

Mount Fuji and Shugendo¹

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Japanese Sacred Mountains and Fuji

Japan is a mountainous country and yet the prominence of sacred mountains within Japanese religion cannot be explained merely by the “natural” presence or abundance of mountains. Religion and mountains have enjoyed an extremely rich and varied interaction in Japanese history. Mount Fuji and Shugendo present a good opportunity for reviewing the role of sacred mountains in the Japanese tradition, for Shugendo is the primary organizing force for sacred mountains, and Fuji is one of the most important holy peaks. The history of Fuji the mountain and Shugendo as a religious organization presents many points of similarity and contrast, contact and separation. Both are focused on the symbolism of sacred mountains, and yet each has a complex history and character not limited to the religiosity of mountains. Fuji itself has its own tradition preceding the formation of Shugendo, but came into contact with and was organized by Shugendo, only to escape beyond its bounds. At present, too, their popular images present both like and unlike aspects. In each case the earlier image of sacred mountains has faded considerably, leaving only shadows of their former glory. However, their ultimate fate has been quite different: most of the Shugendo mountain headquarters have disappeared or become highly attenuated; on the other hand, the “secularization” of Fuji has made it one of the

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central images of the nation and a favorite tourist attraction. The interaction between Fuji and Shugendo is too lengthy and complex for comprehensive treatment in an essay, but even a brief look at their interrelationship may throw new light on each.²

Mount Fuji is located southwest of Tokyo on the border of Yamanashi and Shizuoka Prefectures. Fuji is actually a volcano, in fact a buildup of three volcanoes, the most recent of which appeared some 10,000 years ago and gave Fuji its distinctive conical shape. Fuji last erupted in 1707 (creating Mt. Hōei on its southeastern side), but was quite active in early historic times, erupting nine times between 781 and 1083 (ENDŌ 1978, p. 29). Both its shape and volcanic activity made a great impression upon the early Japanese. The eighth century *Manyōshū*, the first collection of Japanese poetry, mentions the "burning fires" of Fuji and calls it a "god mysterious" (*Manyōshū* 1940, p. 215). However, at the time the *Manyōshū* was being written, Fuji was but one of many sacred mountains, and only later rose to prominence as a central national symbol. Fuji was a sacred mountain, in fact it was viewed as a *kami*, but it took some time before it developed to the point of its later preeminence. Indeed, in the eighth century *Hitachi fudoki*, Fuji is compared unfavorably with Mount Tsukuba: Fuji is snow-covered and discourages climbing, whereas Tsukuba is free from snow and invites climbers to its summit (INOBE 1929, p. 168; ENDŌ 1978, p. 26). Fuji was the site of shrines in early historic times, especially the "Asama (Sengen) Shrine" and "Fuchi Shrine" mentioned in the tenth century *Engishiki* (BOCK 1972, p. 107).³

The attitude of the court, and of the people living at the foot of Fuji, can be seen in the events of the ninth century in the districts of Suruga (present-day Shizuoka Prefecture) and Kai (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture). Pacification rites and thanks were offered, along with the reading of Buddhist sutras, to avoid catastrophes, and Asama Kami was given the higher title of *myōjin* 明神 ("illustrious kami"). But after a disastrous eruption in 864, the governor of Kai said that the eruption was caused by the laxity of ritualists and

² I am now writing a book on the religious beliefs and practices related to Mount Fuji, which will treat these subjects at greater length.

³ See BOCK 1972, pp. 107-111 for a good overview of *kami* and shrines in the *Engishiki*; as she indicates, the fact that such shrines were listed in the *Engishiki* and existed from the eighth or ninth centuries does not tell us the nature of the shrine or *kami* worshiped there, and does not guarantee continuity with shrines of the same name in later times.

priests for Asama Myōjin in Suruga; therefore they established a *myōjin* in Kai with ritualists and priests (ENDŌ 1987, pp. 5–6).

These early developments are quite important for understanding the nature of Fuji as a sacred mountain, but require some interpretation. Asama is the name of several mountains, the most important of which is a volcano on the border of present-day Nagano and Gunma Prefectures. “Asama” (and perhaps “Fuji,” too) probably are early words meaning volcanoes (or hot springs related to volcanic activity) (ENDŌ 1987, pp. 19–20; INOBE 1929, pp. 123–124). The word “Asama” 浅間 in Sino-Japanese characters can also be read “Sengen,” and the shrines traditionally linked to Fuji came to be called Sengen shrines. Eventually there came into existence more than a thousand Sengen shrines, but the most famous and important ones are those around the foot of Fuji. The location and activities of these ninth century shrines provide insight into the earliest known religion associated with Fuji. The rites of pacification and thanks, as well as the reading of Buddhist scriptures, seem to have been intended to “quiet the fire” (*chinka* 鎌火) or “make peaceful” (*shizumeru*) the “rough kami” (*araburu kami* 荒ぶる神). This is especially associated with the eruption of Fuji as a kind of fire deity. However, the location of the most important Sengen shrine, at Ōmiya, shows another side of early Fuji faith. The shrine was built at the point where the lava stopped, also the source of a gushing spring of pure cold water from Mount Fuji (ENDŌ 1987, pp. 9–10). Mountains and mountain water in Japan are seen as a source of fertility (especially in relation to the cultivation of rice), and Fuji is no exception. This water coming directly from Mount Fuji is considered to be especially sacred, and in later ages was used for purification prior to climbing Mount Fuji. However, it is important to point out that in the earliest times Fuji was worshiped from afar, rather than actually climbed (ENDŌ 1987, p. 5).

The exact nature of the earliest faith in Fuji is not known. Japanese scholars have consistently emphasized the attitude of fear in these pacification rites, and this is understandable. However, fear of the destructive aspect of the volcano may be closely related to the respect and veneration for the power of the mountain. In fact, the power of Fuji⁴ in early times is seen in both fire and water, volcano and spring. The fire kami was not feared and seen simply as

⁴ The “power of Fuji” will be treated more extensively in the book on Fuji I am writing.

malevolent, for it had the power to subdue rough spirits.

The imagery of Fuji is much more complex because it was viewed aesthetically as well as religiously. As early as the *Manyōshū*, Fuji was “seen” as an ideal mountain, even though many poems and paintings of the mountain were completed according to ideal conceptions, the poets and painters never viewing the actual mountain. It is quite interesting that the fire of Fuji, which must be pacified with ritual, became radically transformed in poetry: in court poetry the fire and smoke of Fuji are compared to burning passion or undying love; for the poet-priest Saigyō 西行 with his Buddhist inclinations, the smoke and fire remind him of the transience of life and “passions” (probably in the Buddhist sense of desire).⁵

The perception of Fuji, both religiously and aesthetically, shifts radically from age to age, depending on the social class of people viewing it, and according to the kind of religious or artistic activity.

Religious Ascent of Fuji

The ascent of Fuji, as in the case of other Japanese mountains, is closely related to the introduction of Chinese culture and Buddhism. The earlier Japanese notion of a sacred mountain which is a kami itself or the abode of kami became overlaid with Taoist notions of the mystical mountain and Buddhist notions of the ascetic mountain. Prince Shōtoku (576–622), deeply revered as both a statesman and patron of Buddhism, is remembered later in literature and painting (*Shōtoku Taishi eden* 聖徳太子絵伝) as having made a magical flight over Fuji on a black horse (TAKEUCHI 1984, pp. 40–41). The next “aerial” ascent of Fuji was by En no Ozunu (or En no Gyōja), the legendary founder of Shugendō. After he had opened other mountains through Buddhist ascetic practices (such as the recitation of magical formula—*darani*—in a mountain cave) he was slandered by a jealous kami and exiled to Izu. However, the *Nihon ryōiki* relates that “at night he went to Fuji-no-take in Suruga to practice austerities” (NAKAMURA 1973, p. 141). En no Ozunu appears briefly in the *Shoku nihongi* record of 699 (SNELLEN 1934, pp. 178–179), but the ninth century *Nihon ryōiki* account seems to depict him in a nightly flight to Fuji. It is notable both that he “flies” to Fuji much like a

⁵ The “beauty of Fuji” as seen in poetry and painting will be treated at greater length in my book on Fuji. For some examples of early poems about Fuji see *Manyōshū* 1940, pp. 215, 187–88; MCCULLOUGH 1985, pp. 122, 151, 231; LAFLEUR 1978, p. 88.

Taoist wizard (Chinese *hsien*, Japanese *sen* or *sennin* 仙人), and that the purpose of his flight is to practice (Buddhist) austerities. Already in Nara times (710–784) some Buddhists were practicing asceticism in the mountains, and after the precedent of the “mountain Buddhism” of Saichō 最澄 (Dengyō Daishi 767–822) and Kūkai 空海 (Kōbō Daishi 774–835) such practices proliferated. Both Saichō and Kūkai established mountain centers of Buddhism; Kūkai said that “According to the meditation sutras, meditation should be practiced preferably on a flat area deep in the mountains” (HAKEDA 1972, p. 47), establishing a formal precedent for mountain asceticism.

During the Heian period (794–1185) there were growing numbers of wandering practitioners who entered sacred mountains in order to perform Buddhist asceticism and rituals for the purpose of gaining extraordinary religious power. Rather than mere intellectual understanding, they emphasized the recitation of sutras and magical formulas (*darani*); they maintained special diets and subjected their bodies to trials such as standing under mountain waterfalls during their recitation. En no Gyōja was revered as a model by these ascetics, who came to found and organize Shugendo centers at various sacred mountains.⁶

The ninth century *Fujisan ki* 富士山記 (Record of Mount Fuji), although not a completely accurate picture of the mountain, does seem to indicate that people were practicing there long before this record was written. The first “historical” person known to have climbed the mountain is Matsudai Shōnin 末代上人, who established a “temple” (probably a small chapel) for Dainichi on the summit of Fuji in 1149. Matsudai apparently was the most illustrious of the religious practitioners who climbed Fuji in Heian times. At any rate, he is remembered as a Buddhist ascetic who also climbed Hakusan and later opened Fuji as an “ascetic mountain”⁷—he is also known as Fuji Shōnin, “the saint of Fuji.” Matsudai supposedly climbed Fuji several hundred times, which seems a generous number even for a devoted ascetic, but it is likely that in contrast to Prince Shōtoku’s and En no Gyōja’s magical flights, Matsudai actually climbed the mountain with his feet on the ground. There is no trace of the Dainichi temple founded by Matsudai, making it difficult to reconstruct the nature of this temple or the practices carried out there.

⁶ For general information on Shugendo, such as En no Gyōja, see my earlier work on Shugendo in EARHART 1970.

⁷ The “asceticism of Fuji” will be another theme elaborated in the book on Fuji I am writing.

But solid evidence of Matsudai's and his followers' activities was found in the 1930 discovery of buried Buddhist scriptures at the summit of Fuji. Matsudai collected scriptures copied by a retired emperor and court people and took them to the mountain for burial: climbing the mountain was not yet a "popular" practice—rather, people participated in the power of the mountain by the proxy visit of Matsudai and his followers. Some of the scriptures date from the Jōkyū era (1219–1222) a mere seventy years after Matsudai's founding of the Dainichi temple on Fuji in 1149; writing on these materials refer to Matsudai as a "holy man" 聖人 indicating that even this early he was worshiped (ENDŌ 1987, pp. 25–32; IWASHINA 1983, p. 134; INOBE 1929, pp. 175–180).

Matsudai's master was a devotee of Amidism, and Matsudai carried Pure Land faith with him to Fuji. However, it is not clear whether the paradise at Fuji was that of Dainichi or Amida. In fact, the character of Dainichi at Fuji is itself quite complex. Formally Dainichi is Dainichi Nyorai, the Sun Buddha. But at Fuji, as at so many Shugendo mountains, Buddhist divinities and Shinto kami were re-defined and linked through the ascetic and revelatory experience of founders. According to the *Jizō bosatsu reigen ki* 地藏菩薩靈驗記, Matsudai was puzzled by the fact that Dainichi, a male form, was manifested at Fuji in the female form of Asama Daimyōjin. Therefore he sat on a rock under a tree and fasted for a hundred days, at which time he received a revelation to walk one hundred and eight steps and dig: he was rewarded with a quartz rock in the shape of Fuji. This enabled him to see that kami and Buddha live in a world transcending male and female, and set his mind at ease so that he could preach to the masses who were in need of salvation. According to the interpretation of ENDŌ, Matsudai discovered that Asama Ōkami equals Sengen Daibosatsu equals Dainichi Nyorai (1978, p. 34). (By this time Sengen was written with the character "sen" 仙 meaning wizard). Matsudai's revelatory experience of the unity of kami and Buddha in the mountain paradise of Fuji marks him as the pioneer of Fuji faith.

Matsudai opened the summit of Fuji to practice, but as the *Hitachi fudoki* reported, Fuji is snow-covered and inhospitable most of the year; usually it is climbed only during two summer months. Therefore, whatever the Dainichi temple was, it could not have been a year-round place of practice or habitation. Matsudai founded the permanent headquarters of Fuji Shugendo in a number of temples

at Murayama, on the lower slopes of Fuji. According to tradition Matsudai became a "Buddha" in the form of a mummy (*miira*).⁸ There is no record of his mummified remains, but he was revered as the founder of Murayama Shugendo.

The Practices of Murayama Shugendo

The most remarkable person of Murayama Shugendo after Matsudai is Raison 頼尊,⁹ who is credited with pioneering the form of asceticism known as Fuji *gyō* 行. As Endō remarks, Matsudai established the vertical structure of Murayama Shugendo, and Raison elaborated its horizontal structure. In the early fourteenth century Raison was responsible for organizing the pattern for climbing Fuji, practicing asceticism and devotions at various shrines and temples. This is the same kind of religious practice as the *nyūbu* 入峰 or "mountain entry" at other Shugendo centers. Of course every mountain jealously preserved its own tradition; at Murayama the "professional" Shugendo priests or *yamabushi* 山伏 (called there *hōin* 法印) observed a rigorous period of more than a week's confinement on the mountain, during which time no lay persons were allowed on the mountain. However, one of the distinctive features of this new pattern of Fuji asceticism was the inclusion of lay people of the common class; and these people under Raison's guidance actually climbed the mountain themselves and performed austerities. In Matsudai's time the elite class of the imperial family and court participated indirectly in Fuji faith through the proxy activities of *yamabushi*; but under Raison this changed to common people participating directly in activities on the mountain (ENDŌ 1978, p. 37).

The organization of Shugendo at Fuji, as at other mountains, involved establishing a total complex of buildings, ecclesiastical institutions (complete with internal hierarchical ranks and external institutional affiliation), doctrinal and ritual systems, and reciprocal ties between priests and lay persons. Shugendo groups vary considerably from mountain to mountain, but the ethos of this total complex called "Shugendo" is found in the "mountain entry"—the

⁸ Endō 1978, p. 35; Endō 1987, p. 32. For mummified Buddhas in northeastern Japan see HORI 1961.

⁹ Details about Raison, including the dates of his life, are not clear. It is known that he was active as a leader of Murayama Shugendo during the Bunpō era (1317–1319). See Endō 1978, pp. 37–39.

practice of rites, devotions, and austerities while confined on the sacred mountain. Generally the purpose of mountain entry is to leave the ordinary world, purify and transform oneself through contact with the sacred mountain and the performance of ascetic and devotional practices, and return to the ordinary world in a renewed state (EARHART 1965).

At Fuji the most important annual practice was the Fuji *mine shugyō* 峰修行, which traditionally is said to have been founded by En no Gyōja, the great Shugendo patriarch. It followed the old calendar (about one month later than the present solar calendar) from the seventh month twenty-second day to the eighth month second day. During this time the professional yamabushi or shugenja confined themselves on Fuji, and lay people were totally excluded. As at other Shugendo centers, "confinement" on the mountain was not static, but a highly active round of pilgrimage, austerities, and devotions. An earlier record of this ritual period notes that they left their headquarters at the foot of Fuji, received paper amulets, visited various sacred sites on the mountain, revered the kami and Buddhas there, recited portions of Buddhist scriptures, performed the *goma* fire ritual, drew sacred water, and after attaining the summit descended on the eastern side of the mountain. At night, of course, they stayed in the small "halls" on the mountain (ENDŌ 1978, p. 41).¹⁰

This practice of Fuji asceticism died out about 1930, but in 1967 Endō recorded the recollection of one of the yamabushi who had actually participated in it. In spite of the state of decline of Murayama Shugendo and the smaller number of participants, this record is quite interesting, especially because it throws light on the practices of Fuji pilgrimage groups (*kō* 講). The *goma* fire rite was performed before starting the mountain entry, as a prayer for safety during mountain entry. Nearby villagers viewed the fire rite and came into contact with the smoke of the fire in order to strengthen their health. Only the yamabushi climbed the mountain, honoring and visiting sacred sites along the way, and visiting shrines, temples, and caves where kami and Buddhas were enshrined. They also underwent the practice of being held by the legs and dangled over a cliff. When they "confined" themselves in the "ascetic hut" (*gyō koya* 行小屋), they had a thin rice gruel of thirty-six grains of rice in a tea bowl.

¹⁰ Endō is quoting the *Suruga shiryō*.

Reaching the summit, they circled the crater (known as *ohachi meguri* お鉢廻り), and worshiped at the sites of “golden water” (Kinmeisui) and “silver water” (Ginmeisui). They confined themselves in a hut for ten days, and listened to the teaching of their leader (*sendatsu* 先達), intensifying their asceticism, and going outside only for firewood and to relieve themselves. At the end of their austerities they cooked the celebratory “red rice” and descended the mountain on the eastern slope, where the villagers were eagerly awaiting them. After paying respects at various places they arrived at a local Dainichi hall and performed a *goma* fire rite as a village festival. They made the rounds of various halls, and performed purification in the pond by a local Sengen shrine, as well as the ascetic rite of reciting a sutra while standing under a waterfall. They traveled around various villages, performing ascetic practices, holding the fire ritual, reciting prayers (*kaji kitō* 加持祈禱) and receiving food in return. When they finally did return to Murayama, before greeting their families or even “opening their mouths” they went directly to the Dainichi hall and held the “final” (*osame no*) *goma* fire rite. Twenty-six days after their departure from Murayama, this marked the closing of the Fuji *mine shugyō*, and the villagers joined in the festivities (ENDŌ 1978, pp. 41–44).¹¹

By late Edo times (1600–1867) there were only three temples (*bō* 坊) and thirteen priests with various functions at Murayama, which technically was under the jurisdiction of the Honzan¹² line of Shugendo supervised by the temple Shōgo-in in Kyoto. However, in addition to its very elaborate rite of “mountain entry” for its own professional yamabushi, Murayama established broader ties with people of the surrounding area. So-called Fuji ascetics (Fuji *gyōnin* 行人), who belonged to the Honzan line of Shugendo affiliated with Shōgo-in and devoted themselves to Fuji belief, developed in the Kansai region. These Shugendo adherents (who also can be called yamabushi or shugenja) were under the guidance of Murayama Shugendo: their leaders, or *sendatsu*, received their rank and qualifications from Murayama Shugen, and made annual trips to Murayama every summer, where they stayed overnight and practiced under the leadership of the Murayama professionals, climbing the mountain and returning home.

¹¹ This is a brief summary of the account by Endō.

¹² For distinctions between the two main lines of Shugendo, the Honzan-ha and Tōzan-ha, see EARHART 1970, pp. 23–24.

The time and expense for such a trip was considerable, and the regional leaders (*sendatsu*) developed a local seasonal ritual for their Fuji “ascetics” (*gyōnin*) called the Fuji purification (Fuji *gori* 垢離). These ascetics were located mainly to the south and west of Fuji. Every year from the fifth month twenty-fifth day to the sixth month second day they set up a Fuji purification hut by the riverside and performed ablutions there, washing away the impurities of the body. Participating in this local seasonal purification was seen as equivalent to the merit of climbing Fuji once. The ideal was still to climb Fuji, and Murayama controlled all aspects of Fuji, even from the right to erect a local Fuji purification hut to the right to lead people up Fuji; as we shall see, every entrance to Fuji charged a fee for passage. But for villagers, more and more the Fuji purification took on an independent significance, apart from the actual ascent of the mountain (ENDŌ 1978, pp. 48-49).¹³

The Fortunes of Murayama Shugen

The religious career of Murayama Shugendo has been traced from its beginnings to its demise in the present century, because it presents a fascinating picture of the ascetic otherworld of Fuji for both professional *yamabushi* and lay believers. However, the fortunes of Murayama Shugendo were closely tied to social and political developments, especially the rapidly changing situation of the “warring countries” period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was a difficult time for everyone—the feudal lords (*daimyō*) and warriors, religious establishments, and the common people. We have seen that Murayama Shugendo did develop some “horizontal” ties with groups of local leaders (*sendatsu*) and lay “ascetics” (*gyōnin*); however, during these turbulent times many common people were looking for new religious possibilities, some of them in relationship to Fuji, and Murayama Shugendo did not attract these new leaders and their followers. Murayama Shugendo postured itself more towards the feudal lord of Suruga, Imagawa Yoshitomo (1519-1560); Murayama *yamabushi*, who enjoyed freedom of travel during a period of great restrictions, served as spies for Imagawa. However, Imagawa’s defeat and death at the hands of Oda Nobunaga in 1560 was the beginning of Mura-

¹³ For a description of annual rites in the area of the Ise Peninsula related to this tradition see MIYATA 1975a.

yama's rapid decline. Increasingly political trends favored the large Sengen Shrine of Ōmiya, which was supported by warriors and later by the great shōgun Tokugawa Ieyasu; when it burned it was rebuilt by him on a grander scale. In a protracted legal suit from 1655 to 1679 which the Sengen Shrine won, Murayama Shugendo was deprived of its land and authority, its priests reduced to reciters of prayers and incantations (ENDŌ 1978, pp. 54–57).

The great importance of Murayama Shugendo for Fuji is that Murayama Shugendo actually constituted Fuji Shugen, and established the major pattern of practice for all the climbing routes of Fuji. As Endō puts it, Matsudai had in place the “vertical” structure of Fuji Shugendo when Raison emerged about 1317–1319, and Raison elaborated the “horizontal” structure. Even though Murayama Shugendo may have missed its opportunity to organize the common people who began to flock to Fuji, and even though Murayama Shugendo lost out politically to the Sengen Jinja at Ōmiya¹⁴ (which in 1679 gained control of Fuji from the eighth station to the summit), it is of lasting importance for having established the pattern of Shugendo which still colors the religious practices related to Fuji down to the present day.

The asceticism of Fuji emerged out of the background of the imperial prince Shōtoku whose ascent of Fuji illustrated his divine powers, and the grand patriarch of Shugendo, En no Ozunu (En no Gyōja), who displayed his powers as a mountain wizard and Buddhist ascetic by nightly flights to Fuji. The real founder of Fuji asceticism is Matsudai Shōnin, who was so assiduous in opening Fuji to the practice of religious austerities that he came to be known as the saint of Fuji. He established the precedent of linking the Buddhist divinity Dainichi to the mountain, erecting a Dainichi hall on the summit, and also founding a permanent headquarters at the foot of the mountain.

The ascetic career of Fuji first developed out of the interrelationship between individual practitioners such as Matsudai and the upper class people who had their sutra copies carried to the mountain and buried for them. Eventually this indirect, proxy form of Fuji faith gave way to lay people, especially common people, participating directly in the climbing of the mountain. Raison was instrumental in organizing the Fuji asceticism that drew these people to the moun-

¹⁴ The present-day Fujinomiya.

tain. As Shugendo became more highly organized, the mountain became much more formally institutionalized—in terms of buildings, social structure, and regularized ritual patterns. There was still a sharp division between professional yamabushi and lay persons, separating the two groups in time, location, and severity of practice; however they were interlocked in a reciprocal relationship of ritual leadership and financial support. Shugendo helped popularize Fuji asceticism, even fostering local Fuji purification rites for those who were not able to make the pilgrimage. Shugendo established and spread the fame of Fuji a mountain for ascetic practices. This trend toward popularization of Fuji belief, Fuji asceticism, and Fuji pilgrimage was yet to reach its apex.

While Murayama Shugendo was refining and solidifying its organization of Fuji as an ascetic mountain and a regional Shugendo center, a number of other developments at Fuji and elsewhere were of great importance for the future of the mountain. Around the mountain itself Murayama established the basic pattern of a religious ascent of Fuji utilizing a set of interrelated buildings, divinities, and rites; this pattern was imitated when four other climbing routes were opened. The earliest history of each of these climbing routes is unknown, but as Murayama Shugendo became more highly organized, they tended to develop along the lines of Murayama practices. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries there is solid historical record of these climbing routes.¹⁵

For various reasons Murayama Shugendo seems to have been unable and/or unwilling to control all of these climbing routes. Murayama Shugendo became linked—quite unfortunately—to the destiny of the feudal lord and the ruling class, rather than to the lower classes. Gradually Murayama Shugen, the organizing force responsible for the establishment of Fuji as a center of mountain asceticism, came to be overshadowed by the rapidly developing practice of Fuji pilgrimage by common people using the four other climbing routes. A number of interrelated factors, including the development of cities and “popular culture” during and after the Muromachi period may have made it impossible for Murayama Shugendo to completely contain the new popular movements of the time, such as the new

¹⁵ Endō (1978, p. 40) dates the first reliable historical documents for these climbing routes as follows: Subashiri, 1500; Suyama, 1486; Kawaguchi, Muromachi times (but no clear historical record); Yoshida, 1502. Other climbing routes were opened later.

pilgrimage associations that came to be formed.¹⁶

Both the image of Fuji and also the social and religious organization of the mountain were closely related to general cultural and political developments. During the time of the Nara and Heian courts, the religious and aesthetic conceptions of Fuji were dominated by the rites, poetry, and art carried out by or on behalf of the elite. From Heian times the influence of the "mountain Buddhism" of Shingon and Tendai, imported from China, helped transform Japanese sacred mountains into ascetic mountains. In Kamakura times, a combination of political, social, and religious changes, along with imported traditions, made for a dramatically new situation. Politically, power shifted from the imperial throne and nobility to the warrior class and the military dictator at Kamakura. Greater ease of travel and the shift of attention to the area around Kamakura meant that more people actually went to the "east" (toward Kamakura) and naturally came more frequently within eyesight of Fuji. The poets and painters of the Nara and Kyoto courts often depicted Fuji without ever seeing it, but warriors and other travelers increasingly came into direct contact with the mountain. Popular mandala (including Fuji mandala) illustrated the increasingly popular pilgrimage customs to sacred mountains and other holy sites.

Socially, the warrior class came to dominate religious and aesthetic matters more than the court and nobility. Religiously, warriors and the increasingly powerful townsmen and common people were drawn to the dramas of salvation of Pure Land and faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, and the miraculous tales of savior figures and sacred sites such as sacred mountains. Popular mandala such as Fuji mandala helped spread the custom of pilgrimage to sacred mountains and other holy sites. The imperial family, the nobility, and eventually lower class people had taken up the practice of making pilgrimages to holy sites such as sacred mountains;¹⁷ for those who could not travel

¹⁶ SUZUKI Shōei has pointed out that "mountain religion" and Shugendo developed from Heian times into the middle ages, but declined rapidly during the tumultuous times of the "warring countries" period. His judgment is that the downfall of the wealthy families and warriors who were the supporters of the temples around the mountain centers of "mountain religion" and Shugendo caused the collapse of their economic base. In a time when Shugendo organizations became more formally structured and wandering ascetics were fewer and their asceticism less severe, one of the characteristics of Fuji and sacred mountains in central Japan was the maintenance of severe ascetic practices while opening this practice to the common people (1978, p. 21).

¹⁷ For the development of pilgrimage customs see EARHART 1970 and DAVIS 1977.

themselves, “wandering religio-secular performers” carried illustrated scrolls which they used as visual aids to retell miraculous tales as well as stories of suffering and salvation (RUCH 1977, p. 294). It was a time of great social and religious ferment in the midst of political turmoil. Warfare among competing feudal lords was so fierce and unceasing that the span from the late 15th through the 16th century is called the “warring countries” period. During this time people sought a religious message and a religious leader who could convince them of a solution to the political and social turmoil, and promise them a personal way of salvation. It is symptomatic of the times that the central message and key leader related to Fuji came not from Murayama and its professional Shugendo priests, but from a wandering practitioner named Kakugyō.

Kakugyō: Rebirth from Fuji

Kakugyō 角行 (1541–1646), formally known as Kakugyō Tōbutsu Kū 藤仏物, is the one person directly responsible for unifying the beliefs and practices related to Fuji as the basis for widespread pilgrimage customs (INOBE 1928, p. 6). Little is known about this important figure. Kakugyō hailed from Nagasaki, and after taking up ascetic practices early in life and traveling around the eastern part of Honshu and visiting various ascetic sites, settled at Fuji for his life work of providing a religious solution to the social unrest and personal suffering of the time. However, this summary of Kakugyō’s life is too prosaic to capture the dramatic power of his career, which is remembered in much more vivid colors by the Fuji pilgrimage groups who recognize him as a founding figure of their practices.

Kakugyō inherited the general religious world view of the times, especially the Shugendo tradition of Murayama, but he did not trace his lineage through Raison and Matsudai. Rather, according to the *Gotaigyō no maki* 御大行の巻,¹⁸ an eighteenth century document recounting Kakugyō’s “great ascetic practice,” he went to northeast Honshu and practiced asceticism in a cave, receiving a revelation from En no Gyōja. In other words, he circumvented the two Murayama founding figures. En no Gyōja told Kakugyō to fulfill his vow

¹⁸ For the text (“Kakugyō Tōbutsu Kū ki”) see MURAKAMI and YASUMARU 1971, pp. 452–481. Royall Tyler has kindly provided me with his unpublished translation of this document. For Kakugyō see also TYLER 1981, TYLER 1984, INOBE 1928, pp. 6–29, IWASHINA 1983, pp. 42–75, COLLCUTT 1988.

of bringing peace to the country and relief to the people by going to Mount Fuji and practicing in the cave called Hitoana 人穴 ("man hole"). Kakugyō carried out remarkable practice in that cave, standing tiptoe on a wooden post, fasting, and going without sleep. One of the fruits of this asceticism was a direct revelation from Fuji Sengen Dainichi, disclosing that Fuji and this deity are in fact the source of the entire universe and all life; indeed, this deity and Fuji, as well as Kakugyō and his wooden post, all constitute the cosmic pillar of the universe. In complex statements, Kakugyō is told that the social disorder and personal suffering of the times are due to the lack of harmony between heaven and earth. However, through Kakugyō's ascetic practices, and through the reverent climbing of Fuji, this order can be restored. The clue to this cosmic order is contained in secret diagrams (*minuki* 身抜) entrusted to Kakugyō, featuring the shape of Mount Fuji graced by the sun, moon, and stars, and including the names of deities and cosmic forces. Kakugyō continued his asceticism through ablutions and purifications at the lakes surrounding Fuji, at which time he received special blessings (*fusegi* ふせぎ) for various problems and ailments.¹⁹

Kakugyō's career is too complicated to be exhausted by such a brief summary, but his significance is great in establishing patterns for pilgrimage customs, especially in Edo times. Kakugyō's origins and life present interesting contrasts with earlier Fuji figures. Matsudai the founder of Fuji faith and Raison the organizer of Murayama Shugendo were both "local boys" from Suruga at the foot of Fuji (ENDŌ 1987, pp. 2931). Matsudai did practice at other mountains, such as the famous Hakusan, but did not travel extensively. However, Kakugyō hailed from Nagasaki in Kyushu, and traveled throughout the eastern regions of Honshu, receiving his initial contact from En no Gyōja in a cave in northeastern Japan. Kakugyō was much more widely travelled than Matsudai and Raison, traversing most of Japan's main island of Honshu, performing ascetic practices at many places, especially ablutions and purifications.²⁰ But his distinctive achievement was entry into and practice within Hitoana, receiving a special message from Sengen Dainichi. This revelation was the unification of Fuji faith into a cosmological system that combined both ritual and ethical components assuring benefits for the individual and peace

¹⁹ There is also a strong Confucian tone to this document, especially expressed in a supposed meeting with the Shogun-to-be Ieyasu. See TYLER 1984, pp. 106–107.

²⁰ IWASHINA emphasizes the role of water austerities in Kakugyō's practice (1983, p. 57).

for the country. At the heart of this system was the emphasis on people of all classes climbing Fuji as an act of ritual pilgrimage and ethical self-cultivation. Most of Kakugyō's practice focused on his asceticism and devotions within Hitoana, but he was also very active in performing ablutions and purifications at the lakes around Fuji, and most of his ritual forms of blessings (*fusegi*) were received during these water practices.

Kakugyō's achievements are also distinct from those of his predecessors. Matsudai was the pioneer of Fuji faith opening the mountain for ascetic practice and establishing the tie between the Buddhist divinity Dainichi Nyorai and the kami of Fuji, Asama Ōkami (both of which are equivalent to Sengen Daibosatsu). Raison was the organizer of Fuji Shugendo, accepting the Fuji faith from Matsudai and elaborating it into the pattern of Fuji asceticism (Fuji *gyō*) as an annual period of retreat and practice on the mountain, both for Shugendo professionals (*yamabushi*) and for groups of local leaders (*sendatsu*) and lay persons subordinate to the Murayama headquarters. Kakugyō actually inherited the foundation of asceticism at Fuji that Matsudai and Raison laid down, and did not negate it directly, but rather went behind it to receive the legitimation for his reconception of Fuji from the grand patriarch, En no Gyōja. Kakugyō's wide travels and rigorous asceticism qualified him for receiving the initial revelation from En no Gyōja, and his subsequent extensive practices around and within Hitoana enabled him to receive a definitive revelation from Sengen Dainichi about the true cosmogonic and cosmological nature of Fuji.

The gist of Kakugyō's revelatory experience in the "man hole" cave is clear, although it becomes elaborated into an extremely complex set of beliefs and symbols. Fuji the mountain and Sengen Dainichi its divinity are in fact the source of the entire universe—including sun and moon, Pure Land, and the human body. The notion of a cosmic pillar is duplicated and reduplicated in a number of forms: the pillar on which Kakugyō performed asceticism was considered a cosmic pillar, but Fuji and Sengen Dainichi, as well as Kakugyō and the diagrams he received were also seen as symbols of the cosmic pillar. In short, Fuji is reconceived as a truly cosmic mountain—as the cosmos itself. Kakugyō, entering within the cosmic mountain where no human can survive, is reborn as a cosmic pillar. The abbreviated or condensed formula expressing Fuji as the cosmos is found in the secret texts revealed to Kakugyō within the Hitoana,

and during his ablu-tion-purification in the lakes surrounding Fuji. These several forms of the cosmic pillar, which are in fact one, represent the unity of heaven and earth, and when this principle of unity is observed and implemented, especially through Kakugyō's practices and in the climbing of Fuji, the nation itself is transformed.

This basic message is conveyed not in the abstract doctrine of a formal system, but rather in overlapping images and tales. Fuji the sacred mountain of ancient times is still present, although not in the same form as originally. The power of fire is subordinated to, or perhaps sublimated in, the form of Dainichi, the "great illumination" which in Shingon Buddhism is "the embodiment of the reality of the universe" (INAGAKI 1988, p. 33). Similarly, the power of water and fertility is taken up and expanded in this notion of Fuji as the cosmic mountain giving birth to all life; at the same time the water around Fuji is seen as purifying the body in the sense of Buddhist asceticism. Some "Shinto" elements have been absorbed or transformed, but other Shinto features come to the fore: by this time the *Kojiki* tales of the beautiful female kami Konohanasakuya hime and her father Ōyamatsumi no mikoto (the mountain kami) are related to Fuji, along with cosmological notions such as the parting of heaven and earth.²¹ Buddhist notions of the mountain as a place of asceticism enter in, along with the idea that the mountain is a Pure Land—which is linked both to Dainichi Nyorai and the thisworldly view of Miroku's paradise. However, the Shugendo notion of Fuji as a site of ascetic practices, important as it is, becomes overshadowed by the new conception of Fuji as a cosmic mountain linking all four social classes in personal fulfillment and social harmony. The cosmic aspects of this message echo not only a reformulated mythic tale but also Taoistic notions of the harmony of yin and yang and the five forces; the social aspects of Kakugyō's teaching bear the imprint of Confucian ethics.²²

Mount Fuji, Fuji Pilgrimage, and Shugendo

According to traditional accounts, Kakugyō and his two disciples were

²¹ In recent times Konohanasakuya hime is known as the formal object of worship (*saijin*) of Mount Fuji, but this connection is rather late. There is no direct relationship between Fuji and Konohanasakuya hime in the mythological records *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. This issue will be treated at greater length in the book on Fuji I am writing.

²² For a discussion on the Confucian side of Kakugyō see TYLER 1984.

successful in healing many people in Edo (later Tokyo) during a disastrous epidemic. The fame of Fuji and Kakugyō spread, and many common people—farmers and townspeople—came to form Fuji pilgrimage associations (Fuji *kō*). The major personal impetus for such groups came from the greatest of Kakugyō's later followers, Jikigyō Miroku 食行身祿 (1671–1733). Originally from the Ise area, Miroku went to Edo and worked as a seller of vegetable oil; he entered a Fuji pilgrimage group and combined a radical religious commitment with an equally dedicated ethical purity. Miroku was convinced of the coming of a new age brought about by a radical change of heart. After doing his best to spread this message, to help usher in this new age, Miroku announced his intention to starve himself to death on the summit of Fuji. He was turned away from the summit itself, but did commit ritual suicide just below the summit. This dramatic self-sacrifice stimulated the growth of Fuji pilgrimage groups, particularly in Edo and the surrounding Kanto plain (TYLER 1981, pp. 155–57; 1984, pp. 109–117; IWASHINA 1983, pp. 140–97, INOBE 1928, pp. 32–57).²³

There were hundreds of local Fuji pilgrimage groups in the Edo period, some of which survive today in attenuated form. They had leaders (sendatsu) who were the head of local groups meeting during the year in homes for devotions and rituals, and who led the members on an annual pilgrimage to Fuji (and also to other religious sites). These Fuji pilgrimage groups were one of the most active and widespread popular religious movements during the Edo period. Because of their popular character they varied considerably, but they shared a number of general features. Their altars consisted of a small replica of Mount Fuji surmounted by wall hangings of Kakugyō's cosmic diagrams and Fuji mandala, and in more recent times Konohanasakuya hime. They recited the prayers (*otsutae* 御伝え) handed down from Kakugyō and other great leaders, and occasionally held fire ceremonies called *takiage* 焚き上げ; this is similar to the *goma* ceremony of Shingon Buddhism and Shugendō, but incense is used in place of wood (*gomagi*). The ideal was for the group to make an annual pilgrimage to Fuji, but usually money was pooled so that

²³ Miroku formally is Maitreya, the so-called future Buddha, but in this case refers more to a thisworldly paradise than to a future ideal. Jikigyō Miroku wrote the "miroku" of his name with characters emphasizing reward through hard work. This subject of Miroku has been treated comprehensively by MIYATA (1975b); the connection of Mount Fuji and Miroku has been traced in COLLCUTT 1988.

each person would get a turn. During Edo times walking from the city of Edo to Fuji and back required both considerable time and money. The sendatsu guided his members to the foot of Fuji, where special lodging houses and guides (*oshi* 御師) took charge of the pilgrims, guiding them on the mountain. Pilgrimage associations and guides were interconnected through mutual bonds; during the off-season, these guides made the rounds of their "parishioners" and distributed talismans.²⁴

Fuji pilgrimage associations are too varied and rich in detail to be comprehended in a quick overview, but their very existence raises interesting questions in relationship to Shugendo. On the one hand, these pilgrimage groups, following Kakugyō's precedent, circumvented the formal Shugendo organization at Murayama; just as Kakugyō went back to En no Gyōja directly, so the pilgrimage associations honored Kakugyō and Miroku rather than Matsudai and Raison. Murayama Shugendo may have been too closely tied to the politics of the feudal lord and the new pilgrimage groups may have been too closely allied to the popular social and religious movements of the time for the two of them to have been united under the same banner. On the other hand, Shugendo is very much present in the practices and ethos of these groups. Even the traditional clothing of Fuji pilgrims was patterned after *yamabushi* dress, and the notion of ascending a sacred mountain as an act of religious devotion and austerities is a continuation of the Shugendo heritage. The fire ritual *takiage* itself is an adaptation of the Shugendo rite of *goma*, and many of the beliefs and teachings within the pilgrimage groups (such as the Taoist influence within Kakugyō's diagrams) are recast versions of Shugendo elements.²⁵

The indirect influence of Shugendo is often present even when there is no apparent connection. One of Shugendo's most important contributions to Japanese religion is its role in helping create and disseminate the beliefs and practices uniting Shinto kami and Buddhist divinities. Shugendo provided a foundation of beliefs and prac-

²⁴ The most comprehensive study of Fuji pilgrimage groups is IWASHINA 1983.

²⁵ As IWASHINA has pointed out, because Fuji pilgrimage groups were the heirs to the Shugendo tradition, they continued many Shugendo terms, practices, and other features such as dress. One very important distinction is that Shugendo practitioners (*yamabushi*) were usually "professional" religionists receiving money for their services; Fuji pilgrimage leaders and their followers were strictly lay people with their own occupations, honoring the ideal of not receiving money for religious services (1983, p. 7, 274).

tices centered around sacred mountains that was essential for the formation of Fuji pilgrimage associations. Even today, as these associations gather in front of their Fuji altars and recite the names of kami and Buddhas, it matters not whether Sengen Daibosatsu is kami or Buddha or both. The model of Fuji as an object of worship is the contemporary representation of the quartz or crystal miniature Fuji that was revealed to Matsudai during his mountain asceticism—symbolizing both the power of the ancient sacred mountain and the Shugendo image of the ascetic mountain.²⁶

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²⁶ Such pilgrimage associations as exist today are mere shadows of their Edo forbears, riding in air conditioned deluxe buses to the fifth station (half way up the mountain). Nevertheless, their beliefs and practices are extremely interesting. My book on Fuji will describe three groups with which I climbed Fuji during July and August 1988. The influence of Shugendo and Fuji pilgrimage groups is widespread today, even in "new religions"; see MIYAKE 1987 and EARHART 1989. The symbolism of Fuji—sacred and secular, aesthetic ideal and object of satire—much more complex and rich than can be indicated in this article, will be treated more extensively in my book on Fuji.

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