amsterdam: John Müller, 1913) v-vi.

11 Komatsu Shigemi and Uchida Masanori, eds., *Zoku Nihon emaki taisei*, v. 13 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1982), 106-107.

12 Kelsey, “Snake of Salvation, Salvation of the Snake,” 99-100.

13 Burton Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 188.

14 Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, 189.

transforms into a man, carries out all the actions of a Bodhisattva and attains correct enlightenment. This moment is an important one for women in Mahāyāna Buddhism because it offers enlightenment to women specifically, in spite of the prevalence of views like those expressed by Śāriputra. Yoshida Kazuhiko suggests that if we take the dragon girl's enlightenment as a refutation of the five obstructions, it is a positive text for women. However, this passage could also be understood as reinforcing the idea of women's obstructions so as to ultimately make a point about the power of the Lotus Sutra to offer women salvation.<sup>15</sup> We can see this circular logic at work in snake-woman stories as well. For example, in the Dōjōji legend, the dragon/serpent transformation emphasizes the weakness of women to further aggrandize the miraculous powers of the Lotus Sutra. It is interesting to note that since Kelsey entirely discounts the Dōjōji legend, he actually concludes that snake rebirth stories were primarily associated with Pure Land Buddhism and stressed the importance of good rebirth.<sup>16</sup> Though snake rebirth is different from snake transformation, this association between the Pure Land and serpents could explain the use of the snake transformation trope in later Pure Land-oriented texts like *Chūjōhime gohonji*. Moreover, revering the Lotus Sutra and saying the *nembutsu* were not mutually exclusive, and as we will see in *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji*, the snake-transformation trope could be used to argue for the efficacy of either practice.<sup>17</sup>

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15 Yoshida Kazuhiko, "The Enlightenment of the Dragon King's Daughter in *The Lotus Sutra*," trans. Margaret Childs, in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Michigan: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2002), 299-304.

16 Kelsey, "Snake of Salvation, Salvation of the Snake," 98-99.

17 According to Shioiri, 46 of the 129 Lotus Sutra devotees in the *Dai Nihonkoku hokekyō genki* also chanted the *nembutsu* and prayed for Pure Land rebirth. Conversely, there is evidence that some Pure Land beliefs were influenced by the Lotus Sutra, such as Shinran's idea of "conversion by the three vows." Shioiri Ryōdō, "The Meaning of the Formation and Structure of the Lotus Sutra," trans. George Tanabe in *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, eds George Tanabe and Willa Jane Tanabe (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 19-21.

## TRANSFORMATION OF A LEGEND: DŌJŌJI IN SCROLLS AND NŌ THEATRE:

While the Dōjōji legend is certainly captivating in text, there is also a very obvious visual component to the story. The transformed snake-woman, consumed by her fiery passions and on a mission of revenge, makes for an iconic image filled with dramatic potential. Many authors and artists capitalized on this, perhaps most notably in the *Dōjōji engi emaki* 道成寺縁起絵巻, a brilliant illustrated scroll used in *etoki* 絵解, a type of medieval performance-preaching that incorporated visual aides.<sup>18</sup> The edition best known today seems to date from the mid-fifteenth century, though the Dōjōji temple has a long tradition of *etoki* on its most famous legend.<sup>19</sup> In this richly illustrated retelling, the legend takes on a life of its own, adding to the story what Virginia Skord Waters calls “a new dynamism and fascinating ambivalence.”<sup>20</sup> By adding the narrative of the pictures to the narrative of the text, the illustrated scroll manages to give a face to the figures in the legend. Interestingly, while its depiction of the snake is appropriately terrifying, the young maiden is depicted as lovely and guileless. In this format, there is a newfound sympathy for the snake-woman. This is a trend manifested elsewhere in re-tellings of the legend, and it had a considerable influence on later uses of the snake-woman trope.

As the trope rises in popularity over the course of the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, its various manifestations can be divided into two distinct camps: those that are sympathetic to snake women, and those that are more misogynistic towards them. Beyond superficial differences, such as whether the woman is given a name or whether the text frames her transformation as tragic, there is one relatively minor feature that puts a story firmly in one camp

18 Reproduced in full color in Komatsu Shigemi and Uchida Masanori, eds., *Zoku Nihon emaki taisei*, vol. 13 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1982), 61-120.

19 Waters, “Sex, Lies, and the Illustrated Scroll,” 60.

20 Waters, “Sex, Lies, and the Illustrated Scroll,” 60-61.

or the other, and that is salvation – or lack thereof. Curiously, this dichotomy is best represented by two versions of the same work, namely the *nō* play *Kanemaki* 鐘巻 and its heavily edited and considerably more famous derivative, *Dōjōji*. Attributed to Kanze Kojirō Nobumitsu (1435-1516), *Kanemaki* is a long and developed work of literature, whereas *Dōjōji* is not thought to have the “mysterious depth” of other, better *nō*.<sup>21</sup> This brief list of what was cut or changed from *Kanemaki* to *Dōjōji* shows the works' fundamentally different perspectives on the snake-woman and perhaps on women in general.

CUT	<i>Sashi/ageuta</i> where the Priest explains the reasons for the bell rededication service. He also says it has been 700 years since the temple founding and that the hearing the temple bell's sound is equivalent to hearing the Lotus Sutra.
CUT	During the <i>shite</i> entrance, the <i>shirabyōshi</i> /snake says she lives on the coast at Komatsubara and is ambivalent about going to hear the bell because of bad memories.
EDITED	In a <i>mondō</i> , the <i>shite</i> debates with the Head Priest himself about entering the temple, whereas in <i>Dōjōji</i> she simply deceives a simple, low-ranking temple servant to gain entrance.
CUT	The <i>shite</i> does a <i>kusemai</i> dance to the story of the temple's founding by a female diver before going into her frenetic <i>ranbyōshi</i> .
CUT	The Priest addresses the serpent-woman and orders her to leave during the exorcism, to which she replies that she will not leave until she has exhausted her resentment by striking the bell.
EDITED	The serpent-woman achieves enlightenment and vanishes, whereas in <i>Dōjōji</i> she is merely driven back into the river. <sup>22</sup>

While cutting or changing the first five items serves to dehumanize the woman, the final one irrevocably condemns her. If we look at it in terms of *nō* hermeneutics, these cuts rob the

21 Klein, “When the Moon Strikes the Bell,” 292-295.

22 Klein, “When the Moon Strikes the Bell,” 299-300.

legend of its complexities. Failure to achieve salvation is rare in the world of *nō*, as it would seem to undercut the Buddhist message of the plays.<sup>23</sup> As Klein points out, when the monks drive the serpent out of the temple, they are symbolically driving women out of the path to salvation. As was the case with the *Konjaku monogatari shū* version of the *setsuwa*, which ends with a moral aphorism about the evil of women, this *nō* play is “profoundly negative” on the subject of women. Of course, *Kanemaki*'s salvation scene still positions a male cleric as the sole arbiter of salvation, an element we will see again and again in snake-woman stories. Ultimately, the plot is much weaker without the salvation scene, advocating a Buddhism only powerful enough to hold evil at bay instead of one capable of saving the unsaveable.<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to say why such an incomplete play would be the one more commonly performed, though it could simply be that audiences were less concerned with female salvation and more interested in the subjugation of an evil monster.

## BEYOND DŌJŌJI: HELL SCROLLS AND STREET THEATRE

The association between women and snakes eventually gained credence with a broad cross-section of Buddhists, becoming a near-universal symbol of women's attachment and beastly inner nature. One force behind the growth and cultural acceptance of this association were itinerant nuns who traveled the country preaching sermons based on pictures of hell.<sup>25</sup> This

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23 *Dōjōji*, *Kanawa* and *Aoi no ue* are known as “the three demoness plays,” wherein the featured woman becomes a demon and does not attain enlightenment. Further, the masks used in these plays represent the transformation in accordance with the severity of the woman's anger. Though called demoness plays, the masks reflect serpent transformation, with the *Dōjōji* mask as the full serpent, and the *Aoi no ue* mask as the “half-serpent,” or 半蛇 *hannya*. The least transformed is the *namanari* mask from *Kanawa*, which only sports “buds” of horns. Erika Ohara Bainbridge, “Deranged Women's Role in Japanese Drama” (presentation, Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, Chicago, IL, 1990), as quoted in Klein, “When the Moon Strikes the Bell,” 293.

24 Klein, “When the Moon Strikes the Bell,” 293-295.

25 Takada Mamoru, *Onna to hebi: hyōchō no Edo bungakushi* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999), 96.

*etoki* was not dissimilar to the preaching done using the *Dōjōji engi emaki*. The *Kumano kanjin jikkai zu* 熊野関心十界図 (also known as the *Kumano kanjin jikkai mandara* 熊野関心十界曼荼羅) was one such portable painting of the hell realms, and it contains some intriguing snake-woman imagery. Used by the Kumano nuns in the late medieval and early modern periods, the *Kumano kanjin jikkai zu* imagery spread far and wide and had a lasting impact on the psychological geography of hell in Japan.<sup>26</sup> In an area known as the *futame jigoku* 両婦地獄, or “two women/wives hell,” there are two human-headed, snake-bodied women encircling a hapless man, facing each other in contention. In the lower right corner there is a crimson pool of blood in which several women are submerged in anguish. Some of these women have human heads but the horns and body of a serpent. This is the *chi no ike jigoku* 血の池地獄, or “blood pool hell,” and it is punishment for the impurity of menstruation and parturition. The presence of snake-women in these hells reflects a broadening of the snake-woman's symbolic meaning. Intense passionate attachment is still at the root of the transformation, but in the *futame jigoku* the sin is specifically *jealous* attachment.<sup>27</sup> The *futame jigoku*, along with other women-specific hells, was included in *Fuji no hitoana sōshi* 富士の人穴草子 (Tale of the Fuji Cave), a didactic work of the late medieval period that also had roots in street preaching.<sup>28</sup> It was an image that resonated

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26 Caroline Hirasawa, “The Inflatable, Collapsible Kingdom of Retribution: A Primer on Japanese Hell Imagery,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 63, no. 1 (2008), 31.

27 The association with jealousy would become more central to the trope during the Edo period. Examples include Semimaru's wife in Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *Semimaru*, who transforms out of jealousy over her husband's lover, and Ueda Akinari's “Jasei no In,” which re-imagines the Chinese tale of the snake-turned-woman in Japanese cultural terms, specifically focusing on her jealousy. For more on violent jealousy between wives, see Asami Kazuhiko, “Miyako to hina no jōsei setsuwa: uwanari uchi o megutte,” *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 50, no. 10 (2005), 67-75.

28 Interestingly, in this *futame jigoku*, the man in the middle is also said to be in serpent form. Keller Kimbrough, trans., “The Tale of the Fuji Cave” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (2006), 1-2, 11.

with listeners, but what of the pool of blood? This hell, along with the hells for barren women, is a place where women are punished for being women. As the tour guide in *Fuji no hitoana sōshi* points out, “It’s true that both men and women fall into hell, but many more women do than men. Women’s thoughts are all evil.”<sup>29</sup> Lust, anger, jealousy, attachment, and even the very fact of being a woman – by the middle of the sixteenth century, a snake transformation could signify any and all of those things. It was a proselytizing tool, available to any sort of Buddhist preacher, and it was a good hook for performers hoping to draw a crowd. One such figure who straddled the line between preacher looking for converts and entertainer looking to draw a crowd was the *sekkyō-bushi* storyteller.

The genre of chanted tales known as *sekkyō-bushi* reached its pinnacle of popularity in the early Edo period. The name of the genre is often translated into English as “sermon-ballads,” which reflects the religious origins of its itinerant storytellers.<sup>30</sup> By the seventeenth century, the chanters had become decidedly more entertainer than preacher, but the Buddhist tone and message of their chants persisted.<sup>31</sup> In some ways, it is difficult to categorize a work as *sekkyō* – as Susan Matisoff points out, we do not have access to the musical notation or performance notes, only the text that was chanted.<sup>32</sup> Information on the performance would help us to distinguish a

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29 Kimbrough, “Tale of the Fuji Cave,” 12.

30 For a more detailed look at the *sekkyō-bushi* genre, see Susan Matisoff, “Holy Horrors: Sermon-ballads of Medieval Japan” in *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan*, ed. James H. Sanford et al., (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992) 234-261 and Keller Kimbrough, *Wondrous Brutal Fictions: Buddhist Sermon-Ballads and Miracle Plays of Seventeenth-Century Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

31 Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 189.

32 Matisoff, “Holy Horrors,” 239.

*sekkyō* work from the similar rival performance art of the time, *ko-jōruri*. That said, there are some features which seem to be common across *sekkyō* stories, such as certain overwrought phrases like *itawashiya* “how pitiful!” and the presence of *mōshigo*, children born as the result of a petition to the gods or Buddhas. These characters often face great adversity, and overcome it by some faith-derived supernatural intervention. A notable example of these unlucky children includes Tenju in *Amida no munewari* 阿弥陀の胸割 (*Amida's Riven Breast*), who sells herself into slavery for her parents' memorial services and subsequently has her liver removed while she is still alive.<sup>33</sup> Thankfully, Amida rewards her filial piety by taking her place when the men come to collect her liver. This is also a common theme in *sekkyō*, where Buddhas and Bodhisattvas perform miracles on behalf of the main character, highlighting the power of Buddhist faith.

Tenju is also an example of another phenomenon in *sekkyō*, the strong and virtuous heroine. There is an abundance of such characters, including Anju-no-hime in *Sanshō Dayū* さんせう太夫, who helps her younger brother escape their enslavement though she knows she will be tortured to death. Another is Goō-no-hime in the eponymous work *Goō-no-hime* 午王の姫, who endures a series of fatal tortures without giving away Yoshitsune's location. In fact, she knows full well her fate, saying, “I'm sure to be arrested by Kiyomori as punishment for helping you to escape. No doubt I'll be tortured and killed. He'll probably twist off my ten fingers in ten days and then smash my twenty parts in twenty.”<sup>34</sup> As is to be expected in a didactic genre, the source

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33 Kimbrough, *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*. Translation of the ca. 1639 *Sanshō Dayū* and the ca. 1670 *Sanshō Dayū monogatari*.

34 Kimbrough, *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*. Translation of the 1673 woodblock-printed text.

of these women's strength is Buddhist faith, and Goō-no-hime seems in some way to be sanctified by the violence of her noble death. The bravery of *sekkyō* heroines is not limited to enduring torture, as with the example of Otohime from the work *Shintokumarū* しんとく丸. She travels unaccompanied against her parents' wishes to find and save the accursed Shintokumarū. Though they have met only once, she literally carries him on her back, and she travels great distances to cure his affliction.<sup>35</sup> While strong women are not always heroines, such as the villainous stepmother in *Aigo no waka* あいごの若, the virtuous and devout heroine is clearly a character archetype in the *sekkyō* genre.

This study is concerned with two such heroines, Sayohime and Chūjōhime, and their snake-woman counterparts. Both heroines fit the profile – strength through faith, a willingness to sacrifice, and unshakeable loyalty – and both use these virtues to confront their seeming opposites, snake-women. Yet both plays allow the snake-women to be more than just villains, and by offering the snake-women forgiveness and redemption, Sayohime and Chūjōhime truly embody the concept of a *sekkyō* heroine.

#### DIVING IN: THE SNAKE-WOMAN TROPE IN ACTION

With this overview of the snake-woman trope's historical and literary context in mind, I would now like to turn to the heart of the project. In the following chapters, I will examine the use of the snake woman trope in two *sekkyō* works, *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji*, exploring the ways snake transformation operates within them. In particular, chapters two and three will be concerned with how the trope affects the narratives, but also with how the trope was changed and manipulated to serve the

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35 Kimbrough, trans., *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*. Translation of the 1648 *Sekkyō Shintokumarū*.

purpose of the stories. In many ways, *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji* are remarkable adaptations, surpassing even *Kanemaki* or the *Dōjōji engi emaki* in the level of sympathy shown to the transformed women. The reasons for this are complex and specific to each work, but certainly both contain a didactic message targeted towards women. Through parsing the snake-woman's appearance in *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji*, we can better understand both these works and the place of the snake-woman as a message of salvation for women.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GIFT OF THE SERPENT: READING THE SNAKE-WOMAN TROPE IN *SAYOHIME*

The plot of the *sekkyō Sayohime* seems fairly straightforward: A beautiful young noblewoman has fallen on hard times. Her rich father has died, leaving her penniless. Being a paragon of filial virtue, she wishes to sell herself into slavery in order to pay for Buddhist services in his honor. Alas, she unwittingly sells herself to a man looking for a beautiful young girl to sacrifice to a terrifying snake deity. All of these story elements, from the girl's youth and beauty to her dire straits to the virgin sacrifice, are familiar. Of course, her filial piety and troubled circumstances are typical of a *sekkyō* protagonist, but there are other themes and motifs at work in this story. Anyone familiar with Japanese mythology hears in this story echoes of the *Kojiki* legend of Kushinadahime and the eight-forked serpent god Yamata no Orochi.<sup>36</sup> It also calls to mind those late-Heian, early medieval *setsuwa* wherein snake deities are subdued by the powers of Buddhism, representative of the clash of native and Buddhist beliefs during the period of Buddhism's cultural ascendancy in Japan.<sup>37</sup> This seems even more relevant if we consider that Sayohime is said to be a manifestation of Benzaiten, a popular syncretic Buddhist/Shintō goddess. And more broadly speaking, the snake god who requires sacrificial virgins is a story element ripe for Freudian interpretation. Or is it? In spite of the heavy expectations set by the narrative, the ultimate confrontation between Sayohime and the serpent is both subversive and transcendent, a feat achieved with the use of the snake-woman trope.

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36 Typeset in Yamaguchi Yoshinori and Kōnoshi Takamitsu, ed., *SNKBZ Kojiki* (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1997), Translated in Basil Hall Chamberlain, *The Kojiki: Records of Ancient Matters* (Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1982), 72-73

37 These are the snake stories Kelsey puts into category two: the mythical snake as saved (defeated) by Buddhism. Kelsey, "Salvation of the Serpent, the Serpent of Salvation," 84, 90.

In that critical moment, face to face with the giant serpent, Sayohime calmly makes a bold last request: to have a moment to read from the Lotus Sutra. Then, she bravely smacks the serpent on the head with the scroll, and the serpent's horns and scales fall away to reveal its true identity. This virgin-eating snake monster is actually a grudge-bearing teenage girl herself, transformed into a serpent by her own resentment at being sacrificed one thousand years prior. She is clearly from a different line of snake stories than those river deities of the past, and what has just transpired can be described as a “reverse snake transformation.” Yet the snake-woman retains many features of other dragon characters in Benzaiten legends, including the *nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠, or “wish-fulfilling jewel,” she presents to Sayohime. The way the snake-woman trope is being used in the Sayohime story is anything but typical of instances of snake-woman transformation, and it serves many fascinating functions in the narrative – it flips the script on human sacrifice and snake transformation stories alike, synthesizing several kinds of snake symbolism in order to create a profoundly positive message for women in Buddhism.

To better understand the ways in which the reverse snake transformation affects the narrative, it will be necessary first to establish the complex influences shaping Sayohime's foundational elements, especially in regards to human sacrifice, water deities, and Sayohime's connection to the Benzaiten of Chikubushima. Once these contextual elements are clarified, a close reading of the passages surrounding the miraculous transformation will reveal the complex interplay of the work's symbolic source material. Moreover, it will show the importance of this unique snake-woman character in underscoring and elevating Sayohime's message of female salvation.

## SAYOHIME, BENZAITEN, & SALVATION: SOURCES OF THE SAYOHIME PLOT

The overall focus of this second chapter is the *sekkyō* version of the Sayohime legend. In truth, I refer not to a single work, but rather to several different texts of the same story. These variant editions represent the Sayohime story as it was recited by particular *sekkyō* chanters (or written down by particular scribes), something I will discuss in more detail in the second half of this chapter. Though they differ somewhat in terms of linguistic flourish and literary caliber, all of the versions recount the same basic chain of events, up to and including the reverse snake transformation. The Sayohime story is not, however, typically read with the snake-woman trope in mind, and most research on the legend has focused on its anti-human sacrifice message. Katja Triplett's extensive study of the Sayohime legend, which focuses on a seventeenth century *nara ehon* of the story currently owned by the Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt, analyzes the tale for what it says about human sacrifice and Buddhism.<sup>38</sup> She concludes that the legend's purpose is to demonstrate religious liberation for all.<sup>39</sup> Stories about frightening human sacrifice practices were not an uncommon proselytizing tool in Japan. Just as Susano-ō defeating Yamata no Orochi symbolized the triumph of civilization over disorder, these later didactic stories show the triumph of Buddhism over cruel and destructive forces of nature – and the supposed violent cults that served them.

Though it has been a matter of some debate, the historical reality of *hitomigokū* 人身御供 “human sacrifice” and *ikenie* 生け贄 “living sacrifice” in Japan seems doubtful. Accusing another culture or religion of practicing human sacrifice has been a powerful propaganda tool

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38 Katja Triplett, *Menschenopfer und Selbstopfer in den Japanischen Legenden: Das Frankfurter Manuskript der Matsura Sayohime-Legende* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), 57-62. Thank you to Joshua Newsome for his help with clarifying some passages in German. Also summarized in English by Elisabetta Porcu, “Review,” *Japanese Religions* 33 (1&2) 148-151.

39 Triplett, *Menschenopfer und Selbstopfer in den Japanischen Legenden*, 12-15.

throughout history – the tactic of “blood libel” was used against Jewish communities as early as the second century in Greece and was a central feature of Nazi propaganda.<sup>40</sup> It is important, then, to approach such accounts with skepticism, especially since there is a lack of hard evidence to corroborate such sacrifices ever taking place. Both twentieth-century Shintō scholar Katō Genchi and famed folklorist Yanagita Kunio wrote about human sacrifice in the Sayohime legend, taking opposing viewpoints on the reality of human sacrifice in Japan. Katō cited the legend as evidence of human sacrifice cults in Japan and suggested the story was proof of the positive effect of Buddhism in Japanese society, while Yanagita completely discounted this idea.<sup>41</sup> Katō's analyses does not take into account the possibility that the story's sole purpose was to serve as evidence for Buddhism's positive effect in Japanese society, and that human sacrifice was a convenient strawman. It is also just as likely that human sacrifice in the Sayohime story serves as a metaphorical problem, representative of the incompassionate ways of folk Shintō deities. Snakes and dragons are often central to this type of myth, representing the unpredictable waterways of Japan and, by extension, their terrible destructive gods. Another example of this type of story is the *Enoshima engi*, which explains the origins of the island of Enoshima in Sagami Bay near Kamakura. The legend was first written down by a visiting Mt. Hiei monk named Kōgei 皇慶 in the eleventh century, and though this original is no longer extant, a number of *kanbun* and Japanese-language versions still exist.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Adler, Cyrus, et al., eds., “Blood Accusation,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), accessed 4/25/2012, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3408-blood-accusation>.

41 Triplett, *Menschenopfer und Selbstopfer in den Japanischen Legenden*, 147-151, 178-180. Triplett describes this debate between Katō and Yanagita in some detail in her fourth chapter. While Katō was interested in the “moralizing” influence of Buddhism, Triplett speculates that Yanagita's *kokugaku* ideas would not allow him to consider the possibility of human sacrifice in Japan. His main writing on this topic was the 1927 “Hitobashira to Matura Sayohime” from his *Imo no chikara*. Reproduced in Yanagita Kunio, *Yanagita Kunio* (Tōkyō: Chūō Kōronsha, 1990), 163-184.

42 Kōgei is sometimes transcribed as “Kōgyō” and “Kōkei.” Still extant are Enoshima Shrine Storehouse's

The story centers on the plight of villagers living in Sagami Bay who have been tormented by the fearsome five-headed dragon that lives in lake Fukusawa. The dragon subjects them to flood and plague and also has a taste for their children. After one thousand long years of this, the villagers begin to offer up their children as living sacrifices in the hopes of placating the beast.<sup>43</sup> Finally, in the fortuitous year of 552 CE, a miracle occurs – a cloud appears over the sea, and a glorious *tennyo* 天女 “heavenly maiden” comes to the bay and creates the island of Enoshima. This is obviously supposed to symbolize the coming of Buddhism to Japan, which is traditionally said to have occurred in 552. Suspicious of the *tennyo*, the dragon launches a single attack only to be repelled. Awestricken by her beauty, the dragon confesses his love, apologizes for eating all those children, and promises to stop. This story seems to share many elements with the Sayohime story, and indeed this makes perfect sense: the *tennyo* reveals itself to be none other than Benzaiten, the selfsame goddess of whom Sayohime is a manifestation. This is no coincidence, but is rather due to the ancient connection between Benzaiten, water, and serpents.

Benzaiten is a familiar deity in Japan. She originated in Vedic Hinduism as Sarasvatī, the manifestation of the sacred Saraswati River in India, and she has been intimately associated with water and rivers ever since.<sup>44</sup> Over time she also came to be a goddess of music and eloquence, qualities that carried over when she was re-appropriated as a guardian deity of Buddhism. After her introduction to Japan, she was often tied to native Shintō deities, and many of her places of

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early Meiji copy of the *kanbun Enoshima engi*, Enoshima Shrine Storehouse's Japanese-language *engi*, the Iwamotorō Storehouse *Enoshima gokan engi* 江島五卷縁起, and the late Muromachi period *Enoshima emaki engi* 江島絵巻縁起. Hattori Seidō transcribes in full the Enoshima Shrine Storehouse's Chinese-language copy in Hattori Seidō, “Enoshima engi' kō,” *Yokohama shōdai ronshū* supplemental volume (1977): 122-175.

43 Hayama Michiko, *Nesugata monogatari: chūsei emaki* (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 2009), 164-165.

44 Bhagwant Sahai, *Iconography of Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1975), 141.

worship were officially designated as shrines. Due to her association with rivers, she has also long been associated with serpents and dragons. In fact, one of her primary manifestations is a white serpent.<sup>45</sup> The complex relationship between Benzaiten and serpents in Japan is best exemplified by the stories surrounding her primary places of worship, namely Enoshima, Chikubushima, and Itsukushima. All located on islands, each one is in some way tied to a dragon or serpent deity and Benzaiten.<sup>46</sup> While the story of Sayohime certainly recalls the Enoshima legend, as the manifestation of the Chikubushima Benzaiten she also bears some influence from the legends surrounding Chikubushima.

Chikubushima lies in the northern part of Lake Biwa, rising majestically out of the water covered with lush greenery. It is one of the stops on the Kansai Kannon pilgrimage and also has associations with the Lotus Sutra.<sup>47</sup> However, Benzaiten was the chief ritual focus here starting in the twelfth century, right up until the early Meiji government endeavored to cleanly separate Shintō and Buddhism. As a syncretic deity, Benzaiten was problematic, and so the Benzaiten Hall became the Tsukubusuma Jinja Honden, dedicated exclusively to Benzaiten's Shintō counterpart, Azaihime no Mikoto.<sup>48</sup> Though they do not involve the element of human sacrifice found in *Sayohime* and *Enoshima engi*, the legends surrounding the Chikubushima Benzaiten do involve dragons, serpents, and salvation.

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45 Sahai, *Iconography of Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities*, 142.

46 Sometimes Enoshima is supplanted by the shrine in Tenkawa, near Nara. The Mt. Hiei monk Kōshū (1276-1350) wrote in the *Keiran shūyō shū* that Chikubushima, Itsukushima, and Tenkawa were the three “Pure Lands of Benzaiten,” and that the islands are “three jewels” linked together by an underground tunnel. Andrew M. Watsky, *Chikubushima: Deploying the Sacred Arts in Momoyama Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 55.

47 Watsky, *Chikubushima*, 53-54.

48 Watsky, *Chikubushima*, 42-43.

The *Chikubushima engi* claims that the island arose from the golden disc at the bottom of the world, and that a goddess (Benzaiten) “established her seat upon the summit of the island's slopes.” The *engi* also mentions a yearly festival where a model of the island was sunk in the lake as a symbolic “jewel-offering” to the dragon god.<sup>49</sup> These origins were rehashed and reimagined over time in other works, such as *Heike monogatari*, which includes a passage in which Taira no Tsunemasa visits the island and his *biwa* playing causes Benzaiten to manifest above his sleeve as a white dragon.<sup>50</sup> Watsky translates a 1603 ridge pole placard from the island. In it, Benzaiten is called “Lotus-Law Solitary Ruler Dragon-treasure-Deity-on-Head Most-Excellent-Eloquence-Talent-Deity Wish-Granting-Jewel Ruler” 法華獨王頂上龍寶神最勝辯才天如意宝珠. The placard says she acquired a *nyoi hōju*, or “wish-fulfilling jewel,” which is something usually in the possession of Indian dragons. It also says that upon reconstruction of her temple buildings, “the Blue Dragon emerged in celebration, the White Snake arose in joy.”<sup>51</sup> Still, though the connection between the goddess and serpents is clear, the true nature of the relationship between them is not. For this, we must look to that distiller of culture, *nō* theatre.

The *nō* play *Chikubushima* is a god play by an unknown author.<sup>52</sup> In his introduction to his translation of the play, Royall Tyler notes that the author did not follow any of the legends contained in the *Chikubushima engi*, but instead adapted certain recurring elements, namely interaction between the dragon god of the lake and Benzaiten.<sup>53</sup> In the play, some officials are

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49 Royall Tyler, trans., *Japanese Nō Dramas* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 58-59.

50 Kajihara Masaaki and Yamashita Hiroaki, eds, *Heike monogatari* vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), 8-9. Passage partially translated in Watsky, *Chikubushima*, 55.

51 Watsky, *Chikubushima*, 320.

52 Translated in Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 58-67.

53 Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 59.

escorted to the sacred island by an old man and a young woman. Finding the place quite holy indeed, the official then says he thought women were forbidden in such a sacred space, and he questions the young woman's presence. The old man (and the chorus) give a chiding reply, saying:

OLD MAN: Your question betrays your ignorance. This goddess, awesome to tell, is an incarnation of eternal enlightenment; therefore women are particularly welcome at her shrine.

YOUNG WOMAN: Ah, but why mention matters so lofty?

CHORUS (*ageuta*): Benzaiten has a woman's form

Benzaiten has a woman's form  
and her divine power is truly wondrous.

Since she appears as a Celestial Lady,  
she and all women are really one.

Your question shows how little you know.

(*kuse*) She conceived her compassionate Vow,  
and reached perfect enlightenment,  
countless aeons ago.<sup>54</sup>

After a bit more, the old man proclaims himself to be the lord of this lake, a.k.a the dragon, and jumps into the water. Of course, the young woman turns out to be Benzaiten. The Dragon God later explains the logic behind all of this:

DRAGON GOD (*noriji*): Many are the Vows made to save sentient beings

CHORUS: Many are the Vows made to save sentient beings:

sometimes Enlightenment displays the formulation  
of a Celestial Lady, to answer the prayers

of beings so attuned; and sometimes the form  
is a Dragon God from the nether world,

bringing peace to the realm.<sup>55</sup>

Tyler interprets this as an expression of non-duality.<sup>56</sup> While the *nō* play *Enoshima* has the

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54 Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 64-65.

55 Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 67.

56 Royall Tyler, "The Path of My Mountain': Buddhism in Nō," in *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan*, ed. James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 159.

dragon and the goddess marry, here the two are reflections, yet Tyler sees the point as the same: “to show how the dualities of the world (male and female, sky and abyss, etc.) resolve themselves in union.”<sup>57</sup> This is the Buddhist philosophical underpinning of these legends. Beyond their mundane origins as allegories for the triumphant compassion of Buddhism, these stories embody elegantly the idea of non-duality, especially as it pertains to women. This is likely one of the biggest influences these older Benzaiten stories had on the character of Sayohime. The clear message of female salvation contained in the *nō* play *Chikubushima*, which is one of salvation for women by a woman (Benzaiten), reasserts itself in the Sayohime legend, and the snake-woman trope only serves to enhance it.

At the end of the *nō* play, the dragon god offers the officer a jewel.<sup>58</sup> The jewel is a recurring theme – Itsukushima, Chikubushima, and Enoshima are all called jewels, and Benzaiten's impressive epithet on the temple placard calls her a “Wish-Granting-Jewel-Ruler” and says she wears the “Dragon Treasure” on her head. This magical jewel has long been an element of dragon lore, especially associated with Indian and Buddhist dragons.<sup>59</sup> This association is significant to the question of how the snake-woman fits into the world of Benzaiten in which Sayohime exists. The answer, ultimately, comes from the Lotus Sutra, Sayohime's primary object of faith and the text at the heart of the snake-woman trope. The Lotus Sutra is the final piece of the puzzle. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the dragon girl's enlightenment in the Devadatta chapter is the locus of female salvation in the Lotus Sutra. She possesses a wish-fulfilling jewel, which she famously presents to the Buddha himself. This

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57 Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 60.

58 Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 67.

59 De Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan*, 10.

parallel between the the Lotus Sutra and the Benzaiten legends is what ultimately makes space for a fascinating take on the snake-woman trope, which both transforms the Sayohime story and alters the trope itself.

#### BEST OF ALL WORLDS: SALVATION FOR WOMEN IN *SAYOHIME*

Having taken into consideration those influences which shaped the world of Sayohime, all that is left is the story itself. Through a close examination of the various *sekkyō*-derived Sayohime texts, the interplay of the Lotus Sutra, Benzaiten and the snake-woman trope will be revealed. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, I am not focusing on a single version of the *sekkyō*, but rather consulting multiple versions. In particular, I will be relying on Kyoto University's illustrated seventeenth century *nara ehon*, *Sayohime* さよひめ, and the 1661 *Matsura Chōja* まつら長じゃ, a woodblock printed *shōhon*. I will be using Keller Kimbrough's translation of the *Sayohime* text in this paper, and my own translations and paraphrases of *Matsura Chōja*. In comparing the several different typeset versions available, I found these two texts to be the richest and also the clearest.<sup>60</sup> Kimbrough calls the *nara ehon* a “readerly” adaptation of the *sekkyō* tale, and indeed it has more literary merits than other, earlier versions.<sup>61</sup> As a *shōhon*, the 1661 *Matsura Chōja* is less removed from the *sekkyō* chant it was based on, and the two versions have some interesting differences that will be worth discussing.<sup>62</sup>

The scene of the reverse snake transformation occurs at the beginning of the fifth act in the *sekkyō shōhon* versions of the tale. Sayohime was purchased in Nara by one Gongga no Tayū,

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60 For a list of other typeset *sekkyō* versions please see Kimbrough, *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*, Appendix 2. For a list of other texts of the story, see Triplett, *Menschenopfer und Selbstopfer*, 57-59.

61 Kimbrough, trans., “Sayohime,” in *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*.

62 The chanter is unknown, but Muroki Yatarō suggests it may have been Osaka Yoshichirō. Kimbrough, *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*, Appendix II.

and in a lengthy *michiyuki* he drags her to his village. She is suspicious as they prepare her for sacrifice with ritual Shintō purifications, and finally she learns her true fate from those attending to her. Naturally she cries and laments for her poor still-living mother. The character of the mother is quite interesting – though Sayohime is doing all of this for her father's sake, her mother rightly points out the hypocritical nature of her impetuous self-sacrifice, saying in the *nara ehon* text, “You've still got a mother living in the world! Do you think it's filial to cause me such pain? Your dead father may be a parent, but isn't your living mother one, too?”<sup>63</sup> In both versions, she boldly argues with Gongō no Tayū when he comes to collect his purchase. Her strong nature also reveals itself in the scene depicting Sayohime's father's death in *Matsura Chōja*. His final request is that she raise his only daughter well. Sayohime's mother replies that he should calm his heart, because Sayohime is not his child alone and of course she will raise her well.<sup>64</sup> These passages are an early indication that the story has a positive message for women. Indeed, though Gongō no Tayū plans to sacrifice Sayohime to a snake, he is doing it to save his only daughter, providing another example of women being valued in this story.<sup>65</sup>

Sayohime's only true regret upon learning her fate is that she will never see her mother again, yet Sayohime's faith in the Lotus Sutra brings her a sense of peace, even as she waits to be

63 Kimbrough, trans., “Sayohime,” in *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*.

64 Muroki Yatarō, SNKS *Sekkyō shū* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1977), 350-351. The *nara ehon* does not include this exchange, and rather has the father bemoaning that his only child is a daughter and beseeching his wife to find Sayohime a husband to carry on his name while his wife laments her husband's death and wonders how she will survive. Though this at first seems contrary to the overall tone of the story, Sayohime's father's disparaging final words could be evoking Sariputra's condescending speech to the Dragon Girl immediately preceding her enlightenment.

65 There are several parallels between the yearly sacrifice described in *Sayohime* and a yearly festival known as the *Rengee* 蓮華会 Lotus Festival, which used to be celebrated at Chikubushima. During the festival, a local parishioner from Ōmi province would be assigned with the honorable task of commissioning a sacred image of Benzaiten, and on the day of the festival the new statue would be taken to the island in a grand boat procession. Watsky, *Chikubushima*, 41. The Lotus Festival could also possibly be related to the sinking of a model Chikubushima as an offering to the god of the lake that is mentioned in *Chikubushima engi*. Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 58.

devoured on the sacrificial dais. The Lotus Sutra is the primary article of faith in this tale, and it is valued specifically for its message of salvation for women. In *Matsura Chōja*, a copy of the Lotus Sutra is Sayohime's father's last gift to her.<sup>66</sup> In *Sayohime*, her mother's parting words to her are about the sutra:

Oh, child, I almost forgot! That protective charm around your neck is a sutra left to you by your father. It's the *Lotus*, the most important of all the sutras that the Buddha preached over fifty years. Among its eight scrolls, the fifth contains the Devadatta Chapter, which tells about Buddhahood for women – how even the eight-year-old dragon girl was able to achieve salvation. Women should honor and trust in it, both for this life and for their next rebirth.<sup>67</sup>

Sayohime takes this ominous foreshadowing to heart, and as she sits on the platform waiting to be consumed, she screws up her courage and decides to quit her crying and recite the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Then, in a great show of thunder and lightning, the snake finally emerges. Sayohime is unfazed, and she directly addresses the serpent. She explains to it that she needs a moment to read from the sutra, dedicating different scrolls to her mother, father and Gongga no Tayū. In *Matsura Chōja*, she dedicates the Devadatta chapter to herself, and begins to read the passage wherein Śāriputra lists the five states of rebirth unattainable by women, which ends with the question *unga nyoshin sokotoku jōbutsu* 云何女身即得成仏 “As a woman, how could you quickly become a buddha?”<sup>68</sup> Invoking the dragon girl's enlightenment, she then proclaims that if the dragon girl's enlightenment is true, then the snake, too, can cast off its snake form, whereupon she hits the serpent upon the head. Sure enough, its many horns and scales fall away, and its true form is revealed. In the process, the sutra's message of salvation is reclaimed for women.

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66 Muroki, SNKS *Sekkyō shū*, 350-351.

67 Kimbrough, trans., “Sayohime,” in *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*.

68 Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra*, 188.

When the snake turns out to be a teenage girl and not a Shintō deity after all, some explanation is required. The snake-woman tells Sayohime that she herself was a sacrificial victim for the building of a bridge here one thousand years ago. As she says in the *nara ehon* text, “I couldn't believe it! Out of all the girls in the eight hamlets and eight villages, they were going to drown me? It was infuriating! In fact, I was so angry that I transformed into a giant serpent, thirty yards long, and became the guardian of the river.”<sup>69</sup> In the *Matsura Chōja* version, she recounts making an angry vow to terrorize the villages as a giant serpent, a threat she made good on, eating nine-hundred-ninety-nine live sacrifices over the last one thousand years. This is the portion of the text that identifies her as a snake-woman *à la Dōjōji*, yet she is treated quite differently by the text than earlier snake-women. Her anger is portrayed as justifiable in keeping with the anti-human sacrifice aspect of the tale, something I will talk about below. Her transformative resentment is also non-sexual in nature – in fact, we are supposed to feel nothing but pity for this unfortunate victim of sacrifice, whereas the woman in the Dōjōji legend is certainly judged for her inability to control her emotions. And whereas that legend emphasized salvation for women *in spite* of the five obstructions, Sayohime's climactic speech is clearly an argument against that reading. She reads those five obstructions aloud, ending with that derisive question – as a woman, how could you quickly become a buddha? Yet in this context, the meaning is different, something akin to a challenge. She hits the snake on the head, an interesting juxtaposition to the way other snake-woman tales hit women over the head with the five obstructions. Indeed, the miraculous moment of salvation can be read as a refutation of the five obstructions, and this seems to be the interpretation of the dragon girl's enlightenment presented in *Sayohime*.

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69 Kimbrough, trans., “Sayohime,” in *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*.

When the snake-woman re-emerges from the lake in her true form, she is said to be a girl of seventeen or eighteen-years-old. The pictures of this scene from the Kyoto University *nara ehon Sayohime* are quite striking: on one page there is a fearsome dragon and our stalwart heroine, and on the next there are two nearly identical figures facing each other. Though we have no record of the puppet performance, the narrative suggests a similar scene was created with puppets on stage. This play of reflections is more than a stunning visual trick, and it accomplishes several things. For one, it underscores the anti-human sacrifice/pro-Buddhism message by contrasting the fate of these two innocent victims. When the snake-woman was sacrificed, she could not find a way to overcome those feelings of anger. By sacrificing her, the villagers unwittingly created an endless cycle of misery, one sacrifice leading to nine-hundred-ninety-nine more. Sayohime, however, has the power of the Lotus Sutra, and with that she overcomes her fear and resentment and ends the cycle of sacrifice. This allows Buddhism to overcome human sacrifice on a societal as well as personal level, which in turn symbolizes Buddhism's offer of social order and personal salvation.

The other result of this pairing of mirror images brings us back to Benzaiten. As Royall Tyler pointed out regarding the dragon god and Benzaiten in the *nō* play *Chikubushima*, the two are an expression of non-duality. By contrasting male and female, Shintō and Buddhist, water and land, and yet working so perfectly in concert, the Blue Dragon and the White Snake suggest that there is no difference between them.<sup>70</sup> In *Sayohime*, this reflective principle is taken further. The snake and Benzaiten are not merely two opposite expressions of the same principle, they are actually one and the same. The gendered reflection of the dragon god and Benzaiten is replaced with an exclusively female representation of non-duality, which could be understood as an

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<sup>70</sup> Tyler, *Japanese Nō Dramas*, 60.

argument for the salvation of all women. In the moment after salvation, there is no difference between a perpetually virtuous manifestation of a goddess and a resentment-filled snake-woman.

There is the possibility that by replacing the snake god with a snake-woman, Shintō is effectively erased in the work. The serpent's true identity denies the validity of the world of *kami*, suggesting a Buddhist origin even for Shintō deities. Other aspects of the work, such as the less-than-flattering depiction of the Shintō priests during the sacrifice ceremony, suggest a possible critique of folk Shintō practices. After the priests finish their invocations, the *nara ehon* text says that “Having completed the ceremony, the men all scrambled helter-skelter for the boat, terrified that the great serpent might suddenly appear . . . Gonga and the priests felt as if they had tread on a tiger's tail, or stroked the whiskers of some poisonous snake.”<sup>71</sup> The tone of the passage seems derisive, and combined with the false nature of the “snake god,” one might conclude that the goal was to mock Shintō beliefs and practices. It could also quite simply serve to highlight the calm Sayohime finds in Buddhism, while the priests and villagers hide and cower in fear of their snake god.

The reflective nature of the snake-woman and Sayohime is not the only remnant of Benzaiten present in this transformation scene. In fact, in perhaps the most multifaceted scene of the entire work, the snake-woman decides to thank Sayohime by offering her a wish-fulfilling jewel. In the moment she presents the jewel to her, three symbolic serpent frameworks are collapsed into one. On one level, this act recalls the dragon god's gift to Benzaiten in *Enoshima engi* and other Benzaiten tales, and this identifies Sayohime as a manifestation of Benzaiten. On another level, this evokes the dragon girl's gift of the *nyoi hōju* to Śākyamuni in the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Finally, in *Sayohime*, we see a snake-woman present the jewel. The

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71 Kimbrough, trans., *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*, “Sayohime.”

jewel, its magical qualities aside, seems to represent buddha-nature in all of these works. In the act of saving another, Sayohime is granted this jewel of buddha-nature, and in giving this jewel, the snake-woman aligns herself with the enlightened. If we take this story as a true *honjimonō*, the presentation of the jewel could also be seen as the moment that Sayohime becomes Benzaiten. It is appropriate, then, that Sayohime uses her wish-fulfilling jewel to repair her beleaguered mother's eyesight; this is a compassionate use befitting a goddess, and it resolves the issue of Sayohime's filial duty to her mother.

#### FOR WOMEN, BY WOMEN

In the end, the complex combination of allusions and allegories seems to have one purpose: to tell a positive story of salvation for women. Beyond subtle background elements such as the strong mother character and the two fathers devoted to their daughters, it is remarkable that there is not a single verse referring to the inherent sinfulness of women, and nowhere do any of the female characters lament their wretched femininity.<sup>72</sup> As the dragon god explained in the *nō* play *Chikubushima*, Benzaiten has a woman's form, and she welcomes women in particular to salvation. By reversing the snake transformation and portraying a woman as the arbiter of salvation, the *Sayohime* narrative frees the Lotus Sutra's message of salvation from the negative aspects of the snake-woman trope. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the snake-woman trope, even in the most sympathetic of its uses, offers a paradoxical interpretation of the Devadatta chapter wherein salvation is offered in spite of

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<sup>72</sup> As noted above, in the *nara ehon Sayohime*, Sayohime's mother does react to her husband's imminent death with panic over what she will do "as a mere woman." Also in that version, Sayohime's father instructs his wife to find Sayohime a husband to carry on the family name. However, of the Tōyō bunko *Matsura Sayohime*, the 1661 *Matsura Chōja*, and the 1704 *Matsura Chōja*, not one includes the wife's rant, and they all concur that the father's last wish is for his wife to raise Sayohime well.

womanhood. This interpretation takes Śāriputra's invectives to be valid and the dragon girl's enlightenment to be remarkable, allowing for the misogynistic framework to persist. *Sayohime* seems to reject this reading, creating a powerful vision of salvation for women, by women.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHANGING SHAPE: THE APPEARANCE OF THE SNAKE-WOMAN TROPE IN *CHŪJŌHIME GOHONJI*

A popular pilgrimage site for Pure Land Buddhists is the Taima Temple in Nara. It is renowned for the *Taima mandara* 当麻曼荼羅, a woven silk tapestry which depicts Amida's Western Paradise.<sup>73</sup> Though it is now thought to have been woven in China in the mid-eighth century, it was not long after the mandala arrived in Japan in the late Heian period that a much more compelling and memorable origin story rose up around it.<sup>74</sup> This tale, in its many and varied versions, centers on the heroine Chūjōhime, to whom Amida Buddha and the Bodhisattva Kannon appear in female form, whereupon they weave or show her how to weave the mandala. Many things about Chūjōhime herself shifted and changed as the story grew more popular throughout the medieval period – her lineage, her involvement with the mandala's weaving, her background story, and even her status as a deity. Soon, the legend of the mandala was woven together with the story of Chūjōhime's abuse at the hands of a cruel stepmother, a development that only further endeared her to medieval audiences and added to her fame.

This wicked stepmother figure is a fixture not just in Japanese folk and popular stories, but in folk tales worldwide. She too undergoes changes throughout the different versions of this legend, most interestingly in the late seventeenth

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73 While it is called a mandala, it is considered to be a *hensōzu*, which Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis translates as “transformation tableaux.” Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 15.

74 Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” in *Flowing Traces*, ed. James H. Sanford, William LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) 181-186.

century *sekkyō-jōruri* work *Chūjōhime gohonji* 中将姫御本時.<sup>75</sup> Here she joins a long tradition of women in Japanese fiction who are driven to the brink of madness by an obsessive attachment and have, as a result, transformed into giant serpents. Foiled continually in her quest to destroy Chūjōhime, the stepmother transforms into a serpent and attempts to disrupt Chūjōhime's final sermon and subsequent enlightenment. There is no serpent slaying or subduing, however – Chūjōhime instead directs her stepmother to let go of her attachments so they can achieve Pure Land rebirth together. In earlier versions, the disgraced stepmother is simply banished or killed. Why, then, was the snake transformation element added to this version? As with the tale of fellow *sekkyō* heroine Sayohime, the presence of a transformed snake-woman allows Chūjōhime to confront those prevailing ideas about the inherent sinfulness of women and to defeat them through her own Buddhist virtue. It also serves as the device which pulls together all the strands of the mandala legend and of Chūjōhime's own origin story, bringing a true resolution in keeping with the female salvation theme of the legend as a whole.

#### THE MANY LIVES OF CHŪJŌHIME

Before discussing stepmothers and snake transformation, it will be valuable to examine the legend in terms of textual history and the development of story elements. While Chūjōhime's story may have begun as a back-story of the *Taima mandara*, subsequent versions have Chūjōhime taking on increasing importance in the tale, to the point where it is Chūjōhime herself who is the cause for wonderment

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<sup>75</sup> Typeset in Yokoyama Shigeru, ed., *Sekkyō shōhon shū* vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1968), 261-277. Not to be confused with the *kojōruri* text *Chūjōhime no gohonji* 中将姫之御本地, which is often written without 之.

and the focus of worship. Tracing the development of the legend reveals some interesting things about it and adds to an understanding of the significance of the appearance of the snake in *Chūjōhime gohonji*. The earliest version of the legend appears in the 1191 *Kenkyū gojunrei ki* 建久御巡礼記, which was the record of an Imperial pilgrimage made in the Kenkyū era (1190-1199).<sup>76</sup> There are two theories presented as to the origin of the mandala: the first claims it was woven by a “transformed person”<sup>77</sup> in response to a vow made by the wife of the temple founder, Prince Maroko,<sup>78</sup> and the second says it was donated by the daughter of one Yokohagi no Otodo.<sup>79</sup> As the legend grew, these two basic elements would be combined into a single story, where Chūjōhime is Yokohagi's daughter and is also the one who makes a vow which causes Amida Buddha and/or Kannon to appear in human form and create the mandala. Though this is considered the basic premise of the tale in its early formulation, these elements were not entirely stable, something which is worth addressing.

It is convenient for some purposes to speak of Chūjōhime in generalized terms, looking at the combined versions as a composite text. For the purposes of this study, however, it is worthwhile to consider the *way* in which the story has changed.

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76 For a more detailed history of the legend, see ten Grotenhuis, “*The Weaving of a Legend*,” 186-188.

77 This is the term ten Grotenhuis uses for the nun who is a manifestation of Amida. This is because she is identified as *ke*. The weaver woman, who is a manifestation of Kannon, is *also* identified as *ke*, and for clarity ten Grotenhuis proposes using “apparitional figure.” ten Grotenhuis, *The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan*, 156-8, 385.

78 Prince Maroko was the brother of Shōtoku Taishi and is said to have founded Taima Temple in 612 CE.

79 Whether Chūjōhime was a historical person or not is ambiguous. Yokohagi no Otodo is sometimes identified as Fujiwara no Toyonari (704-765), who had the title Yokohagi Daijin during his career. For more on Chūjōhime's historical identity, see ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 184: footnote 7.

For example, Chūjōhime is identified sometimes as the daughter of Yokohagi, sometimes as his wife, and even as his mother-in-law. Ultimately the role of daughter won out, unsurprising for the medieval period when popular literature often featured the plights of unfortunate children.

One aspect that remains steadfast throughout the versions is Chūjōhime's desire to leave the world. She is depicted as preternaturally religious in the *Taima mandara engi emaki* 大麻曼荼羅縁起絵巻 (Picture Scroll of the Origin of the Taima Mandala).<sup>80</sup> Despite the title, Chūjōhime is certainly the central figure of this work.<sup>81</sup> The images depict her assiduously copying sutras, and the text describes her making “a moss sleeve” (nun's robe) and taking vows.

But, [despite her privileged upbringing, the princess'] heart was not touched by the flowers of spring, nor did she turn her thoughts to the autumn moon [. . .] Searching deeply for the path of the Buddha, she looked for enlightenment in the Law. Accordingly, she copied one thousand scrolls of the Pure Land-praising [Shōsan Jōdo] sutras; she mounted them on jeweled rollers, tied them with gorgeous strings, and dedicated them to this temple.<sup>82</sup>

After Chūjōhime becomes a nun, she makes the vow which results in the weaving of the mandala, saying, “If I do not see the Buddha in a living form, I shall not leave

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80 For a full translation of this text, see ten Grotenhuis, *The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan*, 156-164.

81 It should be noted that while I am referring to Chūjōhime as the central character of *Taima mandara engi emaki*, the first known use of the name 'Chūjōhime' for this character appears in the *Shiju hyaku innenshū* 私聚百因縁集 of 1257. She is actually unnamed in the *engi emaki*. ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 184: footnote 7.

82 *Taima mandara engi emaki*, as translated in ten Grotenhuis, *The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan*, 157. As Monica Dix points out in her dissertation on Chūjōhime, this scene plays against the audience's preconceived ideas about young aristocratic women, who were characterized as being interested in poetry and romance, not enlightenment. Monica Dix, *Writing Women into Religious Histories: Re-reading Representations of Chūjōhime in Medieval Japanese Buddhist Narratives* (doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2006), 25.

this temple gate.”<sup>83</sup> It is then that the “transformed” nun arrives and requests the supplies for the mandala, which is then woven by an “apparitional” woman who appears shortly thereafter. The first woman is later revealed to be Amida Buddha, and the weaver woman is the bodhisattva Kannon. It is this element of the basic form of the legend that makes it remarkable and marks it as a legend with special appeal for women – something that likely stems from its Pure Land orientation.

Pure Land Buddhism rose in popularity and influence during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. Derived from within the Tendai School of Buddhism, Pure Land devotion focused on Amida and his vow to deliver followers to the Western Paradise if they simply chant his name. Since this method requires no monastic vows and a relatively small amount of personal effort, it was far more accessible than some of the other practice-based or esoteric Buddhist schools like Zen or Shingon and was thus quite popular among upper and lower classes alike.<sup>84</sup> In contrast to some other sects, Pure Land also offered salvation to women, despite the five obstructions and inherent sinfulness of women.<sup>85</sup> Amida's thirty-fifth vow in particular states that he would not attain buddhahood if women were still reborn as women even after hearing his name.<sup>86</sup> While this would seem to indicate some parity for women in Pure Land Buddhism, many scholars have noted that the vow requires women to despise their female bodies, and that by discussing salvation as extending

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83 ten Grotenhuis, *The Revival of the Taima Mandala in Medieval Japan*, 157.

84 Robert S. Ellwood and Richard Pilgrim, *Japanese Religion* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 36-38.

85 As Monica Dix points out, the five obstructions were borrowed from the Lotus Sutra and incorporated into the Pure Land interpretive tradition later. Dix, *Writing Women into Religious Histories*, 63.

86 Dix, *Writing Women into Religious Histories*, 62.

even to the most sinful and irredeemable, Pure Land rhetoric effectively places women in an inferior position.<sup>87</sup> This could be an effective proselytizing tool since women, once convinced of their inferiority, would likely turn to the only sect offering them salvation. Conversely, in Pure Land didactic works, women served as representations of sinfulness, making Amida's redeeming power all the more impressive. One alternate view, as explained by Keller Kimbrough in *Preachers, Poets, Women, and the Way*, is that some stories can be understood as “pro-woman within a misogynistic context; that they function to liberate as they inadvertently oppress.”<sup>88</sup> Indeed, casting off hundreds of years of oppressive rhetoric about women and envisioning gender equality would be perhaps too much to expect from even female proselytizers of the medieval period. Instead, by reflecting the reality of women's lives, stories like Chūjōhime's can grapple with misogynistic limitations and, at their best, overcome them.

Amida's vow is echoed in Chūjōhime's own vow to remain at the temple until she sees a living Buddha. That the legend of Chūjōhime would be based in Pure Land belief makes perfect sense, since the *Taima mandara* is an image of the Amida triad, showing Amida and his two bodhisattva counterparts, Kannon and Seishi, in a resplendent Western Paradise. Monica Dix theorizes that the appearance of female-bodied Amida and Kannon in the Chūjōhime legend stems from an effort to express

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87 For a more in-depth discussion on this topic, see Terry Kawashima, *Writing Margins: The Textual Construction of Gender in Heian and Kamakura Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center), 17-20, and R. Keller Kimbrough, *Preachers, Poets, Women and the Way: Izumi Shikibu and the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Japan*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2008), 160-163.

88 Kimbrough, *Preachers, Poets, Women and the Way*, 163.

Pure Land solidarity with a female audience.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the images that frame the central image of the mandala depict the story of the Indian Queen Vaidehi, who asked to be led from her imprisonment to a safer space, and so was taught sixteen contemplations for rebirth in the Western Paradise by Śākyamuni. Though some Pure Land doctrine might not be in line with female salvation, the Chūjōhime legend certainly is, and this will be important for any discussion of *Chūjōhime gohonji*.

So far in the development of the legend, we have a young girl take religious vows and summon Amida and Kannon in female form to weave the *Taima mandara*. This version of the story spread far and wide among Pure Land devotees, its use in preaching and soliciting of funds attested by its inclusion in the 1253 *Yamato-kuni Taima-dera engi* 日本国当麻寺縁起 (The History of Taima Temple in Yamato Province).<sup>90</sup> Eventually the legend was included in one part of the *Ippen Hijiri-e*, the pictorial history of the Pure Land holy man and Jishū (Time Sect) founder Ippen (1239-1289).<sup>91</sup> Made in 1299, it remarks that Chūjōhime is considered to be a manifestation of Dai-seishi, the third member of the Amida triad depicted in the *Taima mandara*. As ten Grotenhuis points out, this is a remarkable feat – to be elevated from the nameless donor to the living manifestation of a bodhisattva in only one hundred years.<sup>92</sup> Still, the late thirteenth-century version of the story has a conspicuous flaw; it does not explain *why* Chūjōhime wants to renounce the world. It

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89 Dix, *Writing Women into Religious Histories*, 57-67.

90 Tokuda Kazuo, *Otogizōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 1988), 373-374. He identifies this work as a *kanjinchō* 勧進帳, or “temple solicitation book.”

91 ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 187.

92 ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 188.

was not common for a young, childless woman to simply become a nun, and yet at this stage the legend proffers no explanation other than that she had always been religious. It was a question that audiences must have asked, and it would seem that it was answered. In his article “Show Me the Place Where My Mother Is!,” Hank Glassman locates the legend's shift from mandala-focused to Chūjōhime-focused as occurring over the course of the fourteenth century, a change guided by itinerant preachers who lectured on the mandala.<sup>93</sup> Though these traditions were recorded in 1436 by Shōsō (1366-1440) in the *Taima mandara sho* 当麻曼荼羅書, the first extant texts to include these new elements were probably two late fourteenth/early fifteenth-century nō plays attributed to Zeami (1363-1443), *Taema* and *Hibariyama*.

In *Taema* and *Hibariyama*, Chūjōhime's life before the mandala is revealed.<sup>94</sup> In fact, *Hibariyama* is focused solely on Chūjōhime's back-story, and curiously neglects to discuss Taima temple or the mandala at all. ten Grotenhuis speculates that Zeami likely grafted another tale onto the Chūjōhime legend to provide a back-story, while Glassman credits the itinerant preaching traditions that informed the *Taima mandara sho*.<sup>95</sup> Regardless, both plays give roughly the same account: Chūjōhime is sent away to be killed on Mount Hibari, only for her life to be spared

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93 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*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: The Kuroda Institute, 2004), 143.

94 *Taema* is accepted as an authentic Zeami text, while *Hibariyama* is thought perhaps to be the work of another author. ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 189.

95 ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 190. While it is not within the purview of this study, it might be valuable to investigate the existence of a prototype for the *Hibariyama* plot. ten Grotenhuis mentions that the tale Zeami attached to the Chūjōhime legend was probably a “current tale,” but perhaps some permutation of the story existed prior to this, and it could shed some light on why the two tales were combined. Glassman, “Show Me Where My Mother Is!” 143-145.

by her executioner. She lives on the mountain until by some happy accident she is reunited with her father,<sup>96</sup> who regrets sending her away and is happy to find her alive. While *Hibariyama* features this story, *Taema* relegates it to the *kyōgen* between acts.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, while *Hibariyama* leaves the reason for the girl's abandonment unclear, *Taema* introduces the character of the mother, as well as the wicked stepmother.<sup>98</sup> Some strains of the legend emphasized Chūjōhime's mother's tragic death, leading Hank Glassman to identify the incident as the young orphan's “primary motivation towards holiness.”<sup>99</sup> However, the *sekkyō Chūjōhime gohonji* belongs to a different lineage. It contains all of one line at the very beginning about her mother's passing, then switches immediately to a far more compelling topic – the trouble with stepmothers.

#### STEPMOTHERS, *SEKKYŌ*, AND SNAKES

The introduction of the wicked stepmother, while certainly an interesting innovation, is not at all a surprising addition. Many popular stories in the medieval and early modern period featured portraits of less-than-flattering stepmothers, such as those in *Nijūshikō* 二十四孝 (Twenty-four [tales of] Filial Piety).<sup>100</sup> Such an

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96 Glassman identifies this element of Chūjōhime's legend as part of what Orikuchi Shinobu termed the *kishu ryūritan*, or “young noble in exile” motif, which was prominent in medieval Japanese literature. Glassman, “Show Me the Place Where My Mother Is!” 142.

97 While this is true of the play as it has been received, it should be noted that *kyōgen* were not usually written down at the time these plays were composed. Therefore, it is entirely possible that this addition of the *kyōgen* was made much later and with some cross-contamination from other stories.

98 ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 191.

99 Glassman, “Show Me the Place Where My Mother Is!,” 142-143

100 *Nijūshikō* (c. Èrshí Sì Xiào) is a set of twenty-four tales of filially pious individuals. Written in the Tang dynasty, these tales were brought to Japan from China sometime in the Edo period. Among the tales are several figures who are filial towards an abusive stepmother, such as Ōshō (c. Wáng Xiáng) 王祥 and Binshiken (c. Mǐn

antagonist is likely to foster sympathy for the main character, and it allows the story to present the element of child abuse without implicating birth parents. Whatever the reasons for the merger, the story was changed on a fundamental level. The legend entered a new phase of its existence, one in which Chūjōhime's stepmother played an increasingly important role.

In the same way that Chūjōhime evolved over time from a nameless, faceless girl in a short dedication to an enigmatic religious icon with a dramatic back-story, the character of Chūjōhime's stepmother also underwent many changes before *Chūjōhime gohonji* was written. In tracing the history of the *Chūjōhime densetsu* 中将姫伝説, a late Edo-period pictorial retelling of the Chūjōhime legend kept in the Naka-no-bō of the Taima Temple, Hioki Atsuko pays special attention to the stepmother and how she eventually becomes a giant snake. The painting, dated to sometime in the late Edo period, features the stepmother's snake transformation prominently. Hioki shows that the *Chūjōhime gohonji* version of the legend is the earliest known extant text which incorporates this element.<sup>101</sup> Before that development, the fate of the stepmother after tormenting Chūjōhime, as Hioki puts it, “cannot be confirmed.”<sup>102</sup> Comparing the stepmother's fate in different versions of the legend after the fourteenth century, we can see there were a wide range of possibilities. In the Hiroshima University Library *Chūjōhime* as well as *Chūjōhime*

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Zīqiān) 閔子騫.

101 Hioki Atsuko, “Chūjōhime setsuwa no tenkai: Taimadera Nakanobō-zō *Chūjōhime eden* o tansho to shite,” in *Publishing the Stage: Print and Performance in Early Modern Japan*, ed. Keller Kimbrough and Satoko Shimazaki (Boulder CO: Center for Asian Studies: 2011), 37-54.

102 Hioki, “Chūjōhime setsuwa no tenkai,” 46. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

*gyōjō ki*, the stepmother is merely banished. In the *kojōruri Chūjōhime no gohonji*, the stepmother is forgiven thanks to Chūjōhime's filial heart. In the Kariya Central Library *Chūjōhime monogatari*, the stepmother is punished for her crimes with *hebizeme*, or snake torture:

The wife [stepmother] and wet-nurse were captured and put into a sizable tub. Then a great number of snakes were gathered and put into the tub with them. When the lid was placed over them, how pitiful were those two women, screaming and crying out.<sup>103</sup>

While it is gratifying to see the heinous villain treated to a particularly nasty form of revenge, it highlights how the combination of the two separate stories created new problems even as it sought to solve the original one. In other words, the cruel stepmother back-story explains Chūjōhime's religious resolve, but how can the two parts of the story truly be reconciled as regards the stepmother? While the instance of Chūjōhime forgiving her stepmother out of her filial heart provides evidence of her Buddha nature and superior virtue, shutting the stepmother in a tub with a writhing mass of snakes is not really in keeping with the message of the latter half of the story. Ultimately, it would be a snake that resolved this problematic inconsistency in the story, but not until Chūjōhime arrived in the snake and stepmother-rich world of *sekkyō-bushi*.

Considering the general elements of the *sekkyō* genre as discussed in the introduction, it is clear the Chūjōhime legend was a natural fit. Not only are there Buddhist miracles and instances of child abuse already in the story, but Chūjōhime was already a familiar and beloved character to audiences of the day. However, *Chūjōhime gohonji* did change the legend in an important way with the addition of a snake

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103 From *Chūjōhime monogatari*. Reproduced in Hioki, "Chūjōhime setsuwa no tenkai," 47.

transformation scene. This served to give it a *sekkyō* flavor, since the *sekkyō Sayohime* also features a snake transformation, and *Aigo no waka* has both a snake transformation and an evil stepmother. Moreover, it was important not only for future incarnations of the tale, as Hioki Atsuko shows, but also for its effect on the internal structure of the story.

The story of the stepmother's transformation begins in act four of *Chūjōhime gohonji*, when Chūjōhime is reunited with her father. The stepmother rightly worries about what will happen to her now that her duplicity has been revealed:

Meanwhile, the wife, hearing this news, thought to herself, “How could I possibly face Chūjōhime? Well, I'll just leave this place. Then I won't be likely to meet her.” Under the cover of night, she left the mansion, and since there were some people she knew, she went and called on them. Though she asked for help, these people had already heard some rumors about her and so, abandoning their compassion, they refused to take her in.<sup>104</sup>

Why exactly she is being turned away is not explicitly stated, but the implication seems to be that now that Chūjōhime has been discovered, people have turned against her stepmother. She even goes to someone the text describes as “particularly close” to her and is told she is not “like them” and sent away. As a result,

having nowhere else to go, the wife made up her mind, thinking, “Rather than continuing on in this floating world with people pointing fingers at me, I'll find some river and drown myself.” She went to a certain pool and, left with no other recourse, flung herself in, becoming one with the water grasses of the deep. There was no one who did not despise her at the end.<sup>105</sup>

These passages about the stepmother invite comparison to another work, *Aigo no waka*.

A famously morose story about a young *mōshigo*, the central villain in *Aigo no waka* is Aigo's young and sexually predatory stepmother. She develops an inappropriate fixation

104 Yokoyama, ed., *Sekkyō shōhon shū* vol. 3, 272.

105 Yokoyama, ed., *Sekkyō shōhon shū* vol. 3, 272.

on Aigo and attempts to seduce him. Being virtuous, he rejects her, but this only aggravates her. Like Chūjōhime's stepmother, she decides to slander Aigo so as to invite his father's wrath. In a prescient moment, she tells her servant Tsukisayo that “even if it dooms me to five hundred lives of torment, including the pains of serpent incarnations, I can't stand the thought of simply leaving my love unfulfilled!”<sup>106</sup> Aigo is beaten and hung up in a tree by his own father. He escapes, only to go on the most arduous and miserable trip, wherein he is beaten repeatedly by strangers. Finally, he kills himself by drowning. When Aigo's father hears of this, he has his young wife wrapped up in a mat, publicly shamed, and drowned in Inase Pool. As discussed in the first chapter, there is a strong association between snake transformations and water, so perhaps drowning her was not a good choice. At the site of Aigo's suicide, she reappears:<sup>107</sup>

Miraculously, the water in the lake began to shudder and shake, and dark clouds descended to the north. A hundred-fifty-foot serpent rose from the depths with Little Aigo's corpse on its head, and it placed it on the prayer altar. “Ah, how humiliating!” the creature cried. “I lightly set my heart on the boy, but now, at last, I have fulfilled my desire!”<sup>108</sup>

We can compare this to Chūjōhime's stepmother's grand re-entrance in act six.

Chūjōhime has already taken her vows and received the mandala from Amida and Kannon in female form. She is on the verge of enlightenment, and a great crowd gathers to hear her final sermon and wait with her in an all-night vigil. Once she reaches the end of her sermon on Amida and Kannon, her stepmother reappears:

The stepmother, having become a great serpent some twenty feet long, tried to

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106 “Kimbrough, trans., “Aigo no Waka,” in *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*

107 There was a common belief that all the waterways were connected underground, so supernatural beings such as giant serpents could travel great distances by going underwater.

108 Kimbrough, trans., “Aigo no Waka,” in *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*. This passage is from the 1670 *Aigo no waka*.

disrupt Chūjōhime's sermon by coming out in front of the hall. The serpent, raising its voice, said, “Hello, Chūjōhime. Do you know who I am? Though I am embarrassed to admit it, I am the person who was your mother. While living in this floating world, I had a strong desire that tormented my thoughts—how might I negate it?” Rattling her scales, shaking her horns and thrusting out her tongue, she was a terrifying thing to behold.<sup>109</sup>

The language here is quite interesting, especially the use of the words “strong desire,” or *nenriki* 念力. This is the same word *nen* that appears frequently in snake women tales as early as *Dōjōji*, often in the snake-woman's confessions. Though Chūjōhime's stepmother's desire is not of a sexual nature like Aigo's stepmother's, this could be seen as an intentional choice when viewed in conjunction with *Sayohime*, the other *sekkyō* featuring a snake transformation. Both of these stories feature snake-transformations rooted in attachment, but not *sexual* attachment. Both are also notably more friendly to women than *Aigo no waka*, and perhaps the deviation from the sexual infatuation-related transformation trope is a rejection of the implication that women's attachments are fueled by lust and romantic jealousy.

The similarities between *Aigo no waka* and *Chūjōhime gohonji* end when Aigo's stepmother dives back under the water. One curious feature of *Aigo no waka* is the lack of salvation for the stepmother. In fact, while the idea of snake transformation comes from Buddhist beliefs, *Aigo no waka* is perhaps not as solidly Buddhist as other *sekkyō* works.<sup>110</sup>In this way, the *Chūjōhime gohonji* seems to have more in common with *Sayohime*, the story of a filial daughter who sells herself to pay for memorial services for her father, only to end up a sacrifice to a snake deity. While *Sayohime* takes its cues

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109 Yokoyama, ed., *Sekkyō shōhon shū* vol. 3, 275-276.

110 It may be necessary to consider the effect of *jōruri* on *Aigo no waka*. While it is rife with the stock phrases and calling cards of the *sekkyō* chanters (i.e., *itawashiya*), it is also divided into six acts as was common in *jōruri* and has slightly more *jōruri*-esque violence and secularism, .

from the Lotus Sutra, the Chūjōhime legend is inescapably Pure Land in all of its versions. As discussed in chapter two, *Sayohime* echoes the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra, focusing on salvation for women and the figure of the Dragon Girl, whereas Chūjōhime advocates Amida's vow to save all sentient beings. Regardless, the scenes wherein Sayohime faces the fearsome snake deity who plans to eat her and Chūjōhime faces her stepmother in snake-form share several similarities. One is that they both command their tormentors to achieve salvation. Not ask, not suggest, but command. Sayohime asks for some time to read the Lotus Sutra, then says, “I want you to listen to it, too. By the power of this scripture, the eight-year-old Dragon Girl received the prophecy to attain enlightenment as Heavenly King Thus Come One. I therefore command you, too, to attain buddhahood with me!”<sup>111</sup> Chūjōhime's version of this statement is Pure Land-based instead of Lotus Sutra-based, but sounds remarkably similar:

“From now on, cast off those evil thoughts and enter into buddhahood,” she said. Clasp her hands together, she earnestly prayed: “Among all the various Buddhas, the compassion of the bodhisattvas is Mahāyāna compassion, and so even deeply sinful women, even evil people – even sentient and non-sentient grasses and trees – shall all without fail be granted salvation. And so, by your vow,<sup>112</sup> grant salvation to both me and my stepmother.” After this, she turned to the great serpent, saying, “How about it, Mother? From here on out, cast off your evil heart and recite the nembutsu!”<sup>113</sup>

The *nembutsu*, or “name of the buddha (Amida),” is what Pure Land followers chant, as per Amida's vow that whoever calls his name will be reborn in the Western Paradise.

Chūjōhime's argument proves convincing and her stepmother chants *namu amida butsu*,

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111 Kimbrough, *Wondrous Brutal Fictions*, “Sayohime.”

112 The vow mentioned here is Amida's vow to save all sentient beings.

113 Yokoyama, ed., *Sekkyō shōhon shū* vol. 3, 276.

*namu amida butsu*. Chūjōhime's stepmother immediately breaks free of her snake form, as did Sayohime's snake counterpart. This is fascinating in terms of the history of the snake-woman trope, since it is often male clerics providing salvation on misogynistic terms to these transformed women, such as in the Dōjōji legend. But here we see young women – Chūjōhime and Sayohime – as the arbiters of salvation to other women. If the original function of this trope in literature was to highlight the true power of Buddhism, a power so efficacious it can save even a woman who has transformed into a snake, then here we see a modification of that idea. This underscores the Buddhist power of these particular women and suggests that such Buddhist virtue is in no way limited to men.

There is another aspect to the snake-stepmother's appearance at the end of *Chūjōhime gohonji* that is important to consider. That is how it changes the structure of the story. While it could be suggested that the snake-transformation storyline was merely tacked onto the Chūjōhime legend because snakes make for good entertainment, it seems to be more complicated than that. It is true that *sekkyō* often involved puppetry, and this text dates from the late seventeenth century, a time when *sekkyō* felt some competition from the fast growing *kojōruri* genre. Certainly a snake puppet or automaton would be exciting, and the more snakes a chanter added to stories, the more he could re-use that puppet.<sup>114</sup> Still, if the addition of snake-transformation to *Chūjōhime gohonji* was merely a shrewd marketing technique, then it is quite the happy accident that it finally fully integrates the two halves of Chūjōhime's story and provides the closure and resolution missing from earlier versions. As already discussed, previous tellings of the legend have Chūjōhime's stepmother being banished or punished, which

<sup>114</sup> For more on snake automatons in puppet theatre, see Nishida Kōzō, “Sekkyō jōruri to kojōruri,” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 70, no. 12 (2005): 117-120.

seems counter-intuitive in a story that is ultimately about salvation for women. By having the stepmother reappear, Chūjōhime is given the chance to air her grievances and forgive her stepmother who, after all, did inadvertently set her on the path to enlightenment:

Chūjōhime, seeing this, shed tears. “How wretched, this form of yours! It's because you have such a heart that you have fallen into the realm of snakes. Even though you are this way, my heart is not set against you. In my childhood, I lost my mother; when I begged you to be my mother, you thought of me only as a stepchild, and you resented me. How horrible!”<sup>115</sup>

This, in turn, gives the stepmother the chance to realize the errors of her ways and apologize. It is interesting to note that when the stepmother arrives at the sermon, she does not say “I'm here to fulfill my terrible desires!” which is what Aigo's stepmother does. Instead, she says her strong desire tormented her thoughts and asks, “How might I negate it?” This contrition opens the door for Chūjōhime to offer a way to salvation (and to display her holy powers), and when the stepmother accepts it, it is quite a stirring scene:

All at once the great serpent escaped her suffering, and she was moved to tears. “Ah, how grateful I am for what you have done! Not knowing that it would come to this kind of thing, I had only wicked thoughts – how wretched! From now on, I shall single-heartedly rely on you. Please lead me on the way!” said the giant serpent, and, instantly achieving buddhahood, she rose up into the sky.<sup>116</sup>

As Chūjōhime points out in her benediction to her stepmother, “even deeply sinful women, even evil people” will be given salvation thanks to Amida. While the miracle of the *Taima mandara's* weaving showed the rewards a virtuous follower might expect, it is the salvation of the stepmother that sells the Pure Land message of the story. When the

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115 Yokoyama, ed., *Sekkyō shōhon shū* vol. 3, 275-276.

116 Yokoyama, ed., *Sekkyō shōhon shū* vol. 3, 276.

back-story and origin story were first merged, the stepmother was a loose end that needed to be tucked in, a side-effect of expanding the story. Now, in *Chūjōhime gohonji*, the figure of the stepmother contributes fully to the message of the story, emphasizing for the audience that even the most damned among us can rely on Amida's vow. Who better than the reviled and villainous stepmother to embody such a concept? In a theological sense, as well as a literary sense, this ending is far more gratifying than banishment or *hebizeme*.

#### TYING UP THE LOOSE STRANDS

The evolution of *Chūjōhime* throughout its disparate versions reflects the influence of many different factors: the needs of different genres, changing ideas about Buddhism, as well as changing perspectives on storytelling itself. After *Chūjōhime gohonji*, some versions of the story included the snake, others did not. As Edo-period sensibilities impressed themselves upon the legend, retellings incorporated romantic subplots and other trappings of the *chōnin* entertainment culture.<sup>117</sup> Still, the unique features of the late seventeenth century *sekkyō-jōruri Chūjōhime gohonji* make it a particularly compelling version, one that has not received much scholarly attention as part of the *Chūjōhime* corpus or as a work of *sekkyō-jōruri*. This is an unfortunate oversight, because the introduction of the snake-woman transformation trope makes *Chūjōhime gohonji* interesting for its contributions to the genre and the development of the *Chūjōhime* legend, and as a piece of literature in and of itself.

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117 For more on *Chūjōhime* in the Edo period, see ten Grotenhuis, “The Weaving of a Legend,” 194-199, and Hioki Atsuko, “*Chūjōhime setsuwa no tenkai*,” 48-53.

## CONCLUSIONS

### CAST OFF YOUR SERPENT FORM: LESSONS FROM *SAYOHIME* AND *CHŪJŌHIME GOHONJI*

So far in this examination of the snake-woman trope, I have limited my in-depth analysis to *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji* and have devoted time to only the most essential history of the trope. Ultimately, both of these works contain profound messages of salvation for women, and both underscore that message with sympathetic uses of the snake-woman transformation trope. It seems pertinent to consider some expansive questions regarding these stories and their message. And, taking into account the limitations of the present study, it is also worth addressing what future study might advance our understanding of snake-women in Japanese literature.

As I noted earlier, *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji* are remarkably positive regarding women, especially snake-women. There are many possible reasons for this positivity, yet most theories are confined to the realm of speculation. Could it be that chanters were catering to a largely female audience, or perhaps the chanters from whom these *sekkyō* originated were themselves female?<sup>118</sup> Perhaps it had more to do with the woman-positive elements of those earlier tales and legends that provided the basis for *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji*, with Benzaiten, the Lotus Sutra and female manifestations of Amida and Kannon exerting influence over the direction of the narrative. At first, the presence of snake-women in these stories would seem to be counter-intuitive – works like the Dōjōji legend and *Aigo no waka* attest to the snake-

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118 While there are no records of female *sekkyō* chanters, there is a record of a later female *ko-jōruri* chanter named Rokuji Namuemon 六字南無衛門 from Yamashiro Province who was active in the seventeenth century. Keller Kimbrough and Satoko Shimazaki, *Publishing the Stage*, 3.

woman trope's use in negative portrayals of women. And yet, the snake-woman character is used in *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji* to heighten the message of salvation for women. It is possible, then, that the subversion of the snake-woman trope in these two works is a kind of commentary on the negative attitudes toward women so prevalent at the time. Again, we cannot know the author's intent, since we do not even know for certain the chanters' names. Still, considering the level of contempt for women present in other works of the medieval and early modern period, it seems worthwhile to question the origin of all this apparent goodwill toward women.

Whatever the reason, these two works are among the best examples of the positive/sympathetic use of the snake-woman trope. But what about other uses, negative, positive, or otherwise? While the preceding analysis looked specifically at these two sympathetic works, there are any number of other works that would add to the understanding of snake-transformations in Japanese literature. Though only dealt with briefly in the first chapter, certainly *setsuwa* featuring snake rebirth and/or transformation deserve some focused attention. As Ōsumi Kazuo notes in her essay, “Historical Notes on Women and the Japanization of Buddhism,” the *setsuwa* genre “is extremely important in clarifying the nature of Buddhism as it was known and accepted by women.”<sup>119</sup> This could also be applied to genres such as the *emaki* used in *etoki*, and perhaps even *sekkyō* and similar forms of itinerant entertainment. What was the meaning of snake-transformation for women of the time? How did that shape their understanding of Buddhism? In turn, what might it tell us about Buddhist views on women?

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119 Ōsumi Kazuo, “Historical Notes on Women and the Japanization of Buddhism,” trans. Barbara Ruch in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2002), xxxvi.

Another interesting topic is the shift that occurs in depictions of snake-woman transformations during the Tokugawa-period. In such works as Chikamatsu's *Semimaru* せみまる, the titular character's jilted wife becomes a serpent out of desire for revenge.<sup>120</sup> While Buddhist services are eventually held to placate her malevolent spirit, this supplication is done out of a practical concern for the safety of the living and not because of any particular desire to see her achieve salvation. Furthermore, the moment of her transformation is intimately merged with other tropes about jealous women – she places a curse by hammering nails into an effigy, and she is wearing the *kanawa* 金輪, or “iron crown,” associated with such revenge rituals. In “Jasei no in” 蛇性の姪 (Lust of the White Serpent), Ueda Akinari retells Feng Menglong's Chinese tale of a serpent-turned-woman, layering the tale with associated themes more familiar to Japanese readers such as the jealous snake-woman and jealousy-driven spirit possession.<sup>121</sup> How might we interpret this secularization of the trope's symbolic meaning, and what might that infer about Buddhism and women in the Edo period?

If the many different instances of female snake transformation throughout Japanese literature could be identified and analysed with the elements of the snake-woman trope in mind, then perhaps a clearer picture of the snake-woman would emerge, one that allows for a truly comprehensive analysis. While fully understanding the origins, evolution and symbolic significance of snake-woman transformation is not a

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120 Typeset in Matsuzaki Hitoshi, Hara Michio, Iguchi Hiroshi, Ōhashi Tadayoshi, ed., SNKBZ *Chikamatsu jōrurishū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1993), 57-82. Translated in Susan Matisoff, *The Legend of Semimaru, Blind Musician of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 204-272.

121 Typeset in Satake Akihiro, et al. eds., SNKBT (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 357-387. Translated by Anthony Chambers in Haruo Shirane, ed., *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology 1600-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 583-598.

realistic possibility, we can still gain some valuable insight from the works examined in this thesis. The snake-woman trope and the way it is used in a work often serves as a barometer of the attitude towards women encoded in the work. It also seems indicative of different trends in Buddhism, both those that condemned women while simultaneously offering them salvation, and those that recognized that the idea of non-duality applies to physical form. Whether a man, a woman, or a giant serpent, all alike can achieve enlightenment by some means. In the case of *Sayohime* and *Chūjōhime gohonji*, the snake-woman characters create a profound vision of salvation, offered by women, for women, and without condemnation.

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