

Shugendo Art¹

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Introduction

The Japanese cult of sacred mountains began in prehistory, continued on into historical times, then mingled with other religions, especially Buddhism. Such interactions produced distinct cultic forms, some of which survive even today. Important examples of such distinctive cults include Ōmine, Haguro, Haku-san, and Kumano, all of which were religiously significant throughout Japan. Other, related cults, of more local interest, existed in every region of the country, and each likewise had its own identity. For example, most temples on the "Thirty-Three Kannon of the Kansai" pilgrimage circuit developed from sacred mountain cults.

The survival of such cults, thanks to popular support, suggests that the cultural complex which nurtured them was no simple one. This complex encouraged the emergence not only of art connected with religious rites, but of various performing arts which deeply penetrated the lives of country people. Among the rituals and performing arts which live on here and there in Japan, many are clearly related to the old mountain cults. In fact, no treatment of regional culture can afford to ignore the role played by local yamabushi. Let us review in this light the art which developed from the cults of sacred mountains.

¹ Translated and edited from the Japanese. See SAWA 1975.

Images of Zaō Gongen 藏王権現 and En no Gyōja 役行者

The founder of Japanese mountain religion is always said to be En no Gyōja, who was active above all in the Ōmine 大峯 mountains. The cult of Ōmine (or Yoshino 吉野 or Kinpusen 金峯山) goes back to the Nara period, but because Ōmine is close not only to the Yamato region but to Kyoto as well, its cult flourished in Heian times and after, and spread as well to every part of the country. Therefore, an examination of mountain-cult art must begin with the art of Ōmine and Yoshino.

The first purely Buddhist practitioner to promote the cult of Ōmine is thought to have been Shōbō 聖宝 (832-909), who founded Daigo-ji 醍醐寺 and who is regarded as the "restorer" (*chūkō* 中興) of Ōmine Shugendō. Shōbō's biography states that he built on Kinpusen a chapel which enshrined a six-foot, gilded Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音; a ten-foot Tamon Tennō 多聞天王; and a ten-foot Kongō Zaō Bosatsu 金剛藏王菩薩. He also organized six boatmen to start a ferry service on the Yoshino River, which had to be crossed by all pilgrims to Ōmine.

No one knows just what Shōbō's image of Kongō Zaō Bosatsu looked like. Deities by that name appear in the Kokūzō 虚空藏 region of the Taizōkai 胎藏界 mandala and in fascicle seven ("On Kongō-zō") of the *Daranishū-kyō* 陀羅尼集經 (T. 18, 841-851): the Taizōkai variant has sixteen heads and eight arms, while the *Daranishū-kyō* variant (described in the *Kongō-zō* chapter, section 12, T. 18, 844b6-28) has one head and two arms. It is also unclear how widespread devotion to this deity may have been at the time. Still, it is significant that Shōbō should have enshrined Kongō Zaō on Kinpusen. Iconographically, his image was surely one of the two varieties just described, not the Zaō Gongen image which developed later. On the other hand, Kongō Zaō Bosatsu and Zaō Gongen are obviously related to each other.

Legend has it that Shaka 釈迦, Senju 千手 (Kannon), and Miroku 弥勒 appeared first as the Buddhist *honji* 本地 of the Ōmine deity, in answer to En no Gyōja's call, and that Zaō Gongen manifested himself only after En no Gyōja had rejected all three in turn. Zaō Gongen has no known textual basis. However, the *Daranishū-kyō* form of Kongō Zaō Bosatsu is described as expressing vehement wrath, and it therefore seems likely that this passage is the ultimate source for Zaō Gongen as well. At any rate, images of the Ōmine deity

made in Heian times and after, as icons of the cult, portray above all Zaō Gongen, and show the iconographic traits peculiar to him alone. No doubt Zaō Gongen has less to do with any canonical document than with ideas specific to the Ōmine cult itself.

Still, a deity iconographically similar to Zaō Gongen can be found in the “old translation” version of the *Ninnō-kyō* 仁王經 (*Jên-wang ching*, T. 8, 823–834). There, Ryūō-ku 龍王吼, one of the Godairiki-ku 五大力吼 Bosatsu, treads the earth with his left foot while lifting his right; carries in his raised right hand a dharma-wheel; and presses his left hand, which forms the sword mudra, against his waist. His hair bristles skyward and his general aspect is wrathful. The only difference between Ryūō-ku and Zaō Gongen is that Zaō Gongen holds in his right hand a vajra, single or triple-pronged. The resemblance is remarkable.

Another, similar iconographic configuration is that of Kongō Dōji 金剛童子, honored in the Tendai tradition. In this case, however, the pose of the arms and legs, left and right, is reversed. Kongō Dōji's left hand holds a triple-pronged vajra, while his right hand is in the mudra of banishing fear. Very few Zaō Gongen images display this mudra. Yet is it true that some Zaō Gongen images are left-right reversed. Examples include the *waki honzon* 脇本尊 (“secondary main image”) of Sanbutsu-ji 三仏寺 in Tottori-ken, as well as an image enshrined in Shōzen-in 正善院, within the Sanbutsu-ji precincts. The lower hand of both these images displays the sword mudra, not that of banishing fear. It is barely possible that these Zaō Gongen images sprang from a lineage different from the one which produced the Ōmine examples.

A related image, made of iron, shows Zaō Gongen holding a dharma-wheel aloft in his right hand. Since this Zaō Gongen is therefore indistinguishable from Ryūō-ku, one should perhaps consider that it actually is Ryūō-ku. However, images of the Godairiki-ku are so rare that there is no confirmed image of Ryūō-ku with which to compare it. This, and the fact that the image is iron, make it safer to assume that the image was intended as a Zaō Gongen, for the personal use of a Shugendo practitioner.

The earliest surviving image of Zaō Gongen, one engraved on a mirror excavated from a *kyō-zuka* 經塚 (“sutra mound”) on Kinpusen, is dated Chōhō 3 (1001). A great many such images are associated with Ōmine; examples excavated from sutra mounds alone number 186. Further, it is possible to gauge the broad diffusion of the Ōmine

cult, from the mid-Heian into the early Kamakura period, by studying Zaō Gongen images found elsewhere in Japan. Examples include two statues at Kōryū-ji 広隆寺 (Uzumasa 太秦) in Kyoto; seven statues at Sanbutsu-ji in Tottori-ken; one statue at Shōzen-in, a sub-temple of Sanbutsu-ji; two *mishōtai* 御正体 images at Hōō-ji 法王寺 in Shimane-ken; two statues at Hoshi-no-miya 星宮 Jinja in Gifu-ken; one bronze statue at Mitake 御嶽 Jinja in Miyagi-ken; and one *kakebotoke* 懸仏 image at Kinpu 金峰 Jinja in Yamagata-ken.²

Moreover, according to *Shōji ryakki* 諸寺略記,³ a gold Zaō Gongen was once enshrined in a stone hall of the temple at Togakushi. In other words, Zaō Gongen images from this period are widely distributed in Japan.

Many surviving Zaō Gongen images can be attributed to the Heian period. Only in late Kamakura times did the *honzon* (the main focus of devotion) of the Ōmine cult cease to be Zaō Gongen and become En no Gyōja himself. By then the cult had spread far along the coast of the Inland Sea. Images of En no Gyōja, dating from this time, can be found at the summit of Sanjō-ga-take 山上ヶ嶽 in the Ōmine range, in the Sakuramoto-bō 桜本坊 at Yoshino, and at Sekiba-ji 石馬寺 in Shiga-ken. A painting on wood (*ita-e* 板絵) at Chūzen-ji 中禅寺 (Nikkō) is dated Gentoku 3 (1321). Muromachi-period images of En no Gyōja can be found here and elsewhere.

Perhaps some people engaged in the Ōmine cult were also devotees of Miroku. Not only did Miroku appear as a precursor to Zaō Gongen, but Ōmine was sometimes regarded as the *nai-in* 内院 (“inner sanctum”) of Miroku’s paradise and Kasagi-yama 笠置山 as the *ge-in* 外院 (“outer sanctum”). An image of Miroku was incised on a rock face on Kasagi already in the Nara period, and this image then served as the model for another, similar one near Murō-ji. The cult which produced such images was probably upheld by the moun-

² Even though Yamagata is the center of the Haguro cult, Kinpu Jinja on Kinpusen, southwest of Tsuruoka, has an independent existence and looks after the region’s Kinpusen cult. It is not known when this Kinpu Jinja was first built. However, Minamoto no Yoshitsune, fleeing from Yoshino toward Hiraizumi, sent a personal representative to Haguro; and this suggests that there was communication between Ōmine and Haguro practitioners even in the Heian period. Kinpu Jinja probably dates from that time. The shrine’s *kakebotoke mishōtai* (unfortunately damaged) belong to the Kamakura Period. One bears an inscription dated Shōwa 2 (1933) which reads, “Placed before the sacred presence of Zaō Gongen. . . .” Apparently a Zaō Gongen, now lost, was enshrined there at the time.

³ Included as *kan* 200 of the *Asabashō* 阿婆縛抄; reproduced in the 9th volume of the supplementary illustrations volume of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, pp. 752–772. See p. 759b10–11.

tain practitioners of Nara. No doubt pictures of Miroku's welcome to the soul (*Miroku raigō zu* 弥勒来迎図) were linked with it as well. Since there exist relatively few post-Heian images of Miroku, it is significant that most of them are found at regional temples associated with Shugendo. One example is the *honzon* of Kontai-ji 金胎寺 in southern Kyoto-fu. However, the diffusion of this Miroku cult was not coextensive with that of the Ōmine cult itself.

Particularly famous as artifacts of the Ōmine cult are the *kyō-bako* 經篋 ("sutra boxes") and *kyō-zutsu* 經筒 ("sutra cylinders") excavated from the *kyō-zuka* where Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 buried them in Kankō 4 (1007). These objects are the oldest so far recovered from any *kyō-zuka*, and are clearly of the highest craftsmanship then available. *Kyō-zuka* became particularly common in the twelfth century and after, and can be found in almost every area of Japan. Those who made them, realizing that the "latter age" (*masse* 末世) had arrived, copied out sutras like the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Amida-kyō* 阿彌陀經, or the *Miroku-kyō* 弥勒經, and hoped to preserve them in the earth until that future day when Miroku should appear in the world. Most known *kyō-zuka* are in the mountains and appear to spring from sacred mountain cults.

Gilt-Bronze Images Found in Mountain-Cult Temples

Most gilt-bronze buddha-images found at temples associated with the cult of sacred mountains belong to the Nara period. Representative examples include:

- an early Nara-period, seated Shaka Nyorai at Sakuramoto-bō, Yoshino;
- a Jūichimen Kannon 十一面觀音, among many other images from a *kyō-zuka*, at Nachi 那智 Taisha;
- three images, including a Jūichimen Kannon and a Shō 聖 Kannon, at Daisen-ji 大山寺 in Tottori-ken;
- a standing figure of Kannon Bosatsu, at Gakuen-ji 鰐淵寺, Shimane-ken;
- a standing figure of Kannon Bosatsu, from a *kyō-zuka*, at Shidori 倭文 Jinja in Tottori-ken;
- a Shaka Nyorai in half-lotus posture, a Nyoirin Kannon, also in half-lotus posture, and a standing figure of Kannon Bosatsu,

at Kanshin-ji 観心寺, Osaka; and

- a standing figure of Kannon Bosatsu, at Kongō-ji 金剛寺, Osaka.

All these objects are either from *kyō-zuka* made by lay or semi-lay mountain practitioners associated with mountain-cult temples, or else belong directly to such temples, which were inhabited by monks who themselves were active as mountain practitioners. Practitioners may have carried with them, for their personal devotions, not only early Nara-period, gilt-bronze images, but also smaller ones of more recent date. Indeed, an astonishing number of gilt-bronze buddha-images were made at mountain-cult temples and shrines.

Examples are to be found throughout Japan. For instance, there are still many gilt-bronze images of Zaō Gongen at the summit of Sanjō-ga-take; and archaizing, post-Kamakura gilt-bronze images are also found in connection with the Haguro cult.⁴ For the Haku-san cult, there exists a late-Heian Jūichimen Kannon; while life-size images of Jizō 地藏, Jūichimen Kannon, Amida, and Shō Kannon, which were once at the top of the mountain, are now enshrined in Rinsai-ji 林西寺, in Shiramine-mura 白峯村. Gilt-bronze images of Kokūzō Bosatsu also occur in connection with the Kōga 高賀 cult. Images like these suggest that the revival of interest in gilt-bronze images, which began in the Kamakura period, may have been due to demand from mountain practitioners. Such images continued to be made into Edo times.

Mountain practitioners tended for various reasons to prefer gilt-bronze images. Small ones, being sturdy and durable, were highly suitable as personal *honzon*, which is no doubt why Nara-period examples still survive at regional mountain-cult temples. Again, many large gilt-bronze *honji-butsumi* 本地仏 images were enshrined on mountaintops in the Kamakura period, no doubt because metal was known to be far more durable than wood. It is surely no coincidence that the revival of gilt-bronze image making occurred precisely during the Kamakura period, when the mountain cults reached the peak of their development.

Mirrors, kakebotoke 懸仏, and *waniguchi* 鰐口 (*Gongs*)

Many bronze mirrors survive at mountain-cult temples. Particularly

⁴ For example, the standing Shaka Nyorai image at Dainichi-bō.

numerous are those on the face of which a buddha-image has been engraved with fine lines. Such mirrors were intended as *shintai* 神体 (“embodiment of the divine”), and the images engraved upon them demonstrate the syncretic relationship between the buddha depicted and the kami. Far more numerous still, however, are the *kakebotoke* which developed from them. These are truly important relics of mountain-cult art. The fact that the oldest dated image of Zaō Gongen is engraved on a mirror shows that such mirrors were indeed the product of mountain religion. The same conclusion can be drawn from the large number of incised mirrors excavated from *kyō-zuka*. A comprehensive study of these mirrors would contribute much to the study of mountain religion and its art. Here, I will only propose a few Heian-period examples.

1. The oldest example is a two-armed Nyoirin Kannon, incised on a mirror placed inside the statue of Shaka which Chōnen 齋然 brought back from China in Eien 1 (987). Although the drawing is in a style not otherwise known in Japan, there is still some doubt whether the image on the mirror was made in China itself.
2. An octagonal mirror excavated in Akita-ken and dated Eien 3.8.3 (989), showing Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 and eight bodhisattvas against an eight-petaled lotus ground.
3. A flower-shaped mirror at Sanbutsu-ji, dated Chōtoku 3.9 (997), showing an image of Dainichi Nyorai against an eight-petaled lotus.
4. An image of Zaō Gongen incised on a hexagonal mirror at Sōji-ji 総持寺, and dated Chōhō 3.4.10 (1001). Similar images of Zaō Gongen from this period can be found on mirrors at Ryūsen-ji 龍泉寺 (Dorogawa 洞川) and Sakuramoto-bō.
5. An octagonal mirror now owned by Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku and dated Kankō 4.5.29 (1007), showing five buddha figures.
6. A flower-shaped mirror excavated at Uguisuno 鶯野 in Akita-ken and dated Chōgen 4.7.13 (1031), showing four buddha figures.

Many similar Heian-period examples exist. Judging from the dates of the earliest ones, it is in the late tenth century that such mirrors first became popular. Although written references to *honji-butsu* images being installed in shrines begin a little earlier, the late tenth century was apparently when such cults gained wide recognition. It

is interesting that images of Zaō Gongen appear already among such late tenth-century incised mirrors.

Waniguchi gongs, too, seem to be a special feature of mountain temples. The oldest, firmly datable *waniguchi*, in a private collection in Osaka, bears an inscription which associates it with Kinpusen and dates it to Shōryaku 2.3 (991). Another early example, excavated in Nagano-ken, is dated Chōhō 3 (1001). Gongs like these hung before the entrance to a hall, to be rung by worshipers. Absent from major, full-scale temples, they were used instead at mountain temples which were the object of popular faith. Most surviving examples are therefore from provincial temples. A good many appear to date from Heian times.

Waniguchi appear to have been associated with mountain religion from the start. In fact, the first appearance of incised mirrors, the first appearance of *waniguchi*, and the first appearance of Zaō Gongen seem to have roughly coincided. Thus, the late tenth century seems to be the time when the Buddhist phase of Japanese mountain religion first became well-established.

Image Statues in Mountain Religion

A fair number of Buddhist statues associated with mountain cults survive from the Heian period in various parts of Japan. Since they exhibit a variety of unusual styles, they are generally referred to simply as "provincial works." While some closely resemble works from the Capital area, most are in highly individual. Works like these are generally ignored by art historians. Their origins are obviously connected with the mountain cults, which played so important a role in spreading Buddhism to the provinces.

It is often said that Shōbō had a great many buddha-images either made or repaired, and the main image-maker cited in this connection is one Eri Sōzu 会理僧都. Eri is the only Heian-period Buddhist sculptor about whom anything is known. Extant images by him include a Senju Kannon at Tō-ji 東寺, a Miroku Nyorai at Jison-in 慈尊院, and a Yakushi triad in the Yakushi-dō 薬師堂 at Kami Daigo 上醍醐. He seems to have been active as a monk in Kyoto, and to have enjoyed late in life a senior position at Tō-ji. Hence, buddha-images connected with him and Shōbō belong to the Capital area and are not considered provincial.

Heian-period *mikkyō* 密教 adepts (*ajari* 阿闍梨) were obliged, as

specified in the *Dainichi-kyō* 大日經, to master the arts of painting and sculpture so as to be able to make esoteric mandalas. Thus, some fully-ordained *mikkyō* monks surely studied these arts as well. Eri is no doubt an example. Furthermore, it is easy to imagine that men who had inherited the technical tradition of the Nara-period Buddhist sculptors, and who had lost their livelihood in the Capital area, then joined the mountain ascetics, among whom they continued to make buddha-images as necessary. Such sculptors would have had only a distant connection with the latest style in demand in the Capital. Instead, they would often have worked completely independently. Such men may have established ties with various Shugendo lineages and traveled widely, making images as they went. Certainly, some provincial, Heian-period buddha-images have facial features which strongly recall one another. At any rate, many provincial images, from both before and after the time of the sculptures of *Kōshō* 康尚 (mid-Heian) and *Jōchō* 定朝 (d. 1057), are inscribed with the maker's name. Although these sculptors are wholly unknown in written records, they and their works deserve reconsideration and reevaluation by art historians.

One interesting problem involving mountain-cult images is that of *nata-bori* 鉈彫 ("hatchet-carved") statues, which give the impression of having been left unfinished. No theory yet proposed accounts for them satisfactorily. It is tempting to think that their origin may be in the *honzon* of *Kongōrin-ji* 金剛輪寺 in Shiga-ken. While this statue's face is finished (unlike classic *nata-bori* examples), the body is only roughly carved (*ara-bori* 荒彫). Support for this idea can be found in the *honzon* of *Saimyō-ji* 西明寺, also in Shiga-ken. This secret image is never shown, but according to the resident priest it resembles the *Kongōrin-ji* statue. Moreover, the *honzon* of the *Konpon Chūdō* 根本中堂 on Mt. Hiei (formerly the *honzon* of *Ōzō-ji* 横蔵寺 in Gifu-ken) is said to be an *ara-bori* image. Evidence like this suggests that *ara-bori honzon* images are peculiar to Tendai temples. Perhaps they were inspired by a momentary vision of the deity. At any rate, the hatchet strokes which form the "unfinished" body of *nata-bori* images are both careful and regular. Thus, *nata-bori* images are apparently not really unfinished. In that respect, then, they are to be distinguished from the genuinely rough *ara-bori* images. Unusual sculptures of this kind are special to Shiga-ken and the region further east. Presumably they are linked with the activity of Tendai-affiliated Shugendo practitioners. *Enkū* 円空 (1632–1695) inherited

their tradition. With sharp insight he discerned within a bit of wood the form of a Buddhist or Shinto deity, and disclosed that form. Thus, his sculptures have a freedom unconstrained by any insistence on carving in the full round.

In contrast to Enkū, Mokujiiki Myōman 木食明満 (1718-1810) was a Shugendo practitioner in the Shingon line, whose warm, artless buddhas are carved in the full round. These buddhas are based on Shingon *honzon*, and are completely three-dimensional. Yet these, too seem to inherit the Tendai *ara-bori* style, interpreted in a Shingon manner.

There are also many buddha-images which seem to have been made by complete amateurs. Some have extremely abbreviated bodies. The *honzon* of the Tate-yama 立山 cult, for example, very simply preserves the rounded form of the original block of wood. Such images as these should no doubt be included among Shugendo art. The making of *sekibutsu* 石仏 ("stone buddhas") too had an intimate connection with mountain religion, although I can do no more than mention it here.

After so brief a treatment of a large subject, I can only say that there is a need for further study of Shugendo art, not only in relation to the art of the Capital region, but in the light of each province's special characteristics; and in terms, also, of the culture elaborated by the mountain practitioners themselves. This is so far a completely unexplored field.

REFERENCE

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