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The *Zokushōsai* Ritual: Chinese Origins and Its Development in Japanese *Onmyōdō* Practices

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Abstract

This article explores the Japanese *zokushōsai* ritual, tracing its Chinese origins and historical development. *Zokushō*, which means assigned star, refers to the correspondence between an individual's birth year and one of the seven stars in the Big Dipper. Although its Chinese origins are acknowledged, this study argues that the tradition in China was a complex of beliefs and practices built from several historical layers, including early concepts from apocryphal texts, popular ritual in Dunhuang manuscripts, institutionalized Daoist liturgies, and apocryphal sutras shaped by Buddhist and Daoist interactions. This article uses a layered approach to show how different elements of the Chinese tradition were selectively transmitted to Japan and then transformed within the contexts of *Onmyōdō* and *Sukuyōdō*. The *zokushōsai* ritual performed in Japan is not a simple reception, but a process of local adaptation, shaped by both its Chinese roots and specific Japanese religious factors.

Keywords: religious ritual; Big Dipper; Onmyōdō; Daoism; liturgical texts

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1. Introduction

The *zokushōsai* ritual (属星祭), a ritual focused on an individual's assigned star, has been an important part of Japan's *Onmyōdō* (陰陽道) practices since the ninth century. Its core purpose is to prevent misfortune and disasters by honoring a specific star within the Big Dipper[1] that corresponds to a person's birth year. The earliest known source for this core concept of *zokushō* (属星), the assignment of a Dipper star based on the Earthly Branch (*Dizhi* 地支) of one's birth year, is a passage from the *Huangdi doutu* (黃帝斗圖), which is quoted in the sixth-century *Wuxing dayi* (五行大義) compiled by the Sui-dynasty scholar Xiao Ji (蕭吉; 530–610) (*Gogyōtaigi kōchū*, p. 141). Table 1 presents this system of correspondence.

Table 1. Correspondence between the Earthly Branches and Big Dipper stars.

Earthly Branch (Year)	Big Dipper Star
Rat (*zi*, 子)	*Tanlang* (貪狼)
Ox (*chou*, 丑), Pig (*hai*, 亥)	*Jumen* (巨門)
Tiger (*yin*, 寅), Dog (*wu*, 戌)	*Lucun* (祿存)
Rabbit (*mao*, 卯), Rooster (*you*, 酉)	*Wenqu* (文曲)
Dragon (chen, 辰), Monkey (shen, 申)	*Lianzhen* (廉貞)
Snake (*si*, 巳), Goat (*wei*, 未)	*Wuqu* (武曲)
Horse (*wu*, 午)	*Pojun* (破軍)

In Japan, the practice of *zokushō* worship began with the *Shihōhai* (四方拝), a New Year's Day ritual performed at dawn in the Imperial Court. It is now widely accepted

that the ritual's conceptual origins lie in China. Tokoro (1985, pp. 371–91), for instance, traced *zokushō* beliefs within the *Shihōhai* back to Chinese traditions circulating in the Kōnin era (810–812). Early research by scholars such as Morita ([1941] 1974), Okayasu (1958), and Kanazashi ([1974] 2024) helped establish the foundational aspects of celestial worship in ancient Japan. More recently, the release of the Wakasugi (若杉) family manuscripts in the 1980s opened up new possibilities for this field. Endō (1987, pp. 1–13) identified a *zokushōsai* ritual text in these manuscripts dated to 1556 (Kōji 弘治2), noting its influences from both *Onmyōdō* and Esoteric Buddhism. Based on Ichijō Kaneyoshi's (一条兼良; 1402–1481) assertion that "*Onmyōdō* rituals originate from the Han dynasty in China" (陰陽道祭漢朝事也), Yamashita ([1982] 1996a, pp. 69–72) further traced the origins of *Onmyōdō* rituals by examining various Chinese texts, suggesting that *Ge Xian Gong's Ritual* (*Gexian Gong jifa* 葛仙公祭法) may have served as a foundational text for Big Dipper worship in *Onmyōdō* rituals.

However, this valuable scholarship often stops at pinpointing one or two potential sources, leaving the full evolutionary story untold. The complex process by which the assigned star belief developed in China, evolving from a textual concept into a popular ritual practice, and later being shaped by Buddhist and Daoist interactions, has not been fully traced. This paper aims to fill this gap. By using a layered historical approach, this study argues that the Japanese *zokushōsai* was not a simple reception of a single tradition, but a dynamic local adaptation of multiple, distinct layers of Chinese beliefs and practices. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 will review the early development of Big Dipper beliefs in China and their initial introduction to Japan. Section 3 will examine the specific practices of the *zokushōsai* ritual in Japan during the 9th to 13th centuries. Section 4 will apply the layered approach to analyze the multiple aspects of the *zokushōsai* ritual's Chinese origins. Finally, Section 5 will analyze the *honmyōsai* ritual, which shares core concepts with the *zokushōsai* ritual.

2. Foundations of the Chinese Beidou (Big Dipper) Belief and Its Early Influence in Japan

According to *The Treatise on the Celestial Offices* (*Tianguan shu* 天官書) of *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shiji* 史記), the Big Dipper (北斗七星) was regarded as the chariot of the Celestial Emperor, from which he observed and governed the four directions (*Shiji*, p. 1291). Beginning with state shrines established in the Qin dynasty (*Shiji*, p. 1375), the Big Dipper became a constant in the state rituals of all later dynasties. By the end of the Western Han (西漢), Wang Mang (王莽; 45 BC–23 AD) created a bronze object shaped like the Dipper, the *Weidou* (威斗), to harness its power of his rule and defend against threats (*Hanshu*, p. 4151). Funerary jars intended to secure the tomb and purify its space (*zhenmuping* 鎮墓瓶, *jiezhuping* 解注瓶) also frequently featured images of the Big Dipper, emphasizing its role in burial rites as a symbol of protection and exorcism (Zhu [2011] 2018, pp. 61–62).

During the Wei and Jin (魏晋) periods (220–420), the Big Dipper was increasingly regarded as a divine authority over the registers of life and death. This belief was noted in texts like the *Central Scripture of Laozi* (*Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經, Dz1168, *Daozang*, vol. 2, pp. 106–31), a Daoist scripture compiled around the fifth and sixth centuries that describes the Big Dipper as "ruling over twelve thousand deities and holding the registers of human fate" (主制萬二千神，持人命籍). This description provided a foundation for later beliefs, situating the Big Dipper as a crucial figure in determining human destiny.[2] The fourth-century collection of supernatural accounts and legends, *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Soushen ji* 搜神記), includes a well-known story that illustrates the Dipper's role in longevity practices. According to this story, Guan Lu (管輅; 209–256) prayed to the Big Dipper to extend Yan Chao's (顏超) life, explaining to him that "the Southern Dipper grants

life, while the Northern Dipper rules over death. Every mortal life, once conceived, makes its passage from the Southern Dipper to the Northern Dipper; therefore, all prayers should be directed to the Northern Dipper" (*Soushen ji jijiao*, p. 64). By establishing the Big Dipper as a guardian of life and death, this story profoundly influenced later rituals and affirmed its role in prayers for longevity.

The names and roles of the individual Dipper stars were identified with the rise of apocryphal texts (*chenwei* 讖緯). These texts were rooted in astral omenology, the practice of predicting the future by observing celestial phenomena as omens, based on a theory of correspondence (*fuying* 符應) (Chen, 11–18). In fact, astral omenology accounts for more than half of their surviving fragments. Yasui ([1979] 1984, pp. 274–83) pointed out that most of the prophecies (*chen* 讖) in these texts consist mostly of astral omenology. One of the earliest records to provide the complete names of the seven stars was *The Revolution of the Dipper in the Annals of Spring and Autumn* (*Chunqiu yundoushu* 春秋運鬥樞), which lists them sequentially as *Tian Shu* (天樞), *Xuan* (璇), *Ji* (璣), *Quan* (權), *Yuheng* (玉衡), *Kaiyang* (開陽), and *Yaoguang* (搖光) (*Shiji*, 1291). This naming system became widely accepted for referring to the Big Dipper.

The Great Meaning of the Five Agents (*Wuxing dayi* 五行大義), compiled by Xiao Ji during the Sui (隋) dynasty (581–618), references lost apocryphal texts that attributed various names to the seven stars of the Big Dipper. Table 2 compares these traditional names from apocryphal texts with their modern astronomical counterparts. (*Gogyōtaigi kōchū*, p. 141, p. 175).

Table 2. Name of the Big Dipper stars in apocryphal texts.

Modern Name	***Chunqiu yundoushu*** **(春秋運斗樞)**	***Huangdi doutu*** **(黃帝斗图)**	***Kongzi yuanchen*** **(孔子元辰)**	***Kongzi yuanchen*** **(孔子元辰), Courtesy Name**
Dubhe	Tianshu (天樞)	Tanlang (貪狼)	Yangjing (陽精)	Xi Shenzi (希神子)
Merak	Xuan (璇)	Jumen (巨門)	Yinjing (陰精)	Zhen Wenzi (貞文子)
Phecda	Ji (璣)	Lucun (祿存)	Zhenren (真人)	Lu Cunzi (祿存子)
Megrez	Quan (權)	Wenqu (文曲)	Xuanming (玄冥)	Shi Huizi (世惠子)
Alioth	Yuheng (玉衡)	Lianzhen (廉貞)	Danyuan (丹元)	Wei Bulinzi (衛不鄰子)
Mizar	Kaiyang (開陽)	Wuqu (武曲)	Beiji (北極)	Wei Huizi (微惠子)
Alkai	Yaoguang (瑤光)	Pojun (破軍)	Tiankai (天開)	Da Jingzi (大景子)

These names attributed to the seven stars, particularly the sequence beginning with Tanlang and Jumen, became the most widely recognized deity names for the Big Dipper in later divinatory and Daoist texts. These apocryphal texts describe a system that correlates each star with an individual's birth year based on the twelve earthly branches, advising that each individual "frequently recite the name of their own assigned star to seek blessings" (恒思誦之, 以求福也) (*Gogyōtaigi kōchū*, p. 175).

While these names for the Big Dipper were developing in China, the broader field of astral knowledge began its journey to Japan. Star worship in Japan was shaped by a confluence of traditional Chinese astrology, Daoism, and Esoteric Buddhism (Mugitani 2000). A crucial moment came in 602 (Suiko 10), the Baekje monk Gwalleuk (Kanroku 観勒) presented the court with calendars and books on astronomy and astral omenology, geography and geomancy, as well as texts on *dunjia* (a system of strategic divination) and various mystic arts, thereby introducing these fields of knowledge to Japan (*Nihon shoki*, p. 140). The Bureau of Onmyō (*Onmyōryō* 陰陽寮) was established during Emperor Tenmu's reign (天武天皇; r. 673–686), with scholars specializing in divination, astrology, and calendar science forming its staff (*Ryō no gige*, p. 36). It was during this time that traditional Chinese astral omenology, including the beliefs surrounding the Big Dipper, began to make its way to Japan.

Concrete evidence of Big Dipper imagery has been found in Japanese archeological sites from the late seventh to early eighth centuries. In the funerary context, the famous Takamatsuzuka (高松塚) and Kitora (キトラ) Tombs both contain astronomical charts painted on their ceilings. While both charts contain the Twenty-Eight Mansions, it is the star chart in the Kitora Tomb that provides direct evidence, as it clearly includes a painting of the Big Dipper. (*Tokubetsu shiseki Kitora kofun hakkutsu chōsa hōkoku* 2008). Beyond tomb murals, this motif is also found on other prestige objects, like the "Seven-Star Sword" engraved with the Big Dipper. Examples from the Asuka (飛鳥) period (592–710) include the sword at Shitenno-ji (四天王寺) and the one held by the deity Jikokuten (持國天) at Horyu-ji (法隆寺). A similar design adorns a sword from the relics of Emperor Shōmu (聖武天皇; 701–756) (Masuo [1984] 2017, pp. 73–114) and another sword forged before the ninth century, unearthed at the Inariyama (稲荷山) site in Chiba Prefecture (Hidaka 2008). Taken together, these artifacts indicate the significant influence of Big Dipper veneration in Japanese society.

The concept of "assigned stars" (*zokushō* 属星), which originated in the apocryphal texts in China, was introduced to Japan through key texts. One of the most important of these was *The Great Meaning of the Five Agents* (*Wuxing dayi*). This text was designated as one of the official manuals for students of the Bureau of *Onmyō* in 757 (Tenpyō Hōji 天平宝字 1), along with other foundational works like the *Zhou yi* (周易), *Xinzhuan yinyangshu* (新撰陰陽書), and *Huangdi jinkui* (黄帝金匱) (*Shokunihongi* 続日本紀, p. 243). This provided the official foundation for *zokushō* beliefs to take root in Japan.

This textual foundation led to ritual practice soon. The earliest known expression of *zokushō* worship was the Emperor's New Year's Day ceremony, the Four Directions Worship (*Shihōhai* 四方拝). The *Dairigishiki* (内裏儀式), a handbook of court rituals compiled in the early Heian period, describes the ceremony in detail, explaining that it consisted of three parts: worship of the assigned star, worship of Heaven and Earth, and worship of the imperial parents' tombs. During the part of the assigned star, the Emperor would face north, recite the name of his assigned star, bow, and then chant an incantation. The text specifies the names of these assigned stars, noting, "The assigned star for this year is named Rokuson (禄存), with the courtesy name Rokue (祿會), representing the third star of the Big Dipper" (*Dairigishiki*, p. 3). Later ritual text, such as *Gōkeshidai* (江家次第), provides more detail on the incantations and the correspondence between birth years and stars (*Gōkeshidai*, 17).

By the early ninth century, these practices were firmly established. The *Dairigishiki*, compiled no later than 818, provides earliest detailed record of the *Shihōhai* ceremony. Building on this ritual, related practice began to emerge. During the reign of Emperor Uda (宇多天皇; r. 887–897), the Daily Morning Worship (*Maichōgyo* 毎朝御拝) ritual was established. The personalization of this belief is evident in Fujiwara no Morosuke (藤原師輔; 909–960), who incorporated star worship into his daily routine, reciting the name of his assigned star seven times each morning.

Beyond fixed state rituals, independent rituals dedicated to assigned stars also began to appear. The earliest on record occurred in 863, when Fujiwara no Arikage ordered the *onmyōji* Yuge no Koreo (弓削是雄; 848–908) to conduct a *zokushō* ritual. While the specific details of this ritual are unclear, it is evident that the *onmyōji* was responsible for it. According to the Yōrō Code (*Yōrō-ryō* 養老令), officials in the Bureau of *Onmyō* were originally responsible for calendar compilation, astronomical observation, and divination, while state rituals were the duty of the Department of Divinities (*Jingi-kan* 神祇官) (*Ryō no gige*, p. 36, p. 77). However, from the mid-ninth century, *onmyōji* were increasingly active in religious ceremonies, and by the tenth century, they were taking charge of rituals to prevent misfortune and prolong the lives of the emperor and nobility (Okada 1991, pp. 150–95).

3. The Zokushōsai and Its Liturgical Texts During the Heian and Kamakura Periods

While belief in the Big Dipper can be traced to eighth-century Japan, the *zokushōsai* ritual developed through a more complex set of astrological texts and related knowledge from China. These were transmitted starting in the same period and eventually led to the formation of Sukuyōdō in Japan.

The astrological systems that influenced the *zokushōsai* were themselves a complex fusion developing in Tang China. One major stream was a sinicized form of Indian astrology, represented by the esoteric Buddhist monk Amoghavajra's (不空; 705–774) compilation, the *Xiuyao jing* (宿曜経) (Yano 2013, pp. 11–27). However, this sutra did not support complex horoscopy for predicting an individual's destiny. Later in the same century, as Iranian astronomers became active at the Tang court, Hellenistic astrology began to gain influence. Representative texts from this period include the *Duli yusi jing* (都利聿斯経), a translation of the work of Dorotheus of Sidon (Mak 2014, pp. 105–69), and the *Qiyao rangzai jue* (七曜攘災決), which brought together several different astrological traditions (Kotyk 2017).

This entire system was gradually transmitted to Japan. The *Xiuyao jing* was brought by Kūkai (空海; 774–853) in 806 (*T*. no. 2161, 55: 1062b). Later in 865, the *Duli yusi jing* and *Qiyao rangzai jue* were brought by Shūei (宗叡; 809–884) (*T*. no. 2174, 55: 1111b). Then in 957, at the request of the *onmyōji* Kamo no Yasunori (賀茂保憲; 917–977), the Tendai monk Nichien (日延; ?–?) brought the *Futian li* (Fukutenreki, 符天暦) from the Wuyue Kingdom (吴越国) in China.

The arrival of the *Futian li*, a key reference for precise astronomical calculation, set the stage for the formal establishment of *Sukuyōdō*. This is marked by a famous debate in 961 between Hōzō (法蔵; 905–969), a monk from Tōdai-ji temple (東大寺) who is regarded as the founder of Sukuyōdō, and Kamono no Yasunori, the head of the Bureau of Onmyō (Onmyō no kami, 陰陽頭). Their debate over how to determine the day of personal destiny (*honmyōnichi* 本命日) and the natal nakṣatra (*honmyōshuku* 本命宿) highlighted a difference in approach (Yamashita [1990] 1996b, pp. 319–68). Hōzō used the *Futian li*, emphasizing the need for precise calculation. Momo (1969, [1975] 1990) identifies it as the key reference text used by *sukuyōshi* for the precise astronomical calculations needed for their divinatory reports. Building on this, Kotyk (2018b) has defined two types of Japanese Buddhist astrology: Mikkyō Astrology, based on the *Xiuyao jing* and used by mainstream esoteric monks for hemerology; *Sukuyōdō*, practiced by professional *sukuyōshi* after the tenth century for complex personal horoscopy and its related apotropaic rituals.

As these systems of knowledge fused in Japan, rituals centered on the Big Dipper became increasingly diverse. Early historical records, for instance, note the performance of the *Hokutohō* (北斗法) in 960 and the *Hokutoku* (北斗供) in 963 during the reign of Emperor Murakami (村上天皇; r. 946–967) (*Rekidai shinki* 歴代宸記, p. 125), both of which were conducted by Jinshin (尋真), one of the *Naigubu Jūzenji* (内供奉十禅師) who prayed for the emperor's well-being within the palace. These rituals were part of a wider spectrum of star rituals that also developed, such as the *honmyōsai* (本命祭)—a ritual for one's day of personal destiny (*honmyōnichi* 本命日) to be analyzed in Section 5, the *Hokuto hō* (北斗法), and the *Hokuto honhaiku* (北斗本拝供) (Toda 2008, pp. 33–48), the *Tōhō seiryūsai* (東方清流祭), and the *Nanpō kōzansai* (南方高山祭). While each of these rituals had its own specific focus, the *zokushōsai* became one of the most important rituals in *Onmyōdō*. It was primarily performed to heal illness, ward off disasters, prolong life, and ensure safe childbirth.

A key source for understanding these rituals is the *Shosaimon kojitsushō* (諸祭文故実抄), *The Compendium of Liturgical Texts for Traditional Ritual Practices*. It was compiled in 1518 (Eishō永正 15) by Higashibōjō Kazunaga (東坊城和長; 1460–1530), a court noble from a

branch of the scholarly Sugawara clan. Drawing on ritual texts inherited by his family, Kazunaga's work collects 56 liturgical texts for 16 different types of rituals practiced at court and by the shogunate between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. The compendium begins by categorizing these liturgical texts based on their presiding specialist: Buddhist, Onmyōdō, or *sukuyōshi* (宿曜師) rituals (*Shosaimon kojitsushō*, copy at Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo, No. 2011-20).

The *Hokutohō*, for example, was classified as both a Buddhist and a *sukuyōshi* ritual. In practice, it was indeed primarily conducted by esoteric monks from Ninna-ji temple (仁和寺) (Saitō 2022), a temple of the Shingon school in Kyoto, founded by Emperor Uda in 888. The *zokushōsai*, meanwhile, was shared between *sukuyōshi* and *onmyōji*, though the name changed depending on the practitioner: it was a *zokushōsai* when performed by an *onmyōji*, but known as a *zokushōku* when led by a *sukuyōshi*. Most other related rituals, such as the *Hokuto honhaiku* (Toda 2008, pp. 33–48), were primarily conducted by *sukuyōshi*.

As star worship flourished in Japan from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, the *zokushōsai* was performed with notable frequency. During this period, the focus of star rituals gradually shifted from protecting the state against celestial omens to seeking individual well-being and longevity (T. Hayami 1975, pp. 22, 45; Saitō 2022, pp. 71–86). This is well documented in the *Azuma kagami* (吾妻鏡), a chronicle of the Kamakura shogunate. For the years between 1180 and 1266, it records more than thirty instances of *zokushōsai* or *zokushōku* rituals, highlighting their prevalence under the warrior government (Murayama 1981, pp. 309–10).

The *zokushōsai* ritual was performed for a wide range of purposes, from countering celestial anomalies and illness to ensuring success in childbirth and military campaigns. One of its primary applications was in response to celestial anomalies. Astronomical events like eclipses or comets were seen as signs foreshadowing disaster, and star-worship rituals were crucial for mitigating these threats. For instance, after a comet sighting in 1210 (Shōgen承元4), the *onmyōji* Abe no Yasusada (安倍泰貞; ?–1240) conducted a *zokushōsai* to calm anxieties over the event (*Azuma kagami* 1: 653). A larger-scale response occurred in 1223 following a series of unusual celestial events, prompting the Kamakura shogunate to organize a suite of major celestial rituals. The Onmyōdō portion of this effort included the zokushōsai, which was conducted by the onmyōji Abe no Harukata (安倍晴賢) (*Azuma kagami* 2: 11).

The political climate following the Jōkyū War (*Jōkyū no ran* 承久の乱) of 1221 served as a major reason for these rituals. After the retired Emperor Go-Toba (Go-Toba Jōkō 後鳥羽上皇)'s failed attempt to overthrow the Kamakura shogunate, records of unusual celestial events began to increase. In response, the third regent (*shikken*執権), Hōjō Yasutoki (北条泰時, r. 1224–1242), actively incorporated *Onmyōdō* and *Sukuyōdō* practices into the shogunate's religious policies (O. Hayami 1989), and rituals addressing celestial phenomena became more frequent. The esoteric monk Chinyo (珍誉), who was responsible for the Seven Luminaries Ritual held in 1223, was an important *Sukuyōshi* during the early Kamakura shogunate (Murayama 1981, pp. 307–8; Toda 2007, pp. 45–59). Subsequently, the Kamakura shogunate frequently turned to star rituals to counter perceived threats.

The ritual was also crucial in matters of health and illness. When the Emperor Horikawa (堀河天皇; r. 1087–1107) felt ill in 1093 (Kanji 寛治7), for instance, a *zokushōsai* was conducted at the Imperial Palace (*Chūyūki* 中右記, p. 226). Similarly, when the third shogun of the Kamakura shogunate Minamoto no Sanetomo (源実朝; r. 1203–1219) felt unwell in 1211 (Kenryaku建暦 1), the *onmyōji* Abe no Yasusada performed the rite at his residence (*Azuma kagami* 1: 657).

Ensuring safe childbirth was another key application. In 1239 (En'ō延応 1), with the third shogun of the Kamakura shogunate, Fujiwara no Yoritsune's (藤原頼経; r. 1203–1219)

consort approaching the end of her pregnancy, the *onmyōji* Abe no Korenori (安倍維範) performed a *zokushōsai* to pray for a safe birth (*Azuma kagami* 2: 5).

The ritual's protective power also extended to a wide array of ominous natural phenomena, from earthquakes and thunderstorms to strange animal behavior. In an example from 1224 (Jōō 貞応 3), a series of unusual occurrences at the shogun's residence, including crows nesting where they shouldn't and mushrooms sprouting from a pot handle, were interpreted as bad omens. In response, a series of Onmyōdō rituals were performed, including not only the *zokushōsai* but also Moon Worship Ritual (*getsuyōsai* 月曜祭), Mars Worship Ritual (*keikokusai* 熒惑祭), Ritual for Expelling Strange Phenomena (*hyakkaisai* 百怪祭), and Ritual for the Deitizy of Taizan Fukun (*taizan fukunsai* 泰山府君祭), a key Onmyōdō ritual dedicated to the deity believed to govern human lifespan (*Azuma Kagami*, 2: 16).

Finally, the *zokushōsai* was employed to seek success in military campaigns. Prior to the Wada Conflict in 1213 (Kenryaku 建暦 3), the *onmyōji* Abe no Yasusada led a series of rites, including the *zokushōsai*, to ensure victory. After the conflict was won, another *zokushōsai* was held in thanksgiving (*Azuma kagami* 1: 680, 695).

In summary, like most Onmyōdō rituals, the *zokushōsai* ritual was fundamentally a ritual to ward off disaster and misfortune. As we have seen, its significance was diverse: it was performed in response to celestial anomalies, to pray for health and safe childbirth, to dispel strange omens, and to seek victory in battle.

While historical records note approximately 50 instances of the *zokushōsai* ritual being performed during the Heian to Kamakura periods, few liturgical texts have survived. The earliest known example dates to a ritual conducted for the retired Emperor Go-Fushimi (後伏見; 1288–1336) in 1311 (Enkyō 延慶 4). The presiding *onmyōji* was Kamo no Arihiko (賀茂在彦), and the liturgical text itself was authored by the scholar Sugawara no Arikane (菅原在兼; 1249–1321) (*Fushimi no miya bon "Kōgimoningosangoki Gofushimitennoushinki" honkoku*, 59–96). This text is divided into three sections: Inviting the Deities, Stating the Wishes, and Sending Off the Deities. In the first section, the invoked deities include Tennō Taitei Yōhaku Hō (天皇太帝耀魄宝), representing the North Star, as well as the seven Dipper stars. Notably, the text does not mention the specific assigned star of the petitioner; instead, it treats the stars as a unified whole, reciting each of their names and courtesy names individually (e.g., Tanlang Star, courtesy name Xi Shenzi 希神子). The second section, Stating the Wishes, repeats this recitation twice while praying for a safe childbirth for the Empress Kōgimon'in (広義門院) (Saionji Neishi 西園寺寧子; 1292–1357) the consort of Emperor Go-Fushimi and the birth mother of two later emperors, Kōgon (光厳天皇) and Kōmyō (光明天皇). Finally, in the third section, the names are recited one last time before the deities are formally sent off.

Most surviving liturgical texts for the *zokushōsai* ritual date to later periods and are found primarily in two collections: the *Shosaimon kojitsushō* and the *Saimon burui* (祭文部類). In the *Shosaimon kojitsushō*, the section on the "Daizokushōku" (大属星供) contains three examples: a ritual for the regent Konoe Iehira (近衛家平; 1282–1324) in 1315, and two for the third Muromachi (室町) shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (足利義満; 1358–1408) in 1390 and 1402. The compiler, Higashibōjō Kazunaga, categorized these rituals based on their presiding specialist: "Tenmondō Rituals" were conducted by *onmyōji* trained in *Tenmondō* (the Way of Astronomy, 天文道), and "Sukuyōshi Rituals", performed by the *Sukuyōshi*. He also divided the structure of the texts themselves into three parts: Inviting the Deities (*Kanshō* 勸請), the main prayer or new compositions (*Reibun* 例文 or *Shinsaku* 新作), and Sending Off the Deities (*Kiku* 皈宮).

This distinction is most apparent in the deities invoked. A comparative analysis shows that Tenmondō rituals led by *onmyōji* Abe no Yusei (安倍有世; 1357–1437), such as the ones in 1315 and 1390, focused tightly on the seven stars of the Big Dipper. In contrast,

the *Sukuyōdō* ritual led by the *sukuyōshi* Teisan (定算) in 1402 invoked a much broader pantheon. This includes not only the Big Dipper but also Ichiji Kinrin (一字金輪, *Ekākṣaroṣṇīṣacakra*), Daibonten'ō (大梵天王, *Brahmā*), Taishakuten (帝釈天, *Śakra*), the Four Heavenly Kings (四天王, *Shitennō, Caturmahārāja*), Two Luminaries and Five Planets (二曜五緯, *Niyō Goei*)—referring to the Sun, Moon, and the planets Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn—the Twelve Zodiac Deities, and the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions.

The use of mandalas was another key feature of rituals led by esoteric monks and *sukuyōshi*. These star mandalas (*hoshimandara* 星曼荼羅) generally fall into two types: rectangular and circular. The rectangular form was first introduced by the monk Kankū (寛空; 884–972) of Kōryū-ji Temple (広隆寺), a Shingon temple in Kyoto, for use in the *Hokutohō*, and later refined by Kanjo (寛助; 1057–1125) of Jōjuin at Ninna-ji Temple (仁和寺成就院). The circular form, meanwhile, was created by Keien (慶円; 944–1019), a Tendai school patriarch. These mandalas typically feature a central deity like Ichiji Kinrin, surrounded by concentric rings of the Big Dipper, Nine Luminaries (*Kyūyō* 九曜), Twelve Zodiac Signs, and Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions (Takeda 1995).

Since *sukuyōshi* were themselves a specialized type of esoteric Buddhist monk, it is reasonable to assume they would have employed such star mandalas during the *zokushōku* ritual. Accordingly, the pantheon they invoked would likely correspond to the deities depicted on these mandalas. This helps explain why their rituals, unlike those of the *onmyōji*, invoked not only the Big Dipper but also a wider array of figures like Ichiji Kinrin, Daibontenō, and the full assembly of astrological deities mentioned earlier.

The *Saimon burui*, a collection formerly held by the Wakasugi family,[3] is a later compilation containing 14 types of *Onmyōdō* liturgical texts associated with the Tsuchimikado (土御門) family from the sixteenth century[4] Most of these texts were transcribed in 1583 (Tenshō天正 11), based on manuscripts passed down by Abe Ariharu (安倍有春; 1528–1603). It contains what appears to be a *zokushōsai* text from a ritual conducted in 1556 (Kōji弘治2). Structurally, this text is familiar: it comprises three sections for inviting (*Kanshō* 勸請), stating wishes to (*Chingang* 陳願), and sending off the deities (*Kiku* 皈宮). Its focus is the collective worship of the seven Dipper stars for the purpose of warding off calamity, dispelling misfortune, and extending life, concluding with the recitation of a mantra.

Based on these liturgical texts, two key characteristics of the *zokushōsai* ritual, performed by onmyōji, become evident. First, the ritual centered on the worship of the seven Dipper stars as a collective whole, rather than focusing on the specific star assigned to the petitioner. Second, the question of whether to include the North Star as an eighth deity was a point of active debate by the era of Higashibōjō Kazunaga.

Beyond the content of the prayers, other sources reveal the practical details of the ceremony. The *Bunkanshō* (文肝抄),[5] a manual from the Wakasugi collection that specifically documents the procedural flow of Onmyōdō rituals, describes the physical arrangement of the deity seats (*shinza* 神座). The text describes two possible arrangements, seven seats for the Big Dipper alone, or eight seats to accommodate the North Star, a choice reflecting the debate over its inclusion. The text also outlines other procedures, such as practitioners were required to observe purification, and the use of a mirror as a *nademono* (撫物), a ritual implement used to transfer impurities and misfortunes from the body. The ritual typically lasted for three nights.

A significant element in the *zokushōsai* liturgical texts is the repetitive recitation of the names and courtesy names of the stars. This practice is evident throughout the ritual's three main sections: the names are recited during the opening "Inviting the Deities" section, again during the closing "Sending Off the Deities" section, and inserted within the central "Stating the Wishes" portion, before the phrases "Respectfully presented" (*kinkei*

謹啓) and "Respectfully repeated" (*kinjyukei* 謹重啓). This emphasis on repetition likely stems from the traditional belief that the very act of chanting the stars' names possesses divine power, a feature that distinguishes the *zokushōsai* from other *Onmyōdō* rituals.

4. From Apocryphal Texts to Japanese Esoteric Buddhism: The Historical Stratification of the Zokushōsai Ritual

An early Japanese account of the *zokushōsai*'s transmission comes from Kanshin (寛信; 1084–1153), a late Heian-period monk from Kanshū-ji Temple. In the twelfth-century text, the supplementary volume "On Stars Associated with Birth Years" (*Shengnian suoshu xing shi* 生年所属星事) of the *Ono ruihishō* (小野類秘抄) (*Shingonshū zenshō*, 89–90),[6] a twelfth-century treatise on Shingon Esoteric Buddhism detailing the school's principal deities, ritual procedures, and historical precedents, Kanshin attributes the "Secret Method of the *Zokushōsai*" to the Chinese monk Yixing (一行; 683–727). While this attribution should be understood as legendary rather than historical, it provides clues about how the ritual's origin was understood in Japan. As Kotyk (2018a) has argued, a legendary image of Yixing as a master of astral magic was established in China during the ninth century. A series of influential texts on the subject were apocryphally credited to him, including the *Xiuyao yigui* (宿曜儀軌, *T*. no.1304), the *Qiyao xingchen biexing fa* (七曜星辰別行法, *T*. no. 1309), the *Beidou qixing humo fa* (北斗七星護摩法, *T*. no. 1310), and the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao* (梵天火羅九曜, *T*. no. 1311). Kanshin's account suggests that this legendary image of Yixing was also transmitted to Japan.

The *Ono ruihishō* offers another, more detailed origin story in "Divine Response (*Kannō* 感応)" section, this one involving the Tang envoy Guo Wuzong (郭務悰). According to this legend, Guo secretly transmitted the esoteric *zokushōsai* ritual to Nakatomi no Kamatari (中臣鎌足; 614–669) in 664, the third year of Emperor Tenchi's (天智天皇; r. 668–672) reign. Kamatari is said to have regularly practiced the ritual, twice a month, which helped him rise to high office. The legend further claims that the monk Dōkyō (道鏡; 770? –772) also mastered this ritual, using it not only to heal the empress's illnesses but also to suppress the Fujiwara no Nakamaro Rebellion (藤原仲麻呂; 706–764) in 764. This was a failed uprising led by Nakamaro against the retired Empress Kōken (孝謙天皇; 718–770) and her clerical favorite, Dōkyō. Whether attributed to Yijing or Guo Wuzong, these legends clearly place the ritual's origins in China.

The legend connecting the ritual to Guo Wuzong likely stems from his historical role as a Tang envoy sent to restore relations after the Battle of Baekgang. However, as is well known, Chinese records contain no mention of Guo Wuzong. Accounts of his activities have primarily been found in the *Nihon shoki* (日本書紀) and *Zenrinkokuhōki* (善隣国宝記), which claim that he was sent to Japan three times as a Tang envoy between 664 and 669. [7] And while archeological evidence like the Kitora Tomb suggests that general Big Dipper worship had indeed reached Japan by the late seventh century, the specific practice of praying to an *assigned star* (*zokushō*) only began to appear in court rituals two centuries later, in the early ninth century. Therefore, the stories linking the fully formed *zokushōsai* to seventh-century figures like Guo Wuzong, Nakatomi no Kamatari, or Dōkyō are best understood as later embellishments.

This inconsistency between the legends and the historical timeline raises two questions. First, did a ritual comparable to the *zokushōsai* exist in China? And second, how was the practice transmitted to Japan? Contrary to the simple story of a secret transmission from an envoy to a minister, the historical evidence points to a far more complex reality.

As noted, *zokushō* refers to the association of a specific Dipper star with an individual's birth year. This core concept, both the correspondence itself and the deity names for the stars, like *Tanlang* and *Jumen*, was first established in apocryphal texts. As mentioned ear-

lier, these apocryphal texts contained a wide range of material related to astral omenology. However, before the Tang Dynasty, this tradition mostly focused on the relationship between celestial phenomena and major affairs of the state. Since the third year of the Taishi (泰始) era (267) of the Western Jin dynasty, the private study of astral omenology and related apocryphal texts was officially prohibited (*Jinshu*, p. 56). In this context, the few existing correlations between the Big Dipper and individual destiny, such as those found in the *Huangdi doutu*, likely remained a limited concept rather than a widespread practice.

Evidence of early ritual practice appears in a now-lost passage from the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi* (天地瑞祥志). We know this passage through the *Kōjidai shō* (江次第抄), a fifteenth-century commentary on the ritual text *Gōkeshidai* by the Ichijō Kaneyoshi (一条兼良). Ichijō Kaneyoshi traced the *zokushōsai* within the *Shihōhai* ritual to this specific passage from the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi*:

On days of personal crisis or illness, one should take the five types of foods corresponding to their assigned star, consume fourteen foods with the first-drawn water from a well in the morning, and, before sunrise, face east and bow twice using water drawn from the well. This practice eliminates all difficulties and suffering, as well as resolves disputes and averts imprisonment. (*Zokuzoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 6, pp. 606–7)

凡人有危難病苦之日，取人所屬星五穀等，各食二七枚以井花水、日未出之時，向東再拜，一切難苦皆消滅，及口舌懸官皆解消也。

The *Tiandi ruixiang zhi* itself was a *leishu* (類書), a type of classified compendium, compiled by Sa Shouzhen (薩守真) in 666 (Linde 麟德3). It was originally 20 volumes, collected auspicious signs, ominous events, and various divination methods.[8] This work was introduced to Japan around the ninth century, where it served as a foundational text for *Onmyōdō* scholars in the Heian period for divination practices. There are no complete copies survive in China, and while nine volumes are extant in Japan, the specific passage quoted by Ichijō Kaneyoshi is missing from them. All that remains in the surviving text is an entry title, "personal destiny being associated with the Big Dipper" (*Renming suoshu Beidou* 人命所屬北斗), which confirms the topic was indeed discussed.

This system of correspondence is detailed in several Dunhuang manuscripts. Two manuscripts in particular, P.2675V and P.2675bis,[9] discuss this correlation under the title "Method for Associating Personal Destiny with the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper" (*Qixing renming shufa* 七星人命屬法). These texts explicitly link an individual's birth year to a specific star and its corresponding food, even specifying the exact quantities. For instance, the Year of the Horse (*wu* 午), linked to the star *Pojun*, is associated with a 3 *shi* (石) and 8 *dou* (斗) of adzuki beans (*xiaodou* 小豆), while the Years of the Snake (*si* 巳) and Goat (*wei* 未), linked to the star *Wuqü*, correspond to 3 *shi* and 8 *dou* of soybeans (*dadou* 大豆). These records give more detail about the correspondence between stars and grains than what is found in the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi*. The Dunhuang texts frame these correlations primarily as a method for achieving longevity, promising lifespans of 83 to 95 years. Crucially, a colophon at the end of P.2675V notes that it was copied in 861 (Xiantong咸通2) by an official diviner in Dunhuang.

A related manuscript P.3398,[10] expands this system from birth year to birth hour. This bound divination book includes a section titled, "Method for Correlating Personal Destiny with the Twelve Hours" (*Tui Shiershi Renming Xiangshufa* 推十二時人命相属法), whichs links hours like *Wei* (未), *Shen* (申), *Xu* (戌), and *Hai* (亥) to Dipper stars such as *Wuqü* (武曲), *Lianzhen* (廉贞), *Lucun* (禄存), and *Jumen* (巨门). As the text notes, these correlations align perfectly with the earthly branch associations for birth years mentioned earlier.

This framework of correspondence did not remain theoretical, it evolved into ritual practices. A notable example appears in Dunhuang manuscript S.2404,[11] an annotated calendar compiled in 924 (Hou Tang 後唐, Tongguang 同光2) by the local calendrical scholar

Zhai Fengda (翟奉達). This calendar records a ritual known as "The Practice of Sir Immortal Ge for Honoring the Great Dipper" (*Gexian Gong li Beidou fa* 葛仙公禮北斗法). Its preface, citing the Xianjing (仙經), stating that "If one devoutly worships the Big Dipper every night, they will enjoy longevity, dispel calamities, and achieve great fortune." The manuscript includes two illustrations related to this ritual practice. The first is a scene of Big Dipper worship, it shows the seven Dipper above a kneeling devotee. In front of the devotee stands a deity in official attire, holding a ritual baton (*hu* 笏). The caption states, "In former times, Sir Immortal Ge devoutly worshiped the Big Dipper every night, resulting in the prolongation of his life and the augmentation of his life account [*suan* 算]." This explicit reference to "Sir Immortal Ge" (Gexuan 葛玄) underscores the connection between Big Dipper worship and the pursuit of longevity. The second illustration depicts a different, though related practice, the worship of one's original spirit of personal destiny (*benmingyuanshen* 本命元神). It features a figure dressed in official garments, holding a court tablet, and wearing a crown adorned with an image of a monkey. Above the figure, a monkey floats amid the clouds. The caption states, "The original spirit of personal destiny for those born in a Shen (申) year [the year of monkey] is the Monkey." It goes on to advise that daily worship of this personal spirit, by placing its image before oneself, will ward off calamities and secure blessings.

Another key text, the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao* (*Indian Astrology of the Nine Luminous Bodies*, *T*. no. 1311), provides further details on this personal devotional practice to the Big Dipper. While traditionally attributed to the famed astronomer, monk Yixing, its authorship of the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao* has long been debated. Early studies examined the text from scientific and folkloric perspectives (Yabuuchi 1961; Osabe [1963] 1990), but recent research has challenged the traditional attribution directly. Lü (1991, pp. 96–108) observed that the text's model of celestial-terrestrial correspondence (*fenye* 分野) is different from Yixing's known framework. Kotyk (2018a) provides strong evidence against Yixing's authorship. He notes that the text cites the *Duli yusi jing*, which was translated after Yixing's death, and it features Iranian-style planetary imagery and Sogdian vocabulary, all traits typical of ninth-century sources. Based on this evidence, Kotyk concludes the text was composed around the mid-ninth century. Significantly, the content of the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao* links it directly to the popular rituals we have seen in other Dunhuang manuscripts. It contains a section titled "Practice of Sir Immortal Ge for Honoring the Great Dipper," sharing the name with the ritual in S.2404. It also features practices, such as offering food, which are similar to those in P.2675V and P.2675bis. Given that these Dunhuang manuscripts date to 861 and 924, respectively, the textual similarities strongly suggest that this type of integrated Big Dipper ritual was indeed popular during the ninth and tenth centuries.

The *Fantian huoluo jiuyao* provides a more detailed account of the ritual practice mentioned in S.2404. It specifies that the ritual should be conducted on one's "day of personal destiny" (*benming ri* 本命日). This day corresponds to the stem-and-branch (*ganzhi* 干支) of one's birth year and thus occurs six times annually. For instance, a person born in a *jiazi* (甲子) year would treat six *jiazi* days within that year as their *benming ri*. The text outlines several ritual practices, including preparing paper money appropriate to one's age, presenting offerings of tea and fruit, setting up a clean mat, and facing the Big Dipper to make offerings to the North star, Big Dipper, and personal destiny spirit. These practices were believed to secure longevity and dispel calamities.

The account in manuscript S.2404 is more concise than the one in the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao*. However, its prominent placement at the very beginning of the calendar highlights its importance, suggesting these practices were a common part of popular religious life. The concept of the original spirit of personal destiny, briefly mentioned in S.2404, is illustrated in even greater detail in another Dunhuang manuscript S.612,[12] another annotated calen-

dar from 978 (*Taiping Xingguo* 太平興國3). This manuscript includes illustrations of the twelve original spirits (*yuanshen* 元神), each depicted in official dress and wearing a crown adorned with one of the twelve zodiac animals. The accompanying text instructs worshippers to honor their original spirit on their personal destiny day by burning paper money, camel-shaped paper figures, and incense to dispel calamities and ensure a long life.

The story of Pei Du (裴度; 765–839), recorded in the *Taiping guangji* (太平廣記), gives us a good idea of how people practiced these rituals (*Taiping guangji*, vol. 307, p. 2434). In his youth, a diviner told Pei Du that his fate was ruled by the *Lianzhen* star and advised him to make regular offerings. Pei Du followed this advice for years but later neglected his practice due to his busy official duties. Things changed when a family member fell ill. A witch told him to perform the ritual on an auspicious day, promising that the *Lianzhen* General would appear. Following her instructions, Pei Du bathed and changed his clothes before performing the rite. Just as the witch promised, the general appeared, and from that day on, Pei Du never dared to neglect the ritual again.

This story of Peidu suggests that the guidance for these Big Dipper rituals often came from practitioners such as diviners and witches, not the Daoist priests. This implies that the "Practice of Sir Immortal Ge for Honoring the Great Dipper, "despite its legendary association with Daoist figures like Ge Xuan, was not an institutionalized Daoist ritual. It was a simple, personal ritual that individuals could perform within the family. As such, it was more similar to a daily personal devotion, much like the morning recitations later performed by Fujiwara no Morosuke in Japan.

The institutionalization of Big Dipper worship in China from the ninth century onward was strongly shaped by Buddhist-Daoist interaction. As previously noted, the eighth-century compilation of the *Xiuyao jing* by Amoghavajra introduced a system of astrology aimed at individual destiny. Later, with the translation of the *Duli yusi jing* and the emergence of the *Qiyao rangzai jue*, which integrated multiple astrological theories, this form of personal astrology gained widespread acceptance among the elites of the mid and late Tang dynasty (Chan [2002] 2010, pp. 1–24). A key text in this tradition is the Buddhist apocryphon known as the *Great Dipper Sūtra* (*Beidou jing* 北斗經), whose full title is the *Sūtra on Prolonging Life through Worship of the Seven Stars of the Northern Dipper*. Its date of composition has been a subject of debate. While early suggestions placed it as late as the fourteenth century (Franke 1990) or as early as the mid-eighth (Sørensen 1995), Kotyk (2017) argues for an early ninth-century composition, noting that the sutra's fusion of traditions reflects the religious atmosphere of that specific period. This conclusion is supported by archeological evidence showing its growing popularity in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In 1962, a printed edition of the *Great Dipper Sūtra*, dated precisely to 986 (Yongxi 雍熙3), was discovered inside a Buddha statue in Shanxi province (D. Zhao 1994). This fragment, housed in the Shanxi Provincial Library, belongs to a different textual lineage from the edition included in the *Taishō Canon*, which was printed in 1802 (Kyōwa 享和2). Further evidence comes from the tomb of Sun siniangzi (孫四娘子) in Jiangsu (江蘇), where a manuscript of the sūtra written in gold ink was unearthed (Suzhou Bowuguan and Jiangyin Xian Wenhuaguan 1982). Since the tomb owner passed away in 1055 (Zhihe 至和2), the manuscript must have been copied before that date. These findings confirm that the *Great Dipper Sūtra* was already popular by the tenth century.

The *Great Dipper Sūtra* prescribes its own set of practices for times of calamity, performing seven acts of worship to the scripture, making offerings, and wearing a talisman corresponding to one's assigned star. According to Mollier (2008, pp. 157–59), the *Great Dipper Sūtra* shows strong influence from Daoist ritual traditions. Mollier points to two key similarities as evidence.

First, the food offerings listed in the sūtra are consistent with those described in the *Secret Instructions for Prolonging Life from the Purple Court of the Seven Principles of the Northern Emperor* (*Beidi Qiyuan Ziting Yansheng Mijue* 北帝七元紫庭延生祕訣, Dz1265, *Daozang*, vol. 17, p. 88). This text was believed to be related to Ge Xuan (葛玄). Its Big Dipper *jiao* ritual is very similar to the "Practice of Sir Immortal Ge for Honoring the Great Dipper," and it uses the term *benmingxing* (本命星) for an individual's assigned star. It also emphasized that invoking the name of one's personal destiny star officers (*benming xingjun* 本命星君) can bring salvation, demonstrating the power attributed to the star's name. The text is fully preserved in the *Yunji qiqian* (雲笈七籤, Dz1032, *Daozang*, vol. 22, pp. 183–86), a Daoist encyclopedia compiled before 1025, which dates its composition to the Tang or Five Dynasties period at the latest. Second, Mollier notes the talismans in the sūtra closely resemble the "Winged Stanzas" talismans from another Daoist work, the *Winged Stanzas on the Golden Mystery of the Seven Principles of the Northern Dipper* (*Beidou qiyuan jinxuan yuzhang* 北斗七元金玄羽章, DZ753, *Daozang*, vol. 32, pp. 549–52). This observation provides strong evidence that the *Great Dipper Sūtra* was deeply shaped by Daoist traditions.

By the ninth and tenth centuries, Daoist offering rituals dedicated to the Big Dipper, known as *Beidou iao* (北斗醮), were widely practiced.[13] The Book of Sui (Suishu 隋書, pp. 1092–93) explains the *jiao* as a nocturnal ritual addressed to stellar deities. A key example for the Big Dipper is the *Zhengyi jiee jiaoyi* (*Offering for Averting Misfortune and Illness of the Zhengyi Liturgy*, 正一解厄醮儀), an offering ritual performed on significant days, such as one's *benming ri* (本命日), to prevent disaster and cure illness. The ritual involved elaborate offerings, including fruit, cakes, "Destiny Rice" (*mingmi* 命米), salt, beans, and numerous oil lamps. The deities invoked included the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper, the Five Emperors of the Five Directions, the Directors of Destiny (*Siming* 司命), the Registrars of Life (*Silu* 司録), and the sixty deities of the sexagesimal cycle. The liturgical text template for this ritual requires a detailed account of the petitioner, including their native place, name, age, "personal destiny" (*benming* 本命), and the name and courtesy name of their assigned Big Dipper star. For instance: "Now there is [petitioner's name] of [official rank] from [address], aged […], born in the month of […], whose personal destiny is *jiazi*. His spirit-official is Wang Wenqing (王文卿), who has eighteen attendants. This person is assigned to the first star of the Big Dipper, *Tanlang* (貪狼), courtesy name *Lu Shenzi* (露神子)." This practice of addressing the stars by their names and courtesy names is very similar to what we find in the Japanese *zokushōsai* texts.

The date of this ritual text is debated. While Schipper (2004, pp. 476–77) suggests the early Tang period, other evidence points to a later date. For instance, the use of a "memorial of accomplished merits" (*gongde shu* 功德疏) in *zhai* and *jiao* rituals is thought to appear in the Five Dynasties period (Cao 2023, pp. 111–30). Furthermore, the title used for the Jade Emperor, "Haotian Yuhuang Shangdi" (昊天玉皇上帝), was granted during the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song (*Songhuiyao jigao*, p. 1547; Wu and Du 2011, pp. 47–58). While this honorific title was likely a later addition to the text, possibly made during or after the Song, the text itself was probably compiled in the late Tang or Five Dynasties period.

The work of Du Guangting (杜光庭; 850–933), a leading Daoist scholar of the late Tang and Five Dynasties, shows just how popular Big Dipper worship had become. In his collection, the *Guangcheng ji* (廣成集), he compiled ten different liturgical texts (*jiaowen* 醮文) for Big Dipper rituals, as well as texts for rituals worshiping both the Northern and Southern Dippers. Later, during the Song dynasty, Big Dipper worship became an official part of the Daoist canon. This was marked by the appearance of a major scripture, the *Supreme Scripture of the Great Dipper of Mysterious Power Guiding Destiny and Prolonging Life* (*Taishang xuanling Beidou benming yansheng zhenjing* 太上玄靈北斗本命延生真經, Dz 622). This

scripture emphasizes reciting the text and worshiping the Dipper could avert disaster and extend one's life. It also details specific procedures like fasting on one's personal destiny day, preparing an altar, burning incense, and praying to the Big Dipper's seven stars.

This chapter began with two crucial questions, prompted by the inconsistency between the legends and the historical timeline. First, did a ritual comparable to the *zokushōsai* exist in China? And second, how was the practice transmitted to Japan? The evidence reviewed above suggests a complex reality.

Regarding the first question, did a ritual comparable to the *zokushōsai* exist in China, the evidence confirms that while the specific term *zokushōsai* was absent, all of its core components existed in China by the ninth and tenth centuries. The correspondence between an individual and the seven stars of the Big Dipper first appeared in Chinese apocryphal texts. Simple, popular ritual forms can be found in the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi* and various Dunhuang manuscripts, particularly in the widespread "Practice of Sir Immortal Ge". A more formalized Daoist liturgy, the *Zhengyi jiee jiaoyi*, was also performed to avert misfortune by worshiping one's assigned star. Notably, its practice of addressing the assigned star by both its name and courtesy name is very similar to the liturgical texts of the Japanese *zokushōsai*. Finally, the key term *benmingxing* (本命星) was widely used in influential Buddhist and Daoist scriptures of the period, such as the *Beidi Qiyuan Ziting Yansheng Mijue*, and in Buddhist texts such as the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao*.

Regarding the second question, how the practice was transmitted to Japan, the evidence points to a process of layered transmission over several centuries. The foundational layer, which arrived before the tenth century, consisted of core concepts. As mentioned, the *Wuxing dayi*, which explained the basic star-to-birthyear correspondence, was required reading for Japan's Bureau of Onmyō as early as 757. Other early texts containing simple ritual instructions, like the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi*, are known to have been in Japan by 876, evidenced by a reference in the *Nihon sandai jitsu roku* (日本三代実録) (*Nihon Sandai jitsu roku*, p. 380). As a second, more complex layer of texts began to arrive from the tenth century onward, bringing astrological and ritual manuals to Japan.

Evidence for the transmission of these key scriptures is found across various Japanese records. The *Fantian huoluo tu* (火羅圖, Hora Diagram), for instance, is mentioned by the Shingon monk Junyū (淳祐; 890–953) in the *Ishiyama shichishū* (石山七集) (*Dainihon Bukkyōzenshō*, vol. 44, p. 336), giving us a clear latest possible date for its arrival. The Buddhist apocryphon, the *Great Dipper Sūtra*, was cited by the monk Kanjo, as *Prolonging Life through Worship of the Seven Stars of the Northern Dipper* (*Hokuto enmei kyō* 北斗延命經) in *Betsugyō* (別行) (*T*. no. 2476, 78: 182). And the Daoist *Supreme Scripture of the Great Dipper of Mysterious Power Guiding Destiny and Prolonging Life* is found in later records, most notably in a Wakasugi family manuscript. This scripture was annotated by Xie Shouhao (謝守灝; 1134–1212) (Miura 2014, 2018), and the detailed Japanese reading marks (*kunten*) on this manuscript highlight its importance to the Tsuchimikado family, a leading *Onmyōdō* lineage.

The influence of these newly arrived texts is clearly visible in the works of Japanese monks, who actively integrated them into local practice. For example, both Ningai (仁海; 951–1046), a prominent Shingon monk, and Jōnen (行林抄, *T*. no. 2409, 76: 450), a Tendai monk, cited the *Huoluo Tu* in their own influential compendiums, the *Ono ryokujō* (小野六帖, *T*. no. 2473, 78: 98) and the *Gyōrinshō* (行林抄, *T*. no. 2409, 76: 450). It was this fusion of layered Chinese traditions within the developing contexts of Japanese Mikkyō and Sukuyōdō that ultimately shaped the formal *zokushōsai* ritual.

5. Rituals for Personal Destiny and Zokushōsai

Several of the Chinese sources we have examined, from the "Practice of Sir Immortal Ge" to the story of Pei Du, mention worshiping the Big Dipper and one's "spirit of personal destiny" (*benming shen* 本命神) on the "day of personal destiny" (*benming ri* 本命日). To understand this, we must first clarify the term "personal destiny" (*benming* 本命), which has two main meanings. First, it could refer to one's birth year. For someone born in the year of *jiazi* (甲子), not only was that year their *benming*, but so too was the year of the same earthly branch (zi 子) 12 years later, and the year of the full *jiazi* cycle 60 years later. Second, and more commonly for ritual purposes, *benming* referred to a specific day. As the Daoist master Tao Hongjing (陶弘景) explained, this was the day whose stem-and-branch designation matched that of one's birth year. For an individual born in a *bingshen* (丙申) year, any *bingshen* day would be their day of personal destiny. This practice of performing rituals on one's personal destiny day appears to have become widespread during the Tang and Song dynasties.

The importance of these personal destiny rituals in Daoism is evident in the work of Du Guangting. His *Guangcheng ji* includes 36 different liturgical texts for *jiao* rituals performed on either the "year" or "day" of personal destiny. Because only abridged versions survive, the complete list of deities worshiped in these rituals is unclear, even though they explicitly mention offerings to the Big Dipper and Southern Dipper. These texts show that the rituals had diverse purposes, ranging from curing illnesses to averting disasters.

By the Northern Song dynasty, these rituals had gained imperial prominence. On the birthday and personal destiny day of Emperor Zhenzong (真宗; r. 997–1022), for example, Daoist *zhai* (齋) and *jiao* rituals were conducted at seven locations across the capital in a single night (*Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, pp. 2316–17). This imperial practice continued into the Southern Song.[14] The Daoist Wanshou Temple (Wanshouguan 萬壽觀), in Lin'an (臨安), was specifically dedicated to honoring the emperor's personal destiny star officers (*benming xingguan*本命星官). Official records from 1187 even stipulate that on the emperor's personal destiny day, ten Daoist priests were to conduct an overnight *jiao* ritual to honor 120 different deities (*Songhuiyao jigao*, p. 576). In these Song dynasty state rituals, conducted by Daoist priests, the terms *benmingxing* and *benming xingguan* both clearly referred to the specific Big Dipper star assigned to the emperor.

In Japan, the *honmyōsai* ritual (本命祭) held for the emperor, empress, and crown prince was managed by the Bureau of *Onmyō*. According to the *Procedures of the Engi Era* (*Engishiki* 延喜式), a detailed compendium of laws and court procedures from the early tenth century, the *honmyōsai* ritual was performed six times a year and involved setting up 25 divine seats (*shinza*神座) (*Engishiki*, p. 664), indicating it was a significant state ritual. However, the interpretation of "personal destiny" (*honmyō*) was not monolithic. The famous debate of 961, which we introduced in Section 3 as the founding moment of *Sukuyōdō*, illustrates the tension between the established *Onmyōdō* view and emerging *Sukuyōdō* practices (*Byakuhokku shō* 白寶口鈔 *Tz*. 7: 334).

The debate arose during preparations for a *honmyōku* ritual (本命供, personal destiny offering) for Emperor Murakami. The discussion focused on how to interpret both the honmyōnichi (day of personal destiny) and the *honmyōshuku* (本命宿, personal destiny mansion). Kamo no Yasunori, arguing from the *Onmyōdō* tradition, maintained that the *honmyōnichi* should be based on the emperor's birth year (*bingxu* 丙戌), and that the corresponding *honmyōshuku* was therefore the Willow Mansion (*ryūshuku* 柳宿). Hōzō, the Sukuyōdō proponent, countered that the *honmyōnichi* must be based on the birth date (*dinghai* 丁亥), which in turn required a separate calculation for the *honmyōshuku*.

The fact that these concepts were well-established by the mid-tenth century is confirmed by a key liturgical text for a *honmyōnichi* ritual, dated to 947. This text is preserved

in both the *Ono ryokujō* (*T*. no. 2473, 78: 100), compiled by the Shingon monk Ningai of the Ono lineage, and the *Gyōrinshō* (*T*. no. 2409, 76: 459), authored by the Tendai monk Jōnen. Written to address personal difficulties and avert future calamities, the text's list of invoked deities is personalized. It instructs the petitioner to call upon only a few specific entities tied to their personal destiny, their assigned Dipper star (*zokushō*), in this case was *Pojun*, and the *honmyōshuku*, the Heart Mansion (*shinshuku* 心宿). This targeted approach contrasts with the *zokushōsai* ritual, where all seven stars of the Big Dipper were invoked as a collective. And while its content was highly personalized, its format shared features with established Daoist models. In addition, the *Gyōrinshō* notes that this Buddhist *honmyōku* ritual was said to have been transmitted by the monk Shinyo (真譽; 1069–1137), who inherited and modified the practices of the great *onmyōji* Kamo no Yasunori.

The *Shosaimon kojitsushō* contains another key liturgical text for a *honmyō* ritual, this one performed for the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1394. The text shows a long list of deities being invoked, but when it comes to the Big Dipper, the invocation becomes highly specific, calling upon the shogun's personal destiny star (*honmyōsei*), *Rokuson* (禄存). The ritual's purported origin is a specific liturgical text, the "*Jiao Liturgical Text for Personal Destiny, Original Destiny*, and *Nine Luminaries* (*Jiao benming yuanchen bing jiuyao* 醮本命元辰并九曜)," which is said to derive from the Tang-dynasty divination manual called the *Baijili* (百忌曆, *Hundred Avoidances Calendar*), attributed to Lü Cai (呂才; c. 600–665). Verifying this lineage, however, is difficult. The *Baijili*, though recorded in both the *Book of Sui* (Suishu 隋書, p. 1035) and *New Book of Tang* (*Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, p. 1557), has since been lost in China. While a related text is held by the National Diet Library in Japan, Wu (2013, pp. 90–97) suggested that this version may be an abridged or incomplete copy, and an examination of the text confirms that this specific liturgy is not included.

A more fruitful line of inquiry comes from comparing the deities invoked in this text. The deities invoked in this *jiao* ritual text resemble the deity rankings found in two major Southern Song Daoist compendiums. The first is "the second row of the jiao positions on the right" in the *Standard Liturgies of the Supreme Great Yellow Register Retreat* (*Wushang Huanglu dazhai lichengyi* 無上黃籙大齋立成儀) (DZ508, *Daozang*, vol. 599–600), written by Jiang Shuyu (蔣叔輿; 1156–1217) during the Southern Song dynasty. The second is the "Petition to the Northern Dipper" (*Shen Beidou zhuang* 申北斗状) (DZ1221, *Daozang*, vol. 31, p. 541), in the *Great Rites of the Numinous Treasure of the Highest Clarity* (*Shangqing lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法), authored by Wang Qizhen (王契真). This strong resemblance suggests that while its direct link to the *Baijili* is uncertain, the liturgical text itself clearly belongs to a mainstream Song dynasty Daoist ritual tradition that was later transmitted to Japan.

In China, while state rituals had long honored the Big Dipper as a collective, by the Song dynasty, highly personalized rites for the emperor's day of personal destiny (*benming ri*) had become important state ceremonies. In Japan, two distinct types of ritual for the Big Dipper, the *zokushōsai* and the *honmyōsai*, evolved with different characteristics. The *zokushōsai*, although its name suggests a focus on a single assigned star, was in practice a ritual where all seven stars of the Big Dipper were worshiped as a collective. Its function was often public facing, aimed at countering large-scale threats like celestial anomalies. The *honmyōsai*, in contrast, was typically a more private rite for an individual's well-being.

6. Conclusions

This paper has traced the complex origins of the Japanese *zokushōsai* ritual, arguing that it evolved from a multi-layered Chinese tradition. In China, the belief in an assigned star, the linking of a specific star of the Great Dipper to an individual, began as a simple concept in early apocryphal texts. Over time, this idea developed into popular ritual prac-

tices, seen in sources like the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi* and popularized by texts, the "Practice of Sir Immortal Ge", which can be found in Dunhuang manuscripts. Within Daoism, this practice took shape in rituals like the *Beidou jiao*. At the same time, the interaction between Daoism and Buddhism led to the new scriptures, such as the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao* and the *Great Dipper Sūtra*.

These layered systems were then transmitted to Japan at different paces. The earliest conceptual layer, drawn from Chinese apocryphal texts, was studied in Japan through works like the *Wuxing dayi*, which became a textbook for the Bureau of Onmyō in 757. Soon after, texts with simple ritual instructions, like the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi*, laid the groundwork for early court rituals like the *Shihōhai*. Subsequently, the arrival of more complex astrological systems of Indian and Hellenistic origin through Buddhist scriptures spurred the formation of the *sukuyōdō*. Adding further to this landscape were the influential scriptures shaped by Buddhist-Daoist interaction in China, such as the *Fantian huoluo jiuyao* and the *Great Dipper Sūtra*, which provided new ritual methods.

The transmission of this tradition to Japan was therefore not a simple reception, but a process of transformation. This is particularly evident in the practices of the *sukuyōshi*, who modified the rituals by introducing distinctly Buddhist elements like mandalas and expanding the pantheon of deities far beyond the Big Dipper. A clear difference in practice can be observed based on the evidence: the *zokushōsai*, for instance, often appears as a public rite where all seven Dipper stars were worshiped as a collective, while practices like the *honmyōsai* show a more personalized focus, invoking an individual's specific destiny star. By the tenth century, while still connected to personal destiny, the Japanese ritual had developed broader functions, performed by both *onmyōji* and *sukuyōshi*. In contrast, during the same period in Song China, the institutionalized state ritual of the emperor's assigned star, the *benmingxing*, was conducted by Daoist priests.

Finally, this study of Japanese *zokushōsai* ritual also provides a new perspective on Chinese traditions. The existence of a clear ritualistic endpoint like the *zokushōsai* ritual has allowed this paper to reorganize the historical materials from China—from the apocryphal texts to popular ritual practices, and then to the Daoist *Beidou jiao* and the highly popular Buddhist *Great Dipper Sūtra*—into a coherent narrative of the evolutionary process of personalized Big Dipper worship.

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Notes

1 The term Beidou (J. Hokuto) 北斗 literally translates to 'Northern Dipper.' However, this paper uses the more widely recognized English term 'Big Dipper'.

2 Regarding the date of compilation of the *Laozi zhongjing*, see Gao Tonglin's summary of previous research and his subsequent analysis (Gao 2021, pp. 106–31).

3 The Wakasugi family was a lineage that served as hereditary stewards (*keishi* 家司) to the Tsuchimikado family, the head of Onmyōdō. As such, they inherited numerous important documents from the Tsuchimikado clan. These "Wakasugi Family Documents" are now primarily held at the Kyoto Prefectural Library and Archives. For a general overview of the Wakasugi Family Documents, see T. Yamamoto (2021).

4 Digitalized color images of the *Saimon burui* from the Wakasuya Family Manuscripts are publicly available on the Kyoto Prefectural Library and Archives website. See: http://www.archives.kyoto.jp/websearchpe/detail?cls=112_komonjo_catalog&pkey=0000031498 (accessed on 30 September 2024). For the images and explanatory notes, see Murayama (1981, pp. 243–82, 383–84). Recent research includes Umeda (2016).

5 Digitized color images of the *Bonganshō* (文肝抄) from the Wakasuya Family Manuscripts are available on the Kyoto Prefectural Library and Archives website: http://www.archives.kyoto.jp/websearchpe/detail?cls=112_komonjo_catalog&pkey=0000031994 (accessed on 30 July 2023). For the images and explanatory notes, see Murayama (1987, pp. 205–24, 371–81). A later copy of the *Bonganshō* is held by the Imperial Household Archives (*Kunaichō Shoryōbu*), which Murayama suggests was transcribed from the Wakasuya Family version. Digitized images of this copy are available on the New Japanese Classical Text Comprehensive Database: http://kotenseki.nijl.ac.jp/biblio/100233147 (accessed on 23 October 2024).

6 For further details about the *Ono ruihishō*, see S. Yamamoto (2007).

7 For research on Guo Wuzong's diplomatic mission, see Hori (1998) and Suzuki (2011). Regarding the transmission of the *zokushō-sai* ritual to Japan, Kanazashi [1974] 2024 cites references in the *Kakuzenshō* (覚禅抄, TZ 5: 410c), which appear to be derived from *Ruihishō*.

8 For research on the *Tiandi ruixiang zhi*, see Nakamura (2000), Ōta (1991), Mizuguchi (2005), and Mizuguchi and Chen (2007). For a published annotated edition, see the work of Japanese scholars: https://shushu.temmon.org/tenchi (accessed on 23 October 2024).

9 The manuscripts P.2675V and P.2675bis can be found in *Faguo guojia tushuguan cang dunhuang xiyu wenxian*, Vol. 17, pp. 196–97. Digitized color images are available at the Gallica website: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8300693j.r=Pelliot%20chinois%202675?rk=21459;2 and https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b83007719.r=2675?rk=42918;4 (accessed on 23 October 2024). For related research, see Z. Zhao (2006).

10 The manuscript P.3398 can be found in *Faguo guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian*, Vol. 24, pp. 77–81. Digitized color images are available at the Gallica website: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b83002453.r=3398?rk=278971;2 (accessed on 23 October 2024).

11 The manuscript S.2404 can be found in *Yingcang Dunhuang wenxian*, Vol. 17, pp. 68–69. Digitized color images are available on the IDP website: https://idp.bl.uk/collection/D65E3A95E8354C29A5D42AF387F5E22F/?return=/collection/?page=2&term=2404 (accessed on 23 October 2024).

12 The manuscript S.612 can be found in *Yingcang Dunhuang wenxian*, Vol. 2, pp. 72–74. Digitized color images are available on the IDP website: https://idp.bl.uk/collection/5734A69469EE46E09A55E2BF6596FDE7/?return=/collection/?page=3&term=612 (accessed on 23 October 2024).

13 For research on Daoist offering rituals dedicated to the Big Dipper, see Xie (2018).

14 For discussions of imperial and popular personal destiny rituals in the Song dynasty, see Liu (2004).

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