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Imagining Rāhula in Medieval Japan

The *Raun kōshiki*

This article examines the *Raun kōshiki*, a liturgical text composed by the priest Yuishin, a scholar of both the Hossō and Ritsu (Vinaya) traditions who studied under Nara priests interested in the revival of the precepts. The *Raun kōshiki*, which is focused on Śākyamuni’s son, Rāhula, captures both the Ritsu school’s interest in “returning” to the foundational teachings of the historical Buddha and his immediate disciples, as well as its support of “early” Buddhist practices associated with the Indian and Chinese Sanghas, such as the veneration of the Buddha’s disciples and the cult of the arhats. In addition to tracing the use of the *Raun kōshiki* in medieval Ritsu-school circles, this article also undertakes a close reading of the liturgy’s textual content, comparing Yuishin’s portrayal of Rāhula with other textual descriptions of the Buddha’s son circulating in Japan during Yuishin’s time.

KEYWORDS: Rāhula—Yaśodharā—Śākyamuni—Eison—Nara—Yuishin—*kōshiki*—Ritsu—Vinaya—arhat—novice—pure land—precepts

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AMONG THE MANY *kōshiki* associated with the Kamakura-period revival of the old Nara schools is the *Raun kōshiki* 羅云講式, a liturgy that pays homage to Śākyamuni's son, Rāhula (Jp. Raun 羅云 or Ragora 羅睺羅). Although clerics belonging to the Nara schools created and performed many different *kōshiki* during this time, attention to the *Raun kōshiki* in particular sheds light on the monastic goals and values shared by these groups, especially those committed to the revival of the *vinaya* and the "return" to "Indian" practices such as devotion to Śākyamuni and his disciples. This article will describe and analyze the *Raun kōshiki*, addressing not only its use and content, but also its place in the religious life of medieval Japan. Ultimately I will argue that the text's author, Yuishin 唯心 (dates unclear), presented Rāhula both as a model for young novices and as a savior figure capable of saving sentient beings.

Rāhula Veneration in Medieval Nara

The *Raun kōshiki*, which venerates the Buddha's son, is one of only several *kōshiki* that honor disciples of the Buddha. The others that fall into this category include the *Jūroku rakan kōshiki* 十六羅漢講式 (*Kōshiki* on the sixteen arhats) and the *Anan kōshiki* 阿難講式 (*Kōshiki* on Ānanda). As the other articles in this issue demonstrate, there were many categories of *kōshiki* created in medieval Japan. More visible categories of *kōshiki* include those that celebrate Śākyamuni himself, including his birth, teachings, final nirvana, relics, and so on; those that honor particular Buddhas, bodhisattvas, heavenly beings, and kami (there are scores that fall into this category); those that praise eminent monks; those that mark particular ritual occasions or goals of Buddhist practice; and those that commemorate particular texts (such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Heart Sutra*, the *Ullambana Sutra*, the *Brahma Net Sutra*, the *Abhidharma Kośa Śāstra*, and so on).

In some ways the *Raun kōshiki* may appear an unusual or marginal text for, as SEKIGUCHI (1998) points out, there is little evidence that widespread cults to the Buddha's son, Rāhula, ever existed in Japan. Veneration of the arhats as a group did become popular in Japan, especially within Zen lineages. In the Kamakura period, devotion to the sixteen arhats became popular, especially among Zen groups, and in the Edo period, we see the spread of cults to the five hundred arhats as well (MROSS 2007, 20). Although Rāhula was commonly depicted in devotional images of the arhats, it was extremely rare for such images to feature Rāhula as a stand-alone figure. Within the context of the medieval revival of the old Nara schools, however, rites honoring Rāhula appear to have reached

a certain level of popularity. Today two known copies of the *Raun kōshiki* are extant: one belonging to the archives of Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺, with a postscript stating that it was copied during the fifth month of 1312, and another held in the archives of Tōdaiji's 東大寺 library. According to its postscript, this second version was copied in the year 1315. There are also a handful of related texts found in Ritsu-school circles: notable here are the *Raun kuyō no gi* 羅云供養儀 (Ceremony for making offerings to Rāhula), copied at Saidaiji 西大寺 in 1290, and the *Raun kō no hossoku* 羅云講法則 (Procedures for the *kōshiki* on Rāhula), held at Shōmyōji 称名寺 and dating to the Kamakura period. These texts also make mention of separate, relevant works, such as a *hyōbyaku* 表白 (a chanted text stating the intent of a given liturgy) in honor of the *Raun kō kuyō* and a *kada* (Sk. *gāthā*) called “Raun” (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 4–5). Taken together, the survival of these various texts suggest that priests active in Nara circles—at places like Tōshōdaiji, Tōdaiji, Saidaiji, and Saidaiji's Kantō temple Shōmyōji—actively promoted the veneration of Rāhula using *kōshiki* and related *kuyō* during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Indeed, references to these rites appear in a number of historical records as well. The *Kantō ōkanki* 關東往還記, a record of the *vinaya*-revivalist priest Eison's (1201–1290) 1262 trip to Kantō, for example, mentions that the novice order (*shami-shū* 沙彌衆) performed the *Ragora kō* 羅睺羅講 (*Kōshiki* on Rāhula) and the *Ragora ku* 羅睺羅供 (Offertory ceremony for Rāhula) on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the seventh month, respectively. As Sekiguchi points out, it is unclear how these two rites differed from each other (or whether they were different), but on both occasions it is noted that the audiences were delightfully edified (*zuiki* 隨喜) by the performances. The record dating from the fifteenth day specifies that members of both the lay and monastic orders were moved to tears (NARA KOKURITSU BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO ed. 1977, 87–88). That priests affiliated with Eison's Nara-based movement to revive the *vinaya* (Jp. *ritsu* 律) included this rite in their ritual performances out in Kantō, where they were trying to nurture new Ritsu temples, suggests to Sekiguchi that such rites were in fact a staple of practice at Eison's home temple of Saidaiji, which served as the center of the Ritsu school during this period (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 5).

Detailed records of daily practices at thirteenth-century Saidaiji are not available, but such records do survive from Hokkeji 法華寺, an ancient Yamato convent restored in the thirteenth century as the head of a new Ritsu-school network of women's monasteries. According to a 1322 copy of the *Hokke metsuzaiji nenjū gyōji* 法華滅罪寺年中行事 (Annual rites of the Lotus temple for the eradication of transgressions), a list of regularly performed rites at the convent Hokkeji, the *Shami Rāhula kuyō* 沙彌羅睺羅供養 (Offertory ceremony for the novice Rāhula) was performed on the eighth day of the first month, in addition to the *Ragora kō*, which the nuns' novice order (*shamini-shū* 沙彌尼衆) carried

out on the eighth day of both the first and seventh months (YKT 5: 86a–87b). Noting that the 1290 Saidaiji *Raun kuyō no gi* states that it is to be used during the seventh month, Sekiguchi speculates that Ritsu rites for Rāhula were typically carried out during the seventh month, following the close of the summer rains retreat (*geango* 夏安居), which was a particularly significant rite for novice monks and nuns. Indeed, Shōmyōji's *Raun kō kuyō hyōbyaku* 羅云講供養表白 (Ritual intent offerings within a *kōshiki* on Rāhula) specifically states that novice monks would sing praises to Rāhula and begin lectures on the *Shamikai kyō* 沙弥戒經 (Sutra on novice precepts) following the summer rains retreat (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 6).

According to the postscript on the Tōdaiji Library copy of the *Raun kōshiki*, which is said to have been transmitted from the temple's Kaidan'in 戒壇院, this rite was first written by a priest named Yuishin when he was staying at the Kaidan'in in 1257. In this account, attributed to the Kegon monk Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321), Yuishin composed the *kōshiki* at the request of two novice monks at Kaidan'in. In the postscript, Gyōnen recalls this occasion some sixty years later, noting how he had prized the rite since that time. Given the many records about the text circulating in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Nara, it is clear that rituals in honor of Rāhula gained traction, especially among *vinaya* revivalists in the old capital, soon after Yuishin first composed the *kōshiki*. Indeed, the postscript on a 1266 copy of *Raun kuyō no gi* states, “[This is a] book common among the novices of Saidaiji.” We also know that Ken'a 劍阿 (1261–1338), the second rector of Shōmyōji, received initiation into a series of *kada*, or Buddhist hymns, that included pieces from the *Raun kō* (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 6–8).

Little is known about the priest Yuishin, although he does appear in the 1702 *Honchō kōsōden* 本朝高僧伝 (Record of eminent monks of our country [Japan]). There he is identified as Yuishin Kanshō 唯心勸聖, a man of the Heian capital and a priest in the precepts tradition (*kairitsu shū* 戒律宗) who initially studied Hossō doctrine under Ryōhen 良遍 (1194–1252) and later learned the *vinaya* under the Tōdaiji priest and Ritsu scholar Enshō 円照 (1221–1277). Yuishin is said to have remained active both as a scholar of the Hossō school and as a *vinaya* priest, and it is known that he lectured on the *Weishi shuji* 唯識述記, a commentary on Kuiji's 窺基 (632–682) *Discourse on the Theory of Consciousness-Only* (*Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論, T 43, no. 1830).¹ According to the *Honchō kōsōden*, Yuishin later ventured to Kyushu to proselytize there. Neither the details of his final days nor the date of his death are known (WASHIO 1992, 1131; DNBZ 103, 799b).

1. Translation follows Dan Lusthaus and Charles Muller, “Cheng weishi lun,” DDB.

Rāhula as Guardian of Novices

The association between novices and Rāhula cultivated by the medieval Nara schools appears to represent a self-conscious modeling of long-standing continental practices. In fact, the practice in which specific groups within the monastic order make offerings, or *pūjā* (Jp. *kuyō* 供養), to particular disciples of Śākyamuni is one that Chinese authors identify with Indian Buddhists, especially those in Madhurā. In describing the practices of the Sangha in Madhurā, for example, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Faxian 法顯 (320?–420?) writes that communities of monks, once they had settled in a particular area, typically built stupas for major disciples such as Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, and Ānanda, and for the three baskets of the teachings: the *abhidharma*, the *vinaya*, and the sutras. Following the rain retreat each year, monks would preach the Dharma after receiving donations from merit-seeking households in the area. After finishing their preaching, a series of offerings would be made to these stupas. While some stupas appear to have received offerings from the whole community, other such offerings denoted special relationships. Faxian tells us that the nuns' order made offerings to the stupa of Ānanda, for example, since he was the disciple who persuaded the Buddha to accept women into the monastic order. Similarly, masters of the *abhidharma* and *vinaya* paid respects to the stupas built for the *abhidharma* and *vinaya*, respectively. And all of the novices made offerings to Rāhula (T 51, no. 2085, 859b18–27).

Over two hundred years later, the celebrated Chinese pilgrim, Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) also visited Madhurā, and he noted a similar practice in which particular groups within the Sangha would make offerings to particular Buddhist figures:

The Abhidharma group makes offerings to Śāriputra; those who study meditative concentration make offerings to Maudgalyāyana; those [who specialize in] intoning and upholding the sutras make offerings to Pūrṇa-maitrāyaṇī-putra; the order studying the *vinaya* makes offerings to Upāli; the various *bhikṣuṇī* make offerings to Ānanda; those who have not yet received full precepts (*sīla-sampad*) [that is, novices] make offerings to Rāhula; and those who are studying the Mahāyāna make offerings to the various bodhisattvas.

(*Datang xiyuji*, T 51, no. 2087, 890b13–17;

English translation in MEEKS 2010, 233)

While Faxian suggests that offerings directed at specific Buddhist figures took place on designated days once per year, Xuanzang describes a practice in which such offerings (*pūjā*) are made more frequently: specifically, during the first fifteen days of the three months of abstinence (that is, the first, fifth, and ninth months), and on the following six days of each month: the eighth, the fourteenth, the fifteenth, twenty-third, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth. Xuanzang

suggests a set of rites that had become not only more frequent, but also more elaborate. In addition to making lavish offerings of banners, jeweled canopies, incense, and flowers to adorn their stupas, each group also prepared an image of the figure who was the object of their devotion (T 51, no. 2087, 890b11–19; KATSUURA 2008, 104–107; MEEKS 2010, 233).

In general, the logic presented is one in which certain subgroups in the Sangha are described as venerating Buddhist figures with whom they identified most closely. These relationships are made fairly clear in the examples that Xuanzang provides: reflecting the tradition in which Buddhist literature celebrates Maudgalyāyana as the disciple foremost in meditation and Upāli as an expert in the *vinaya*, for example, those members of the Sangha specializing in meditation and the *vinaya* venerate Maudgalyāyana and Upāli, respectively. In the case of Rāhula, neither Faxian nor Xuanzang offers an explicit explanation of his connection to novices. But as the *Ragora kōshiki* makes clear, Rāhula's association with novices stemmed both from his youth at the time of his tonsure and from his status as the leader or “most excellent” (*jōshu* 上首) among the monks of the novice order. According to the *Ragora kōshiki*, Rāhula, despite being only nine years old when he first entered the monastic order as a novice, quickly gained the admiration of the Buddha's other disciples. The *Ragora kōshiki* thus celebrates Rāhula as a kind of patron saint and role model for novices, who were typically the youngest members of the Sangha (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 15–16).

Unfortunately we know very little about this practice of different members of the Sangha venerating particular Buddhist figures as it changed over time and across geographical space. These precedents from the writings of Faxian and Xuanzang suggest that the Japanese practice was rooted in earlier, continental versions of such offerings. While there are no documented examples of Rāhula veneration in Japan prior to the Kamakura-period *Ragora kōshiki*, there is at least one, tenth-century example of nuns venerating Ānanda at the Junna'in convent, also known as Sai'in (MEEKS 2010, 234–35). Our knowledge of the *Ragora kōshiki* suggests that it had many important continuities with the practices described by Faxian and Xuanzang. While stupa veneration does not appear to have been part of the practice documented in Japan, it is well known that Japanese *kōshiki* services usually involved the veneration of a visual image of the figure receiving offerings. This detail corresponds with Xuanzang's account, in which stupa offerings were made to images of the figures being honored.

In the case of the *Ragora kōshiki*, scholars have identified a couple of hanging scrolls that were likely used during *kōshiki* ceremonies honoring Rāhula. Shōmyōji, for example, has a fourteenth-century image known as *Portrait of the Venerable Rāhula* (*Raun sonja zō* 羅云尊者像), which shows the young Rāhula sitting on a Chinese-style chair with an attendant at his feet. The Nara convent Chūgūji 中宮寺, which also came to be aligned with the Ritsu school during the

medieval period, owns a very similar image that depicts a young monastic sitting atop a Chinese-style chair with an attendant at his or her feet. Although Chūgūji tradition has long identified this young monastic as the nun Shinnyo 真如, Sekiguchi argues, based on similarities between these two portraits, that the Chūgūji painting was most likely created as an image of Rāhula to be used for *kōshiki* in honor of the Buddha's son, a figure who was, after all, often celebrated for his beautiful features (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 9; NARA KOKURITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN ed. 1988, 52; MEEKS 2010, 239–40).

In addition to the fact that both Indian *pūjā* and Japanese *kōshiki* for Rāhula utilized images of Rāhula, there also seems to have been some continuity in the scheduling of these rites. Xuanzang mentions that these rites for different figures are carried out on the eighth, the fourteenth, the fifteenth, twenty-third, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth days of each month. It seems significant, then, that records from the *Kantō ōkanki* and the *Hokke metsuzaiji nenjū gyōji* indicate that the *Ragora kōshiki* was held on the eighth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days of particular months. These were the *uposatha* days, when lay devotees commonly observed the Eight Pure Precepts and made offerings; as explained in Barbara Ambros's article on the *Anan kōshiki* in this volume, these days were also associated with repentance rites and the affirmation of the precepts. In addition to the *uposatha* days, it also appears, as Sekiguchi points out, that Ritsu groups performed the *Ragora kōshiki* following the summer rains retreat in the seventh month. This timing suggests an overlap with the tradition noted in Faxian's account, in which these rites were carried out once per year, after the rains retreat. Taken together, these various parallels suggest that medieval Ritsu monastics were modeling their devotional veneration of Rāhula and other figures on models found in continental texts.

The Structure, Style, and Content of the Raun kōshiki

The *Raun kōshiki* is a *kanbun* text just over 2,000 characters in length; it contains 145 lines of roughly fifteen characters each. Structurally, it begins with a short introduction and is then divided into five sections, each of which is called a *mon* 門, or gate. The opening section, composed of twenty-three lines, includes a series of invocations, summoning and praising Śākyamuni, among other Buddhist deities. It goes on to praise Rāhula at length, recognizing him as the “eldest child” of the Buddha and as the foremost among novices.² This introductory section also identifies Rāhula with Biliyangqu zhou 畢利颺瞿洲, a land where he

2. As noted throughout, it appears to have been common for Buddhist texts to refer to Rāhula as the “eldest child” (*chōshi* 長子) of the Buddha, even though he was also understood to have been the only biological child of the Buddha.

resides with 1,100 arhats.³ The subsequent five sections of the *kōshiki* include: (1) “The Birth and Going Forth [of Rāhula]”; (2) “The Thus-Come-One’s Bestowing of a Prediction [of Rāhula’s Buddhahood]”; (3) “[Rāhula’s] Protection of the Buddha-Dharma”; (4) “Reverence and Offerings [for Rāhula]”; (5) “Transfer of Merit and Arousal of the Aspiration for Enlightenment” (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 15). Each section ends with a four-line verse and an invocation of praise.

Niels GUELBERG (1999; 2006), James Ford, and others have pointed out that *kōshiki* were performed in the vernacular and were meant to be accessible to auditors, regardless of their level of education (see, for example, FORD 2006, 74–75). The scripts of *kōshiki*, however, certainly reflect the erudition of their authors, and the *Raun kōshiki* is no exception. Its author, presumably the monk Yuishin, utilizes many parallel constructions, as was customary for the genre, suggesting that he was concerned with the literary value of the *kōshiki* as a text, despite the fact that such constructions would be rendered more or less invisible when the ritual text was read aloud in the vernacular. And as was customary when writing *kōshiki*, Yuishin also employs many difficult Chinese compounds based on translations from the Sanskrit.

It is clear from the content of the *Raun kōshiki* that Yuishin had a deep knowledge of continental Buddhist texts. It is difficult to pinpoint his sources, which he neither identifies directly by title nor seems to quote verbatim, but his descriptions of Rāhula demonstrate broad exposure to Buddhist textual traditions, as well as a keen interest in stories about Śākyamuni and his immediate disciples, an interest visible in the works of many monastics associated with the *vinaya*-revival movement of medieval Nara. In the teachings of the priest Eison, for example, we find many stories of Śākyamuni and his first disciples; such interest is consistent with the broader goals of these groups, which emphasized a “return” to the veneration of the historical Buddha and the fundamentals of his teachings (see *Kōshō Bosatsu Gokyōkai Chōmonshū*, “Collection of admonitions heard from the Bodhisattva Kōshō [Eison],” in *Kamakura kyū Bukkyō*, KAMATA and TANAKA eds. 1971, 199–226). That said, Yuishin’s *kōshiki* does present Rāhula in a decidedly Mahāyāna light: in addition to praising Rāhula as a model for young novices, he also celebrates him as one of the sixteen arhats who protect the Buddha-Dharma following the Buddha’s passing, and as a bodhisattva figure who, like other bodhisattvas, has his own Pure Land and is selflessly devoted to the salvation of sentient beings. Ultimately, then, Yuishin presents Rāhula as a savior being who, like other figures in the pantheon of Buddhist deities

3. “Biliyangqu zhou” represents the Sanskrit term Priyamgudvīpa, which is said to mean “land of chestnuts and grains” (“Rāhula,” in *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, BUSWELL and LOPEZ 2013). The term also appears in Xuanzang’s translation of the *Nandimitrāvādāna* (Ch. *Da aluohan nantimiduoluo suoshuo fazhuji* 大阿羅漢難提蜜多羅所說法住記; T 49, no. 2030, 13b08–10).

venerated in medieval Japan, is praised as a specialist on the one hand (as a patron saint for novices) and as a figure worthy of universal praise on the other.

The First Section: Rāhula's Birth and Going Forth

The first section of the *Raun kōshiki* focuses on Rāhula's birth and going forth, or home-leaving. Of particular interest in this section are the choices Yuishin makes in conveying the story of Rāhula's birth. There are several different versions of Rāhula's birth to be found in canonical scriptures. Early Pāli narratives of the Buddha's home-leaving do not mention a child at all, of course; in these versions of Śākyamuni's departure, he leaves behind only his sobbing parents. But in later Pāli narratives, Śākyamuni is married and takes up the religious life on the very day that his wife Yaśodharā gives birth to Rāhula: he hears of his son's birth, names the child "Fetter," and decides to renounce the world. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* (T 23, no. 1442), however, presents Rāhula's birth in a completely different light. Here, Rāhula is conceived on the night of Śākyamuni's home departure, and he is not born until six years later, on the day of the Buddha's enlightenment (STRONG 1997, 114–15).

It is a narrative related to this third version of Rāhula's birth that appears in the *Raun kōshiki*. Yuishin begins the first section of the *kōshiki* with words of praise for Rāhula: surely his merit from previous lifetimes must have been great, for it allowed him to be born into a noble family, as the son of Siddhārtha. The beloved grandchild of King Śuddhodana, Rāhula was born, Yuishin writes, on the day that Śākyamuni attained enlightenment (*jōdō* 成道). Before this, the child was in his mother's womb for six years, something that Yuishin recognizes as a rare and miraculous sign. But some harbored doubts about this long gestation period. Yuishin does not provide a long explanation here, but the implication is clear: how could this child, born six years after Śākyamuni's departure, truly be the son of the Buddha? (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 15)

Rāhula's six-year gestation—and the stir it caused among skeptics—is taken up in a number of sources, including the *Saṅghabhedavastu* section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, the *Dazhidulun* 大智度論 (Great wisdom treatise; T 25, no. 1509), and the one hundred and seventeenth narrative of the later, Chinese work *Zabaozang jing* 雜寶藏經 (T 4, no. 203).⁴ As John Strong explains, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* contains numerous explanations of this extended gestation period. Two explanations are based on the karma of Yaśodharā and Rāhula, respectively, and another is what Strong calls a "naturalistic" explanation,

4. Versions of Rāhula's birth story similar to that found in the Sanskrit *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* also appear in the *Mahāsaṅghika vinaya*, the *Mahāvastu*, and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā śāstra*, as well as in certain biographies of the Buddha, such as *Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra* (STRONG 1997, 125, footnote 7).

one in which Rāhula's growth in the womb is stunted by Yaśodharā's austerities. The first two explanations are *jātaka* tales that explain Rāhula's long gestation through stories of the previous lives of Yaśodharā and Rāhula, respectively. In one, Yaśodharā, as a cow-herder in a previous life, tricked her mother into carrying an extra pail of heavy milk for six leagues. As a result of this deception in a previous life, Yaśodharā was in this lifetime forced to carry Rāhula for six years. In the *jātaka* tale that blames Rāhula's karma for Yaśodharā's long pregnancy, Rāhula was a king who inadvertently left a subject waiting for six days. In return, we are told, the king was reborn as Rāhula and had to wait six years to be born (STRONG 1997, 116–17).

Finally, the more naturalistic explanation offered in the *Sanghabhedavastu* section of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* says that Rāhula's growth in Yaśodharā's womb was stunted because his mother, feeling great despair after Siddhārtha's departure and concerned about all of the ascetic practices he was undertaking, decided to practice austerities herself. Seeing that Yaśodharā's meager diet has threatened her pregnancy, King Śuddhodana protects her from any additional news of Siddhārtha's practices in the wilderness. When she begins eating normally, the pregnancy, though reduced in pace, continues. As Strong explains, this narrative creates a parallel between the Buddha's journey to enlightenment and Yaśodharā's path to motherhood: both ends are ultimately achieved at the same time. Moreover, just as Siddhārtha must conquer Māra just before his enlightenment, Yaśodharā, too, faces near defeat before finally giving birth. Māra sends his minions to announce that the Buddha has died from extreme ascetic practices, and Yaśodharā, hearing this message, falls into a deep despair, endangering her own life, as well as the health of her pregnancy. When other divinities reveal the truth that Siddhārtha has not passed but has in fact attained enlightenment, Yaśodharā is overjoyed, and this joy facilitates the long-awaited birth of Rāhula (STRONG 1997, 117–19).

Once Yaśodharā gives birth, however, her purity is challenged: naysayers within the Śākya clan begin suggesting that Yaśodharā has been unfaithful to Siddhārtha during his six-year period of practice. In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* version of this story, Yaśodharā undertakes an "act of truth" to prove her fidelity: she declares that her son Rāhula, when placed upon a stone in a nearby pond, will not sink if he is in fact the son of the Buddha. She then says that he will float from one shore to the other and back again, another order that successfully materializes before astonished witnesses (STRONG 1997, 119).

The *Dazhidulun*, a commentary on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* attributed to Nāgārjuna, achieved considerable currency among Japanese monastics. Although this text does not mention a trial by fire, it does establish a similar parallel between Śākyamuni's six-year ascetic practice and Yaśodharā's six-year pregnancy. In this version of the story, it was Śākyamuni's other wife who defended

Yaśodharā's honor, saying that she knew from having lived with Yaśodharā that she was innocent. Here, Rāhula's paternity is proven when Śākyamuni manifests himself as five hundred identical arhats and the boy is able to recognize which one is his father. When Yaśodharā asks the Buddha what karma had caused her to carry her son for six long years, he replies with a story about how Rāhula, in a distant past life as a king, kept a sage waiting for six days, a decision that caused him to suffer extreme hunger and thirst. As a result, Śākyamuni explains, Rāhula was fated to remain in his mother's womb for six hundred years during his next five hundred lifetimes. Yaśodharā, however, has no crime, Śākyamuni says: it was Rāhula's past karma that led to her long pregnancy with him (T 25, no. 1509, 182b–c). Daoshi's 道世 *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (668, Forest of gems in the garden of the Dharma; T 53, no. 2122) employs a similar narrative; here, too, Śākyamuni tells Yaśodharā that she carried Rāhula for six years because Rāhula, in a previous life, had kept a sage waiting for six days (T 53, no. 2122, 357c).

In the *Raun kōshiki*, Yuishin's version of the Rāhula narrative is much more compact and does not go into the kind of detail that we find in sources like the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* or the *Dazhidulun*. He says only that Rāhula must have had great merit to be born as the son of Śākyamuni, that he was in the womb for six years, and that this long gestation period was the cause of some doubt. While this general outline shows certain continuity with the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* version of the narrative, there are a couple of differences worth noting here. First, as Strong points out, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* does not present Rāhula's birth as a miraculous one: Rāhula was, after all, the result of natural conception, and his long gestation period is explained through references to the karmic pasts of Rāhula and Yaśodharā, and as a result of Yaśodharā's austerities (STRONG 1997, 117). Yuishin, however, chooses to present Rāhula's six-year gestation period as a "miraculous sign" (*reizui* 靈瑞), a decision that is in keeping, it would seem, with the *kōshiki*'s broader goal of praising Rāhula as a divine being. Yuishin's handling of Yaśodharā's response to those who doubt her fidelity also diverges from the narrative found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*. Instead of referring to an act of truth involving a stone, he tells of how Yaśodharā silenced her adversaries by surviving a trial by fire: after being thrown into red-hot flames, Yaśodharā appeared "sitting cross-legged atop a blue lotus flower, unconsumed by the fire" (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 15).

This version of the story appears to stem from a variant narrative. Yuishin does not mention his sources, but a similar trial by fire appears in the *Zabaozang jing* version of Rāhula's birth narrative. Scholars categorize the *Zabaozang jing*, which dates to fifth-century China (472 CE), as *avadāna* literature, or narratives that describe the past lives and karma of their protagonists. It is believed that the text, compiled by Tanyao 曇曜 (fl. mid-fifth century) and translated with the help of the Central Asian monk Kivkara (Ch. Jijiaye 吉迦夜, fl. 472), was composed

in China but based on Indian materials (WILLEMEN 1994, 1; DDB, “Zabaozang jing,” “Tanyao,” “Kivkara”). After its transmission to Japan, the *Zabaozang jing* achieved wide circulation there (KAMATA et al. eds. 1998, 59a).

Parable 117 of the *Zabaozang jing* states, very matter-of-factly, that Rāhula was conceived on the night that the Buddha left home and was born on the night that he achieved enlightenment. Unlike the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, which finds parallels between Yaśodharā’s pregnancy and Siddhārtha’s path to realization, the *Zabaozang jing* narrative of Rāhula’s birth focuses almost exclusively on the Śākya’s cruel reaction to Rāhula’s birth. Trouble begins among the ladies in the palace; Yaśodharā’s cousin Vidyut, for example, was quick to chastise Yaśodharā, accusing her of bringing shame and dishonor to the family. When King Śuddhodana hears the commotion and learns of Yaśodharā’s newly born child, he too, grows angry. Calling together the 99,000 members of the clan, he orders Yaśodharā to appear before them. The angry group berates Yaśodharā, accusing her of lies when she insists that Rāhula is indeed the son of Siddhārtha. As the vitriol escalates, King Śuddhodana proposes that Yaśodharā be tortured and killed for her apparent transgression. He asks the crowd how her execution should be carried out, and one Śākya suggests that she and her child be thrown into a pit of fire (WILLEMEN 1994, 240–43; for Chinese, see T 4, no. 203, 497a).

Although terrified of the flames, Yaśodharā handles her trial with grace and courage. She calls out to the Buddha, asking for his help, and pays her respects to the Śākyas. Then she makes a vow of truth: “As for my son here, I really do not have this child from anyone else. If it is true and not false that he has stayed in my womb for six years, the fire will be extinguished and never burn us, mother and son.” She then enters the fire and, miraculously, the flames are transformed into a pond and she appears on a lotus. With Yaśodharā’s loyalty now clear for all to see, she and her son are welcomed back into the Śākya clan. We are told that Śuddhodana, moreover, developed a deep attachment to his grandchild Rāhula (WILLEMEN 1994, 243–44; for Chinese, see T 4, no. 203, 497b).

Yuishin’s presentation of the Rāhula birth narrative does not cite the *Zabaozang jing* directly. But even though his concise explanation of Yaśodharā’s trial by fire does not borrow any phrasing from the *Zabaozang jing*, it seems likely that Yuishin’s version of the narrative stems from this particular development within the alternative, Sanskrit version of Rāhula’s birth story. Thus far I have been unable to find other Japanese sources that mention Yaśodharā’s trial by fire, though there are a couple of sources that mention her long pregnancy with Rāhula. A narrative in the early Heian-period *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 (ca. 810–824), for example, mentions that Rāhula stayed in his mother’s womb for six years as a result of karma from a previous life (3: 24, in SNKBT 30, 165). In this very concise telling, which seems to combine elements from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* and the *Dazhidulun*, Rāhula, as a king in a previous life, prevented an

enlightened beggar from entering his kingdom. The beggar died of starvation seven days later, and the king, as punishment for this lack of compassion, was forced to endure six years in his mother's womb before being born as Rāhula.

In short, Yuishin's version of Rāhula's birth suggests familiarity with numerous continental narratives about the Buddha's son. Though hardly surprising, given the context, it is worth noting that Yuishin chooses to present Rāhula's long gestation period as a miraculous sign, rather than blaming this unusual situation on bad karma from a previous lifetime. As a text that celebrates Rāhula as a bodhisattva capable of saving sentient beings, the *Raun kōshiki* presents the Buddha's son in the best possible light, even though Yuishin must have been familiar with those textual traditions that understood the long gestation period as a karmic punishment rather than a miracle.

Having explained Rāhula's birth and Yaśodharā's redemption, the first section goes on to tell of how Rāhula went forth at the young age of nine. Again, Yuishin emphasizes the rarity of Rāhula's virtue. This, too, stands in contrast to other narratives of Rāhula with which Yuishin was likely familiar. In the *Weicengyou yinyuan jing* 未曾有因緣經 (Sutra on unprecedented causes and conditions; T 17, no. 754), for example, the reader learns that once Rāhula had reached the age of nine, the Buddha sent his disciple Maudgalyāyana (Jp. Mokuren 目連) to fetch the boy from his mother so that he could be ordained. Angry and saddened by the prospect of losing her son to the monastic order, Yaśodharā resists, but after the Buddha sends others to convince her, she finally relents. Perhaps to prevent the boy's loneliness, some five hundred other boys from the kingdom are ordained at the same time. The young Rāhula, however, is not up to the task: as might be expected of an immature child, he shows little interest in the Dharma and must undergo rigorous training—and hear the karmic lessons of others—before he realizes the value of his father's teaching. This basic narrative also appears in Sengyou's 僧祐 (445–518) *Shijiapu* 釈迦譜 (Genealogy of Śākyamuni, T 50, no. 2040). Here Rāhula, after taking ordination at the age of nine, dislikes the monastic life and wants to return home.

The late Heian-period *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語集 contains a narrative about Rāhula that stems from these rather unflattering presentations of Rāhula's early days in the Sangha. In the *Konjaku* episode (1: 17), however, the bulk of the blame is placed on Yaśodharā, who is faulted for her delusional attachment to Rāhula. That the *Konjaku* tale follows the basic storyline of the *Weicengyou yinyuan jing* and *Shijiapu*, though, suggests that narratives problematizing rather than praising Rāhula's early monastic career were in fact known in Japan.

In the context of Yuishin's affiliation with the precept-revival movement, however, it is noteworthy that the *Sifenlü* 四分律 (Four-part *vinaya*; T 22, no. 1428), a text of central importance to *vinaya* revivalists in the Nara capital, puts a decidedly more positive spin on the story of Rāhula's entry into the Sangha. In

this version of the story, the Buddha is out on begging rounds when Yaśodharā is in a high tower with her son and sees the Buddha coming. She tells Rāhula that this man is his father, and the young boy, on his own accord, descends to greet his father. The Buddha asks Rāhula if he will take ordination, and the boy says yes. Here, then, Rāhula's decision to join the Sangha is voluntary, and Yaśodharā does not attempt to prevent it (T 22, no. 1428, 809).

Although Yuishin does not make any clear references to the story of Rāhula's tonsure as it appears in the *Sifenlü*, his account is similar in so far as it emphasizes Rāhula's virtue and dedication as a young boy. Indeed, Yuishin has only words of praise for the Buddha's son: despite his youth, he dedicated himself fully, distinguishing himself among the Buddha's disciples and gaining recognition as one of the great sixteen arhats. He ends this first section with a short verse:

The Prince Rāhula
 When he was nine years old
 Went forth from the home life
 To cultivate the Eightfold Path.
 Let us take refuge in and pay highest homage to Venerable Rāhula, who was
 born and went forth in order to benefit sentient beings.
 (my translation of SEKIGUCHI 1998, 16)

The Second and Third Sections: Rāhula as a Savior Figure

In the first section of the *kōshiki*, Yuishin establishes Rāhula as a holy figure, primarily by praising his miraculous birth and the young age at which he went forth. In the second section, Yuishin brings Rāhula into Mahāyānic discourse. Here Yuishin makes a clear reference to the *Lotus Sutra* ("the true words taught by the *Lotus*") in his discussion of Śākyamuni's prediction of Rāhula's enlightenment (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 16).

In the ninth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, the historical Buddha predicts that both Ānanda and Rāhula will achieve buddhahood. The Buddha first announces Ānanda's future buddhahood, saying that Ānanda will become a buddha named Sāgaraharabuddhivikriḍitarājābhijña (Mountain Sea Wisdom Unrestricted Power King Thus Come One), and that his pure land will be called Avanāmitavaijayantā (Ever Standing Victory Banner). After describing the glories of Ānanda's pure land and praising his original vow, the Buddha turns to Rāhula and predicts his success on the bodhisattva path:

In the future, you will become a buddha called Saptaratnapadmavikrama [Stepping on Seven Treasure Flowers], a Tathāgata, Arhat, Completely Enlightened, Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct, Well-Departed, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed, Tamer of Humans, Teacher of Devas and Humans,

Buddha, Bhagavat. You will pay homage to the Buddha Tathāgatas, whose number is equal to that of the grains of dust in the ten worlds; and you will always become the eldest son of all the buddhas just as you are my eldest son now. (KUBO and YUYAMA 1993, 166; T 9, no. 262, 29c–30b)

The Buddha goes on to say that Rāhula’s pure land, the number of his disciples, and the length of his True and Semblance Dharmas will be identical to those of Mountain Sea Wisdom Unrestricted Power King Thus Come One. He also notes that Rāhula and Ānanda will use their “transcendent powers” to save sentient beings in the ten directions (KUBO and YUYAMA 1993, 155; English translations of Buddha and Pure Land names from WATSON 1993, 155–57; see also T 9, no. 262, 30b).

In general, Yuishin’s descriptions of Rāhula’s predicted buddhahood follow those provided in the *Lotus Sutra*. One notable difference is that Yuishin provides a more thorough description of Rāhula’s pure land than does the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Lotus Sutra* describes Ānanda’s pure land in some depth, saying, for example, that its ground will be made of lapis lazuli. But of Rāhula’s pure land, it says only that it will be identical to that of Ānanda. Yuishin, however, provides greater detail in his description of Rāhula’s pure land. Not only does he mention that the ground will be made of lapis lazuli, but he also speaks of sandalwood trees, fragrant winds, golden branches, silver flower pedestals, and so on. This embellishment likely reflects the popularity of pure land discourse among Yuishin’s contemporaries (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 16).

The second section makes it clear that Rāhula is not merely a role model for novices. Rather, Yuishin emphasizes Rāhula as a bodhisattva and future buddha, emphasizing that he, like other Mahāyāna figures, is capable of saving sentient beings. The second section ends with this hymn:

Rāhula will become a buddha;
 His name will be Stepping on Seven Treasure Flowers
 (Saptaratnapadmavikrāntagāmī),
 And his pure land
 Will be called Ever Standing Victory Banner (Anavanāmitavajjayantā).
 Let us take refuge in and pay highest homage to Venerable Rāhula, who will
 become a buddha in the future, widely saving sentient beings!
 (my translation of original text as reproduced in SEKIGUCHI 1998, 16; translations of Rāhula’s Buddha and pure land names from WATSON 1993, 55–57)

In the *Raun kōshiki*’s third section, Yuishin praises Rāhula as a protector of the Dharma. This section draws on texts associated with cults to the sixteen arhats. Sekiguchi suggests that Yuishin drew on Xuanzang’s 654 *Da aluohan nantimiduoluo suoshuo fazhuji* 大阿羅漢難提蜜多羅所說法住記, a translation of the Nandimitrāvadāna (SEKIGUCHI 1998, 11; DDB, “Nandimitrāvadāna”). This

sutra, which is widely regarded as a foundational source for the cult of the sixteen (or eighteen) arhats, teaches that the sixteen arhats will remain in the world to preserve the Buddha-Dharma during the great span of time between the Buddha's final nirvana and the descent of Maitreya (BUSWELL and LOPEZ 2013, "Nandimitra"; KAMATA et al. eds. 1998, 605c). Indeed, arhats like Rāhula were celebrated for their longevity. Xuanzang even claims that during his seventh-century trip to India, he encountered a Brahman who had taken in a mysterious *śramaṇa* who turned out to be Rāhula himself. "Because I desire to protect the true law I have not yet entered nirvana," Rāhula explained to the Brahman (quoted in RAY 1997, 150–51, footnote 39).

According to Yuishin, the sixteen arhats play a special role in protecting the Buddha's teaching in this realm of Jambudvīpa between the time of the Buddha's final nirvana and the coming of Maitreya in "fifty-six hundred million years." Manifesting themselves in various provinces throughout, they—and especially Rāhula, as the "eldest son" of the Buddha—ensure that the doctrine transmitted by the Buddha remains in this world. The *Raun kōshiki*'s third section ends with the following praise for Rāhula, the arhat and savior:

Protecting the Buddha-Dharma so that it lingers in this world,
 He firmly maintains the highest level of the pure precepts.
 The manifestations of his spiritual powers fill the ten directions,
 And in accordance with their abilities he saves all beings everywhere.
 Let us take refuge in and pay highest homage to Venerable Rāhula, who protects and upholds the Buddha-Dharma and benefits the Buddha's remaining disciples!
 (My translation of SEKIGUCHI 1998, 17)

In these second and third sections we see that Yuishin moves beyond praising Rāhula for his biological connection to the historical Buddha and his role as a young novice in the early Sangha. In the second section Rāhula is praised as a Buddha-to-be, capable of saving sentient beings and destined to rule over his own pure land. And in the third section we see Rāhula as an arhat, protecting the Dharma during the extremely long period of time separating the historical Buddha's death and the coming of Maitreya to this world. The narrative in this third section thus connects Rāhula with the broader cult to the arhats, which had gained great popularity in China, in particular. As an arhat, Rāhula also has some supernatural attributes, the most obvious of which is his incredibly long lifespan.

The Fourth and Fifth Sections: Venerating Rāhula and Transferring Merit

In the fourth section, Yuishin begins to look inward to discuss the relevance of venerating Rāhula in Japan. He opens this section, the section on "revering and making offerings [to Rāhula]," by saying that "even though ours is a small country," the people are "especially devoted to the Mahāyāna." He then goes on

to praise the practice of paying respect to the ancestors of the tradition; within the teachings meant for novices, reviving the intentions of Rāhula is important. From there, Yuishin describes the practice of venerating an image of Rāhula. The section ends with a verse praising the spiritual benefits of worshipping Rāhula. The section ultimately appears to be self-referential, as the practice of performing the *Raun kōshiki*, Yuishin suggests, is of great benefit:

In making offerings of the four necessities for monks,
 the mind resists attachment;
 This is called stainlessness.
 Due to this stainlessness, all achieve
 The realization that the Tathāgata permanently abides in the fruits [of practice].
 Let us take refuge in and pay highest homage to Venerable Rāhula;
 In venerating and making offerings to him, we receive compassion.
 (My translation of SEKIGUCHI 1998, 17)

The fifth and final section serves to transfer broadly to sentient beings the merit produced through the performance of the *Raun kōshiki*. Closing with a merit transfer is standard for many Buddhist rituals, and *kōshiki* are no exception. Here Yuishin again emphasizes the blessings of Rāhula, whose past merit enabled him to be born into the Śākya clan. He also discusses the benevolence of the Tathāgata, the kindnesses of the patriarchs, and the importance of maintaining the precepts. Finally, he explains how the performance of the *kōshiki* will create limitless merit. The final verses of the *Raun kōshiki* invokes common Mahāyāna themes:

May we meet holy ones life after life,
 Always hear profound teachings in each realm,
 Always practice the bodhisattva path without retreat,
 And achieve unsurpassed, great enlightenment without delay.
 (My translation of SEKIGUCHI 1998, 18).

Having firmly established in the first three sections Rāhula's worthiness as an object of veneration, Yuishin uses the fourth section to explain the practice and usefulness of performing the *Raun kōshiki* and the final section to ritually transfer the merit of the ceremony to sentient beings. Viewed holistically, then, we see that the *kōshiki* offers lengthy narratives and praises of Rāhula, comments upon the great merit produced through the performance of the *kōshiki* itself, and conveys the intention to distribute this merit widely.

The Raun kōshiki in the Religious Landscape of Medieval Japan

FORD (2006) describes the Hossō monk Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213) as having a pluralistic vision of Buddhist worship and salvation. Although exclusivist practice, particularly that focused on the Pure Land of Amida Buddha, was gaining

traction during this time, many monks, and especially those like Jōkei, who were active in the old Nara capital, encouraged the veneration of a long list of Buddhist deities, including Śākyamuni, Maitreya, Kannon, Jizō, Benzaiten, and Yakushi, among others. In many ways, their more inclusivist approach represented the more traditional and mainstream Mahāyāna view that there were, in fact, many routes to salvation and many Buddhas and bodhisattvas worthy of admiration and devotion. Moreover, this broader vision of Japanese Buddhist practice is also congruent with contemporary Japanese religion, in which plurality and inclusion are highly valued (FORD 2006, 205).

This study of the *Raun kōshiki* aligns well with Ford's arguments. Although Jōkei does not mention Rāhula as a special object of devotion, he, like many other monks active in the old Nara capital during the Kamakura period, was committed both to the restoration of the *vinaya* precepts and to the revival of Śākyamuni veneration. In fact, one of his critiques of Hōnen's followers, who practiced the exclusive *nenbutsu*, was that they had "forgotten the very name of our original teacher," Śākyamuni (quoted in FORD 2006, 79). Jōkei's devotion to Śākyamuni influenced Eison, as well as many others in the Nara capital (FORD 2006, 78–81). Certainly devotion to the historical Buddha is very clear in Eison's writings, and in the practice of the Ritsu school. Zen lineages, which also began to prosper in the old Nara capital during the Kamakura period, also emphasized the importance of devotion to Śākyamuni. In general, the *Raun kōshiki* can be understood as an extension of this broader interest in the veneration of Śākyamuni. In the first section in particular Yuishin pays a great deal of attention to continental texts focused on the biographies of the Buddha and Rāhula's place within them. This emphasis mirrors, in many ways, Eison's keen interest in the life and teachings of the historical Buddha, which comes through rather clearly in his collected sayings or teachings, the *Kōshō Bosatsu Gokyōkai Chōmonshū*.

Of particular interest in the *Raun kōshiki* is the degree to which the liturgy's content is tailored to suit the needs and interests of Nara monks, especially those involved in the restoration of the *vinaya*. The first section of the *Raun kōshiki* focuses on Rāhula's place in the life of the historical Buddha, thereby serving the community's interest in connecting with stories of Śākyamuni. But the second and third sections take the narrative further, connecting Rāhula with the cult of the sixteen arhats and portraying him as a savior figure in his own right. Here we learn that the Buddha's son is himself destined for Buddhahood and has his own Pure Land. We also learn that he, along with the other fifteen arhats, is protecting the Dharma until Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, appears. These themes also correspond with broader trends mentioned by Ford: Maitreya had also become an important figure of worship in Nara circles, as evidenced in Jōkei's practices. And the fact that Rāhula is himself portrayed as a salvific figure pro-

vides a fascinating example of just how broad the pluralistic vision of Buddhist devotion had become among monks of the old Nara schools.

In addition to portraying Rāhula as an important connection to the historical Buddha, as an arhat charged with protecting the Dharma, and as a salvific figure with his own paradise, the *Raun kōshiki* also emphasizes Rāhula's role as a model novice. Praised as the leader among all novices, he is said to share a special connection to novice monks and nuns; novices are thus encouraged to venerate him as a means of cultivating and protecting their own practice. The veneration of Rāhula appears, then, to have occupied a special place in the ritual calendar of Ritsu-school monastics: they encouraged Rāhula veneration both as a link to ancient, continental practices, and as a means of inspiring and supporting the novice order, which represented the next generation of their movement.

To meet these many goals, Yuishin chose to portray Rāhula in the most flattering light possible. Ignoring narratives already known in Japan, such as those that attributed Rāhula's long gestation with negative karma from a previous life, or those that described his initial distaste for the monastic life, Yuishin drew instead on narratives that emphasized Rāhula's strengths and virtue. He ultimately describes Rāhula as a blameless figure who protects the *vinaya*, encourages novice monastics, and even saves sentient beings to his own pure land. Although the *Raun kōshiki* may have served a relatively small community, its use among Ritsu monastics mirrors broader trends among mainstream medieval monastics. In particular, we see that even seemingly marginal Buddhist figures, such as the son of Śākyamuni, are viewed as worthy objects of devotion and are shown capable of providing the kind of salvation associated with Pure Land Buddhism.

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- SNKBT *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 新日本古典文学大系. Satake Akihiro 佐竹昭広 et al., eds. 100 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989–.
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