Temple Myths and the Popularization of Kannon Pilgrimage in Japan
A Case Study of Ōya-ji on the Bandō Route

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The Bandō pilgrimage is a major form of Kannon devotionalism in Japan. This paper explores the role of founding tales (engi) in promoting the Bandō pilgrimage by examining an example from one of its sites, Ōya-ji. Pilgrims were deeply stirred by what they saw at Ōya-ji, particularly the mysterious image of the senju Kannon that was the temple’s main devotional image. The stories collected in the Ōya-ji engi concerning the origin of this image and its worship stirred the religious imagination of pilgrims. The engi does so by identifying Ōya’s environs descriptively with the mythscape of Kannon’s abode on Mount Fudaraku. Second, it offers a dramatic vision of the bodhisattva’s powerful presence on site by using one type of founding myth of meeting—subjugating the kami through the issue of spiritual light. Third, it has tales about exemplary meetings of Kannon with pilgrims. These emphasize the spiritual benefits that can accrue through worship. Engi like Ōya-ji’s and others collected in pilgrimage texts called reijō-ki were vital for the popularization of the Bandō and other Kannon pilgrimages in Japan.

According to the kannon-gyō, originally the twenty-fifth chapter of the Lotus Sūtra that was widely circulated in Japan as a popular scripture in its own right, Kanzeon or Kannon (Avalokiteśvara) constantly surveys (kan 観) the world (ze 世) listening for the sounds (on 音) of suffering. Hearing sounds of distress, the “Sound Observer”—by virtue of “unblemished knowledge,” the “power of supernatural penetration” and “expedient devices”—is able to display his body “in the lands of all ten quarters.” Kannon does so “by resort to a variety of shapes,” changing into the most suitable of thirty-three different forms for preaching the Dharma to save all who are suffering (Hurvitz 1976, p. 318). In eighteenth-century Japan, the promise of salvation given in the Kannon-gyō was accepted as a spiritual fact. It was commonly believed that Kannon had manifested a saving presence at
temples scattered throughout the country.

Corresponding to Kannon’s thirty-three forms, pilgrimage routes to thirty-three temples were a major feature of Kannon devotionalism in Japan. The oldest of these, dating from the Heian period, is known as the Saikoku 西国, or “Western Provinces” pilgrimage, centered in the Kansai area. By the Tokugawa period, the popularity of the Saikoku route led to its replication. Over two hundred and thirty-six copies (utsushi 写) of the route spread throughout Japan, one-third of which were located in eastern Japan.¹ Of these, the Bandō thirty-three Kannon-temple route is one of the most important after the original Saikoku pilgrimage. Starting from Sugimoto-dera at Kamakura, the Bandō route extends for over a length of thirteen hundred kilometers throughout the eight former provinces of Sagami, Musashi, Kozuke, Shimotsuke, Hitachi, Kazusa, Shimousa, and Awa in the Kantō region and includes such famous temples as Hase-dera in Kamakura, Sensō-ji (Asakusa-dera) in Tokyo, and Chūzen-ji in Nikkō.

Faith in the Bandō route is clearly evident, for example, in the key work of Kannon devotionalism in the Kantō area, the Sanjūsansho Bando Kannon reijō-ki 三十三所坂東観音靈場記 (The records of the thirty-three numinous places of Bandō). In its opening tale, in a dream, the bodhisattva tells the legendary founder of lay Kannon pilgrimage in Japan, the retired emperor Kazan 花山 (968–1008), that as an “expedient means” he has divided himself into thirty-three bodies throughout the eight provinces of the Bandō (Kantō) area and that pilgrimage (junrei 巡礼) to these thirty-three sites is the “best austerity” for release from suffering (KANEZASHI 1973, p. 221). This origin legend, traditionally dated as occurring in 988 (according to the Sugimoto-dera engi 杉本寺縁起 [1560] and other texts), clearly shows the influence of the Saikoku route on the creation of the Bandō, for Kazan was traditionally revered as the rediscoverer of the Saikoku route in 988 after its legendary founding by the monk Tokudō Shōnin 徳道上人 in 718.

The historical evidence for the Bandō route’s origin, however, points to a much later date. The earliest reference to the route is from an inscription at the base of a Jūichimen Kannon statue carved by the Shugendo priest Joben 成弁 in 1234. According to it, the statue was carved while the ascetic was in seclusion for thirty-three days in the Kannon Hall of Yamizo-san temple in Hitachi (temple twenty-one on the route) while on the thirty-three-temple pilgrimage (HAYAMI 1980, p. 272). Prior to the sixteenth century, the number of pilgrims on the

Bando pilgrimage was limited, the exercise primarily attracting clergy and wandering holy men. However, evidence from votive placards (nosatsu 納札) and other sources indicates that especially after the Genroku period (1688-1703) increasing numbers of ordinary people participated in the pilgrimage.\(^2\) By this time the route had also become formally linked both to the Saikoku and to a third major Kannon route, the Chichibu thirty-four temple pilgrimage (in present-day Saitama Prefecture), making a mega pilgrimage route of one hundred Kannon temples.

In order to focus on the role of legends and miracle tales in establishing and promoting the Bandō pilgrimage sites I will here examine the legends of the Tendai temple Oya-ji 大谷寺, temple number nineteen on the pilgrimage and one of its most fascinating and geographically intriguing sites. Oya-ji is located approximately seven kilometers northwest of the city of Utsunomiya in present-day Tochigi Prefecture, ensconced under a cavernous overhang at the end of a “great valley” (Oya) in an area noted for its impressive towering cliffs.

Tsuruoka Shizuo (1969, p. 410) has argued that as a sacred center

\(^2\) This was part of the general trend of this period. See Maeda 1971, pp. 72ff.; Shimizutani 1971, pp. 373ff.
Oya-ji has its origin in the ancient Buddhist cave temples at Tun-huang in China, and, ultimately, to the Ajanta caves in India, but Oya-ji also has roots in Japanese mountain Buddhism. From as early as the seventh century mountain Buddhist ascetics (gyōja 行者, shugenja 修験者) worshiped Kannon as a spiritually powerful divinity believed to have beneficial powers to drive away evil and beckon good fortune (josai shōfuku no gorisho 除災招福の御利生). Of the seven Kannon types related to esoteric Buddhism that were worshiped by mountain ascetics over the centuries, one of the most popular was “the thousand-arm thousand-eye” (senju 千手) Kannon (Sahasra-bhuja-avalokiteśvara). Along the Saikoku route, there are over fifteen, and along the Bandō route eleven temples have the senju image as the main image. The Kannon hall of Oya-ji is one of these, enshrining a forty-two arm senju image. Dating from the early to mid-Heian period, it is carved as a high bas-relief (magaiibutsu 磨崖仏) out of the soft volcanic ash rock of the cliff face and is one of the oldest rock images in the Kantō area (see figure 2). Although now only tinged red due to damage in a fire in 1811, the “Oya Kannon” was originally painted vermillion, covered with clay for molding the fine features, and adorned with an outer layer of lacquer and gold leaf (HANAWA 1984, pp. 13-14). It was probably made by Buddhist image makers (busshi 仏師) affiliated with the wandering Tendai prelate Jikaku Daishi 慈覚大師 (or Ennin 円仁, 794-864) or the mountain ascetic Shōdō Shōnin 勝道上人 (737-817), the founder of Chūzen temple at Mount Nikkō (HANAWA 1984, p. 20). Both men were born in Shimotsuke province and were influential in the spread of esoteric Buddhism in the area.

While the temple’s own tale traditions describe it as being crowded with pilgrims during the Shōan era (1171 to 1175), archeological evidence, such as votive placards dating from 1710, 1744, and the erection of several new buildings from 1704 to 1711, strongly suggest that the Oya-ji, like other Bandō temples, did not attract large numbers of

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5 On the history of the seven Kannon images in Japan, see HAYAMI 1981, pp. 30-41.

4 See HANAWA 1984, pp. 13-14 and GORAI 1981, p. 21. TSURUOKA dates it anywhere from the middle to late Heian period (1975, pp. 246-56). This date is also supported by KAWAKATSU Masatarō 1978.

5 Shōdō is credited, for example, with carving the main senju image at Chūzen-ji. See Bando reijō-ki, pp. 289-97. According to temple traditions, Jikaku Daishi also carved several Bandō Kannon images, for example, the senju image at temple twelve, Jion-ji. See Bando reijō-ki, pp. 266-67.

6 The earliest hard evidence of lay pilgrimage dates from the Kamakura period. These are sutra stones (kyōsei 経石) and small votive images (kakebotoke 懸仏) that were excavated from the temple precincts. One stone, dedicated to the parents of a pilgrim with an inscription dated 1363, is the first indicator of the existence of the Kannon Hall on the site.
The Forty-two Arm “Senju” Image at Ōya-ji

pilgrims until the eighteenth century (Hanawa 1984, pp. 22, 26). The few remaining accounts by pilgrims of this period suggest that they came to worship the golden Kannon glowing within the dark cave, an

7 Ōya-ji underwent two major phases of reconstruction in the Tokugawa period. In 1615–1624, under the supervision of Denkai Sōjō with the patronage of the local suzerains of Utsunomiya castle: the Okudaira clan, especially Kamehime, Tokugawa Ieyasu’s eldest daughter, who became the wife of Okudaira Nobumasa. The second phase in 1704–1711 was with the support of several patrons: Matsudaira Terusada, Okudaira Masahide, and Miegusa Morisuge. The new buildings erected during this phase included a Benten hall, a main hall with a Shō Kannon image, a Hall for the Ten Heavenly Kings (jiō-do 十王堂), and a guest house.
image that evoked a sense of awe and wonder—an undeniable feeling of Kannon’s spiritually powerful presence. For example, the anonymous author of the Shimotsuke fudoki (composed in 1688) came away from his visit to Ōya-ji “deeply moved” by what he had seen. “It is not a Buddha,” he believed, “that had been carved by an ordinary person” (Hanawa 1984, p. 12). Writing almost a century and a half later in his travel guide, the Confucian scholar Narushima Motonao saw it after the resident priest intoned the Kannon-gyō once and then opened the curtain for worship. Narushima found it “truly extraordinary” (makoto ni kizetsu nari 誠に奇絶なり). Along with the other Buddhist images carved from the cliffs covered with flowering vines, the Ōya Kannon presented an “extremely marvelous sight” (hanahada kikan 甚奇観) before him (Hanawa 1984, p. 30).8 As these two testimonies attest, pilgrims were deeply stirred by what they saw at Ōya-ji, particularly the mysterious image that, as attested in Kazan’s dream oracle, was believed to be a fragment of Kannon’s living body.

What fostered this sense that the image was extraordinary? How did eighteenth-century pilgrims learn about the existence of numinous images (reizō 霊像) like the Ōya Kannon and what motivated large numbers of them to visit temples like Ōya-ji where they were enshrined? Or, to put it another way, what changed Ōya-ji from a sequestered eremitical site into a well-known destination on the Bandō route? What made Kannon pilgrimage popular in premodern Japan?

The Ōya-ji Engi as Temple “PR”

Among the many social, political, institutional, and even technological changes that spurred the growth of Kannon pilgrimage after the Genroku period, certainly one key factor was the development of new propagandistic tracts known as reijō-ki 靈場記, or “the records of numinous places.” Reijō-ki were basically collections of engi 縁起 tales. The word engi is the Chinese equivalent of the Buddhist term “pratitya samutpada,” or the notion that all things are causally interdependent and produced. But in Japan engi became a label for a major genre of shrine and temple tales. Engi tales, often circulated as picture scrolls (engi emaki 縁起絵巻), were used in temple proselytization from as early as the Heian period. It was in the eighteenth century, however, that reijō-ki (also labeled as yurai-ki 順礼記, junrei en-ki 順礼縁起, engi reigen 隆起縁起通伝) were created to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of lay pilgrims along the routes. Printed often as highly

8 His diary is the Nikkō ekitei kenbon zakki 日光驪程見聞雑記, published in 1843.
abridged versions (ryaku engi 略縁起) of the earlier engi narratives, they were widely circulated both individually and in pilgrimage sets. Especially after the Kyōhō era (1716–1736), in addition to the many road guides (dōchū-ki 道中記, junrei annai-ki 順礼案内記), pictorial guides of famous places (meisho-zue 名所図絵), and votive cards of the main images (miei 御影), numerous engi collections were produced.⁹ Sold or lent by the temple pilgrimage centers or “placard places” (fudasho 札所), bookstores, lodging houses (hatago 旅籠, funaya 磨宿), and confraternities (kō 講), reijō-ki were a handy reference for any literate traveler who wanted to know more about the origin and sacred history of the Kannon temples. They were mainly used by the pilgrimage guides (sendatsu 先達), who told the tales to those in their charge as they traveled from site to site (SHIMIZUTANI 1971, p. 365). As easy-to-read tales about Kannon’s saving presence at the local temples, the reijō-ki functioned much like Christian stories about the holy acts of the saints or the miracles associated with images of the Virgin Mary; as sacred stories, they had the power to edify the faithful and strengthen them in their belief (LÜTHI 1970, p. 37). But perhaps the better comparison is with the many Christian narratives of pilgrimages to Jerusalem that proliferated with Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land throughout the middle ages. As Glenn Bowman has argued, Holy Land pilgrimage narratives show to what extent all travel is itself an imaginative act. Early Christian pilgrims like Epiphanius, the Bordeaux Pilgrim, and Egeria were “powerful elites” whose travel accounts described what they expected and wanted to see, which were scenes and images from the Gospels that they imaginatively “grounded and sited” wherever they traveled. Their pilgrimage narratives establish Palestine as a Holy Land by creating a “mythscape”—a landscape that is imbued with Christian sacrality that they themselves experienced and that others following them could also experience. Their images of Jerusalem and other holy places constitute “a lexicon” that “was adopted by the popular imagination” (BOWMAN 1992, pp. 50–53).¹⁰

As we shall see, the eighteenth century reijō-ki functioned in much the same way, creating a mythscape of Kannon sacred places along the Saikoku, Bandō, and Chichibu pilgrimage routes that exerted a powerful influence on pilgrims’ religious imagination.

The Ōya-ji engi is collected in the major reijō-ki collection of the

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⁹ For a comprehensive list of the travel guides, junrei uta, and engi collections produced during this time, especially for the Saikoku route, see SHIMIZUTANI 1971, pp. 367–72, and HYOGO-KEN KYOKU IINKAI 1991, p. 6.

¹⁰ See also LEED 1991, pp.144–46, and SMITH 1987, especially chapter four, “To Replace.”
Bando route, the aforementioned Sanjūsansho Bandō Kannon reijō-ki (hereafter cited as Bandō reijō-ki), compiled in ten volumes by the Shingon priest Ryosei 亮盛 and printed in 1771 (see Kanezashi 1973, pp. 216–331). The text of the Ōya-ji engi itself is somewhat brief, consisting of seven major sections:

1. A description of the environs of Ōya and the senju Kannon
2. The engi tale of the confrontation between wandering Buddhist ascetics and the Ōya snake kami, climaxing in the miraculous carving of the Kannon image and the founding of the temple
3. Comparisons with similar stories in China and Japan
4. The temple’s pilgrimage poem-prayer ( junrei uta 巡礼歌 )
5. A miracle story concerning a poor parishioner, Gen Saburō
6. A discussion of the place-name
7. An additional commentary explaining certain esoteric Buddhist technical terms

The Ōya-ji engi is a fairly typical example in the Bandō reijō-ki. But exactly what kind of message or promises did the Ōya-ji engi offer to attract pilgrims to the temple? How did it edify the faithful and strengthen them in their belief?

In his important study of the genre, Ōji Hidenori has argued that engi were effective religious propaganda for two reasons (Ōji 1959). First, engi encouraged belief in the miraculous appearance of Buddhist divinities. In the tales, buddhas and bodhisattvas were portrayed as highly exceptional and extremely impressive beings with a potency to produce wonders ( reigen 風験 ) and miracles ( kidoku 奇特 ). In the case of the Bandō reijō-ki, Ryōsei’s own preface makes this same point. While the Buddhist focus as stated in the Lotus Sūtra is on how “the seed of Buddhahood arises ( ki 起 ) from conditions ( en 禪 ),” Ryōsei emphasizes that engi were about “men of great virtue and holy men of

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1 On Ryōsei’s life, the textual history of the Bandō reijō-ki, and its precursors, see Shimizutani 1971, pp. 375–442. See also my “Kannon Engi: The Reijō and the Concept of Kechien as Strategies of Indigenization in Buddhist Sacred Narrative” (MacWilliams 1990). Two other important examples of eighteenth-century Kannon reijō-ki texts are: for the Saikoku route, the Saikoku sanjūsansho Kannon reijō-ki zue 西国三十三所観音霊場圖絵 (The collected pictorial guide of the thirty-three Kannon numinous locales of Saikoku; hereafter cited as Saikoku reijō-ki), in ten volumes, printed in 1803 is a slightly revised version with illustrations by Tsujimoto Kitei of an earlier work by Kōyō Shun’ō, entitled the Saikoku sanjusansho Kannon reijō-ki 西国三十三所観音霊場記, which dates from 1725, in Kanezashi 1973, pp.18–209; for the Chichibu route, the Chichibu engi reigen enisuden 秩父縁起霊験円通伝, in five volumes, collected by the monk Ensō 円宗, printed in 1766. A transcription of this text has been published in Saitama sosho 3 (1970): 3–74.
the past” who “were moved by mysterious causes and conditions (fushigi no innen 不思議の因縁), and for the sake of those living in the final age (masse 末世) founded respectively Buddhist temples and shrines for the kami.”

In the tales, holy men-ascetics, various good deities who were protective of the Dharma (gobō zenjin 護法善神), and the enshrined Kannon statues at the temple site all produce stunning performances for the faithful. Engi fit Buddhism into the Japanese world of meaning by portraying Kannon as a local and intimate saving presence that merited worship because of the bodhisattva’s awesome power.

The Ōya-ji engi is illustrative in this respect. There the temple with its main image is portrayed as a place for intense spiritual experiences for the worshippers who come in contact with the power of Kannon. Contact occurs through dreams (yume 夢), waking visions (maboroshi 幻), and face-to-face meetings with an avatar (gongen 権現) or transformation body (keshin 化身) of the bodhisattva. For example, in the origin tale of the senju image (#2 in the text), the villagers experience the miracle of the deity’s sacred presence after they enter Ōya and have a collective waking vision of Kannon’s spiritually radiant image upon the cliff face. In the second tale as well (#5 in the text), a boy named Gen Saburō, a lay pilgrim, is blessed with the great compassionate manifestation (daihō no jigen o komori 大悲の示現を蒙り) of Kannon on two occasions after the deity conveyed wondrous dream oracles (reikoku 霊告) concerning the whereabouts of his lost father.

Second, Ōji argues that engi were effective because they often appealed to the preexisting faith in the kami. A “weak point” in otherwise successful proselytizing strategies of the new Buddhist sects of the Kamakura period was that they largely ignored the popular faith in the kami.13 But temples like those on the Saikoku and Bandō Kannon pilgrimage routes, which were mostly affiliated with the older Buddhist schools, especially Tendai and Shingon, pursued a different strategy. As Allan Grapard has noted (1984, p. 244), the buddhas and bodhisattvas of kenmitsu Buddhism did not necessarily dislocate the kami at sacred sites, but entered into “communication” and various “associations” with the preexisting system. In Kannon engi, kami are often woven into the narratives, creating a synthesis of Buddhist and kami faith (shinbutsu shūgō) that helped to win the hearts and minds of the people.

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13 The great exception, of course, is Ippen Shōnin of the Jishū sect. See Ōji 1959, p. 89.
Oya was inhabited long before the advent of Buddhism to the area. Excavations from 1958 to 1965 have uncovered several types of pottery, including furrowed-line earthenware, *ryukisenmon* 隆起隕文, or Oya type one, as well as skeletal remains that prove that the cave was used both as a burial site and a dwelling place from the early Jōmon until the middle of the Yayoi period (*TSURUOKA* 1969, p. 402; *HANAWA* 1984, pp. 2–6). It also seems to have been a kami cult site. The Kannon image is situated within an outer sanctum (*gejin* 外陣) of a typical Buddha hall. This structure, however, is erected up against the mouth of the cliff overhang covering the cave opening. According to the *engi*, this architectural arrangement was adopted because the mountain itself, with its *senju* image emerging from the rock face, is the inner sanctum (*naijin* 内陣) of the temple. In this respect, Oya-ji is very similar to certain Shinto shrines, such as the Miwa and Ōkami shrines in Yamato and the Kanasana Shrine in Saitama Prefecture, which are constructed with offering halls (*haiden* 拝殿) before mountains worshiped as the divine bodies (*shintaizan* 神体山) of the local kami (*TSURUOKA* 1969, p. 409; *TYLER* 1992, p. 50; *HANAWA* 1984, p. 12). The author of the *Shimotsuke fudoki* twice describes the area before the statue as a *haiden*, which in his time was hidden by a curtain that would be drawn open by the priest in order for worship (as in the case of Narushima Motonao noted above). On the basis of this layout of the temple, Tsuruoka concludes that the “form” (*keitai* 形態) of the Kannon hall was built upon the “foundation” (*kohon* 基本) of the *shintaizan* (*TSURUOKA* 1969, p. 409; *SHIMIZUTANI* 1971, pp. 200–201).

In the *Oya-ji engi* we find a literary rendering of this spatial *naijin/gejin* synthesis with a *yama no kami* woven into the narrative. As the first story opens (# 2 in the text), the future site of Oya-ji in the district of Arahan is troubled by a poisonous serpent (*dokuhebi*) living at the source of the stream that bubbles from the cave under the cliff face. The stream, which normally should have fertilized the valley of Oya, made the five grains, grasses, and trees wither away and caused great suffering among the local populace. It had become so polluted that anyone who tasted the fouled waters would sicken and die. Because it was so bad, people said the area was really a hell valley (*jigoku-dani* 地獄谷). As a precaution the villagers, following the practice at Mount Koya, put up a sign to warn travelers about the dangers of drinking the noxious water (*Bando reijō-ki*, p. 297).\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\) The reference is to Kōbō Daishi’s poem from the Kongobu-ji of Mount Koya found in the *Fūga wakashū* 風雅和歌集, a fourteenth-century *waka* anthology compiled by retired emperor Hanazono (1297–1348): *wasuretemo/ humi ya shitsuran/ tabibito no/ Takano no oku/ Tamamwa no mizu*. In his preface, Kōbō Daishi says he composed the poem after posting
This description of Oya’s *dokuhebi* is reminiscent of the water snake kami that were worshiped throughout Japan from early on for their power over floods, droughts, and the quality of water sources, and, later on, to ensure agricultural fertility (see Blacker 1986, p. 123). In later legends they often appear as chaotic and polluting. Such a malevolent snake deity needs to be handled “as one would deal with other violent forces of nature. It posed a general threat to the agricultural community...and was the manifestation of the violent aspect of those deities connected with thunder, water, and the dead” (Kelsey 1981a, p. 110; see also Kelsey 1981b, pp. 223–25). In the *Toyokuni fudoki*, for example, when emperor Keiko made an imperial progress (*miyuki* 御幸) to the village of Kutami, one of his servants tried to ladle water from a spring there that was inhabited by a water snake (*okami*). The emperor commanded him to stop because the water was foulsmelling. From that time on, the place was called, “Kusai izumi” (or “Stinky Spring”). Another famous example is the shrine origin myth of Matachi in the *Hitachi fudoki*. In this story, an imperial envoy outsider/hero named Matachi confronts the local serpentine “gods of Yatsu” who are preventing the villagers from developing their rice fields. Dressed in armor, he attacks them and chases them to the foot of the mountain. There he uses his staff to mark the border dividing the human world below the world of the serpent gods above in the mountains and founds their shrine. Matachi’s descendants continued to worship the serpent deities to assure the continued fertility of the fields (de Visser 1913, pp. 55–56; Gilday 1993, pp. 280–83).

As we have seen, the *Oya-ji engi* has a similar snake in its story. But, in this case, it is three wandering Buddhist ascetics rather than a cultural hero like Matachi who save the day. Certainly, Ōji is correct in saying that *engi* with their emphasis on the miracles and, in many cases, a supporting cast of kami, helped to popularize the Kannon cult. But it is not enough to catalog, as Ōji has done, the various independently defined symbols of the sacred in *engi* texts. We must look at the stories themselves and not just the discrete symbols interspersed a sign to warn travelers on the way to the inner temple at Kōya not to drink the water from the Tamagawa because of the many poisonous insects in the water. See Tsugita and Iwasa 1974, p. 336. For another use of this poem on the Saikoku route, see the *Saikoku junrei saikenki*, Kokubun toho bokkyû sosho (Washio 1926, 7, p. 548.)

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15 Tanigawa Ken’ichi notes that *ryûkisenmon*-style pottery, such as discovered at Oya, may represent a highly stylized snake motif, but this is uncertain. For a full discussion of the snake-decorated pottery and its religious implications, see Tanigawa 1986, pp. 160–79. See also Yoshino 1979, pp. 21–24.

16 See Akimoto 1960, p. 363; see also p. 397 for a related story. For more examples see de Visser 1913.
within them to understand how engi were powerful tools for proselytization. As Stephen Crites has argued, any symbol of the sacred, like Kannon or a kami, “imports into any icon or life situation in which it appears the significance given it in a cycle of mundane stories, and also the resonances of a sacred story” (1971, p. 306). A few questions suggest themselves as one sets out to explore these tales. How do engi encompass Kannon’s new situation—the presence of the bodhisattva in situ at the one hundred numinous locales throughout Japan? In cases where kami appear, in what distinctive ways do engi fit them into a worldview and message that, as Kuroda Toshio (1981) has argued, was strongly Buddhist? How does the Ōya-ji engi in particular specifically shape the kami-Buddhist synthesis in a way that promotes the indigenization of the Kannon cult at Ōya and the popularization of the Bandō pilgrimage? Since reijō-ki were promulgated with the popularization of lay pilgrimages after the Genroku period, did texts like the Ōya-ji engi in Ryōsei’s Bandō reijō-ki offer anything new in the way the “language game” of temple proselytization was played? Did the Ōya-ji engi create a new literary mode of contact between the Kannon of Buddhist scripture and the lives of the Japanese pilgrims who went on the Kannon pilgrimage routes?

Ōya-ji as a Kannon Reijō

The purpose of myth, according to Roland Barthes, is to give “an historical intention a natural justification.... What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality” (1982, pp. 130–31). The Ōya-ji engi provides just such a natural image of the senju Kannon. The tales and devotional poem-prayer naturalize the deity by situating it inextricably and eternally within Ōya’s environs. The engi does this by being structured in a special way, by what M.M. Bakhtin has called the chronotopes or the fundamental “concretizing representations” for materializing time in space within a narrative. According to Bakhtin, chronotopes function as “matrices” for organizing the scenes and dramatic events of a story; what gives any narrative its internal symbolic unity (and its distinctiveness and power as a genre) is its characteristic fusion of spatio-temporal relationships (1981, p. 250). Two types of chronotopes structure the narrative/poetic framework of the Ōya-ji engi: the numinous place and the motifs of meeting.

The “Ōya Kannon” is a perfect example of how a spiritually efficacious senju Kannon image (reizō) is a “mysterious and magical
outgrowth” of its local matrix—the so-called numinous place or site (reijō, reichi) (Mus 1964, pp. 8–9). Carved out of the soft volcanic rock found in the area (Ōya iishi), the senju Kannon emerges from the cliff face within its own cave-sanctuary. That Kannon’s presence here is natural—in the sense of being considered intrinsically a part of the space it occupies—is reinforced in the engi’s image of Ōya’s sacred geography. In the first tale, the temple precincts are described in richly Buddhist detail, showing the relations of equivalence between the actual Japanese site at Ōya and Kannon’s mythical abode in the sutra literature.

First, Ryosei’s speculation on the place-name (#6 in the text) offers a major clue that Ōya is no ordinary place but is rather a perfect natural dais for the deity. Ryōsei observes that the site is surrounded by towering cliffs, as if it were enclosed by a folding screen (byōbu 屏風) or “at the bottom of a monk’s begging bowl.” To gaze at the heavens one must look up; therefore, it is called Mount Tenkai, “opening toward heaven.” In other words, the place-name indicates that Ōya is an axis mundi that unites heavenly and earthly realms; it provides an opening for passage to the upper world, making it an ideal seat for a celestial bodhisattva “established above the stains of existence on the lotus of heavenly births and manifestations” (Mus 1964, p. 461).

To this picture, the engi adds more topographical details that leave little doubt that Ōya is a Pure Land of the Great Compassionate One (daishisha no jōdo 大悲者の浄土). In the sutras, Kannon’s paradise is often located on Mount Fudaraku (Potalaka), a mountainous island somewhere in the sea south of India. One famous account of it is found in book ten of the Daitō saiiki-ki 大唐西域記, the travelogue of the Chinese monk Hsuan-tsang’s (Jpn. Genjō, 600–644) pilgrimage to India. His description of Fudaraku is fully quoted by Ryōsei in the Bandō reijō-ki:

The mountain paths (to Fudaraku) are through steep and dangerous cliffs and gorges. At the top of the mountain there is a pond. Its water is clear as a spotless mirror from which a

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17 There are traditions in China that compare the stupa enshrining the Buddha’s relics to the shape of an inverted monk’s begging bowl. See Mabbett 1983, p. 76.
18 Bandō reijō-ki, pp. 299–300. The current temple engi pamphlet, the Bandō jukyuban fudasho Oya Kannon, offers another place-name legend. After he made the senju image, Kōbō Daishi’s reflection (sugata) was cast in the river. Hence the name of the river, Sugatagawa.
19 This is the title given to temple seventeen, Shimotsuke Izuru Mangan-ji, a temple that is located in the same area as Ōya-ji. See Bandō reijō-ki, pp. 289–92. It is interesting to contrast the Ōya-ji engi with its emphasis on the reijō, with the Chinese Kannon miracle collections of the Six Dynasties period with their notable lack of “emplacedness.” On this, see Campany 1993, pp. 252–53.
river flows out. Beside the pond there is a rock palace where Kanjizai Bosatsu resides.\textsuperscript{20}

In Japan, the belief that temple sites either resembled or actually were Fudaraku was widespread. One of the earliest of these was Nachi-dera (Seiganto-ji 青岸渡寺), the first temple of the Saikoku Kannon pilgrimage in the twelfth century. Its devotional prayer suggests that the falls near the temple echoed with the sounds of the waves beating against the shore of Mount Fudaraku: \textit{Fudaraku ya / ishi utsu nami wa / mikan mano no / Nachi no oyama ni / hibiku taki tsuse.} “Is it not, then, Fudaraku? The waves crashing on its shore are the rapids resounding on Mount Nachi, at the three holy shrines of Kumano” (KANEZASHI 1973, p. 20). As the eastern gate of Kannon’s paradise throughout the later medieval period, Nachi-dera served as point of disembarkation for the many boat crossings (\textit{tokai} 渡海) to Mount Fudaraku.\textsuperscript{21} Fudaraku \textit{shinkō} spread to the Kantō area with the migration of Shugendo mountain Buddhist ascetics from both the Honzan and Tōzan branches of Shugendo, who were centered in the Kinai region. One example is the fifteenth-century monk Dōkō 道光, a member of the Honzan branch who first practiced at Nachi, traveled the Saikoku route, and eventually made his way to the Kantō region (SWANSON 1981, p. 58).\textsuperscript{22} Monks like Dōkō probably first identified sacred Bandō sites like Chūzen-ji (number eighteen) in Mount Nikkō as Mount Futara or Fudaraku. Chūzen-ji, with its spectacularly beautiful lake, is described in the \textit{Chūzen-ji engi} (Bandō reijō-ki #18) as surrounded on all sides by “thick groves of trees and bamboo. Yet not one leaf falls into the water. The lake water is transparent to the very bottom, and is like a bright mirror. Moreover, no scaly creatures lie in the lake. This is one of the mysteries of the area” (Bandō reijō-ki, p. 295). In the priest Jikaku’s poem, it is compared to the jeweled pond of Mount Fudaraku: \textit{Fudaraku ya/asahi no hikari/kagayakite/Ukiyo no soto ni/sumeru

\textsuperscript{20} See the \textit{Nikkō-san Chūzen-ji engi} in \textit{Bandō reijō-ki}, p. 295. Ryōsei here also quotes the section on Fudaraku from Shikshananda’s translation of the \textit{Avatamsaka Sūtra (Shin kegon-gyo)}, in which the pilgrim Sudhana (Zenzai Dōji) finds Fudaraku “an immaculate place made of jewels, with trees with fruits and flowers growing everywhere and an abundance of flowing springs and ponds” where the very wise and steadfast Kanjizai (Kannon) dwells “for the benefit of all beings.” See Cleary 1987, pp. 150–51; T #279, 10.336–37.

\textsuperscript{21} Other Saikoku temples were also associated with Fudaraku, such as Chikubushima (number 30) and Ishiyama-dera (number 13). The latter temple’s connection with Mount Fudaraku has a long history. See \textit{Ishiyama-dera engi} in the \textit{Zoku Gunsho ruiju}, HANAWA 1926, 28a:97. There is also now a “Fudarakusen” hill near the main temple, with a route to Kannon’s thirty-three \textit{keshin} marked off as a miniature route.

\textsuperscript{22} By Dōkō’s time, Bandō temples had become formally affiliated with both branches of Shugendo.
mizuumi. “Oh, Fudaraku! Where the morning light shines and the lake lies clear beyond the borders of the floating world” (*Bandō reijō-ki*, p. 294).

As the next stop on the Bandō route, Ōya-ji is situated close to Chūzen-ji. Moreover, Ōya-ji’s own setting, not surprisingly, is strongly evocative of Kannon’s paradise. As in the *Saiki-ki* account, Ōya, like Fudaraku, is reached through dangerous cliffs and gorges. Moreover, the cliff overhang, which shelters the Ōya Kannon from the rain and dew, is like the rock palace (of the deus) where Kanjizai “in coming and going takes his abode” in the *Saiki* (cf. Beal 1881, vol. 1, p. 233). In the *engi*, the same cliff overhang is also described as a *funagoko* 舟後光 (or *funagata kōhai* 舟形光背), that is, a type of halo symbolizing the divine light (*komyō* 光明) that issues from the bodies of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and is commonly found behind *senju* images (the form of the bodhisattva often associated with Fudaraku and enshrined in all of the Kantō Fudaraku temples). Shaped like the prow of a boat, the *funagoko* is a particularly appropriate appurtenance for a deity inhabiting a mythical isle; Fudaraku itself has rich symbolic associations etymologically, mythically, and ritually with boats. Third, as in the *Saiki* description of Fudaraku (and also in the *Shin kegon-gyō*), Ōya-ji also has “a tranquil and pure lotus pond” (*shōjō no renchi*) next to the cave/stone palace (*Bandō reijō-ki*, p. 298).

In the *Ōya-ji engi* it is clear that Kannon does not just emerge anywhere. By drawing implicit relations of equivalence between distant Fudaraku and nearby Ōya in the Japanese archipelago, the *engi* gives a completely remythologized vision of Ōya’s sacred landscape in Buddhist terms. In the opening description, in the later place-name account, and, as we shall see, in the tales themselves, the *Ōya-ji engi* provides a kind of narrativized mandala: it offers a mystical vision of Ōya as a sacred realm—as Mount Fudaraku, the Pure Land abode of Kannon. It also offers what Susan Tyler has called a “visual shell” through which the bodhisattva’s power emanates for the good of the pilgrims. In both respects as a sacred text, the *engi* functions much like the Pure Land mandala paintings (*hensō* 変相) of Fudaraku that were so popular in Japan over the centuries. Like the apparitional

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23 Other Bando Fudaraku temples include Hoshinoya (number 8), Sensō-ji (number 13), Tsukuba-san Omi-do (number 25), and Nago-dera (number 33). See Tsuruoka 1969, pp. 421–22.

24 Several renderings of the *senju* Kannon in the Heian and Kamakura periods had such a halo. For other examples, see illustrations numbers 14, 15, 17, and 20 in Nara National Museum 1981. On the ritual of boat crossings (*tokai*) to Fudaraku from the Kumano-Nachi area during the medieval period, see Gorai 1976, pp. 119–209.

25 See Tyler 1992, p.116 and especially p. 131, where she describes the Muromachi period
visions of these paintings, the Oya-ji engi paints a vivid picture of Oya’s special qualifications as a numinous place (reijo): an enspirited Kannon image would naturally emerge from the natural cathedral-like paradise of Oya-ji. According to Allan Grapard (1989), this kind of “intertextuality and sacred geography” was a basic esoteric Buddhist way of unifying the faith in the sutras (culture) with mountain worship (nature) from the middle ages until the nineteenth century.

The Motifs of Meeting

The most obvious function of the temple as a sacred place is that it is an abode of a deity. As such, the temple serves as a “meeting point between the whole structure of human life and the life of the divine realms” (Turner 1979, p. 27; Knipe 1988, p. 112). It is not surprising, therefore, that the rei jo functions as a matrix in tandem with another chronotope that Bakhtin calls the “motif of meeting.” Although the motif of meeting is one of the most universal of motifs, Bakhtin emphasizes that in the mythological and religious realms this motif “plays a leading role, of course: in sacred legends and Holy Writ (both in the Christian works and in Buddhist writings) and in religious rituals.... (It) is combined with other motifs, for example that of apparition (“epiphany”) in the religious realm” (1981, p. 98).

A key feature of the bodhisattva path is to enter into the turmoil of this world to save beings who, deluded by their own ignorance, are forever caught in the realm of birth and death. The Oya-ji engi is essentially a mythologized history of Kannon’s meetings with the local kami, the holy men-founders of the temple, and the pilgrims who visited it in the beginning. It lives up to its generic label as tales about engi, co-dependent origination, by offering a “primordial”—in the sense of an original and founding—karmic drama about the causes and conditions (innen) at work behind Kannon’s manifestation and transfer of merits (ekō 回向) to suffering beings at the rei jo. The tales “take place” in a valorized past that is the source of the temple’s power and prestige.

The first meeting in the engi is the story of Kannon’s initial hierophany that marks the founding of the temple. In many Kannon engi, the story revolves around the close encounter between holy men-founders and local deities. This is often uneventful. In the tales, kami regularly appear as enabling assistants leading the holy man (who

Fudaraku mandala in the senju Hall at Kaidan-in at Tōdai-ji. For a full discussion of Fudaraku paintings in the context of Kasuga Shrine, see pp. 115–44. See also Okazaki 1977, pp. 80–82.
either carries or later carves the spiritually efficacious Kannon image) on his way to build his Buddhist hut/temple at the site. This story-type follows a pattern in which the seeker of Kannon’s abode is led to the reijō in stages—first by a dream or some sign from the gods and then through the active intervention of a benevolent local deity. A good example is from the engi of Ishiyama-dera. According to temple tradition, the monk Rōben is initially guided to the site of the temple by a dream oracle of the deity Zaō Gongen. When he arrives, he meets an old man sitting on a rock, fishing, who identifies himself as Hira Myōjin, the ruler of the mountain. The kami informs him that the spot is a numinous site (reichi) of Kannon, and permits Rōben to enshrine his image of Nyoirin Kannon on his rock seat, which is described as shaped like an eight-petaled lotus with purple clouds floating around it. After this account of the peaceful origin of Ishiyama-dera, several miracles attributed to the Kannon image are related in other temple tales.26

But, in other cases, this first meeting is fraught with peril. Generally this happens when the kami is a malevolent serpent whom the holy man must subjugate in order to build his temple.27 It characteristically begins with a highly negative image of a dangerous local kami who has destroyed the crops and is beyond the ritualistic control of the local villagers. When holy men have to face off against such beings, the conflict is often dramatic.

In Kannon engi dealing with serpent subjugation, explicit acts of violence are generally avoided, perhaps because of the Buddhist emphasis on ahimsā. Various ritualistic methods and weapons are frequently used to subjugate them. For example, in the Oka-dera engi (Saikoku reijō-ki #7), the monk Gien merely strikes his serpent with prayer beads. In the Jion-ji engi (Bandō reijō-ki #12), Jikaku Daishi uses various symbolic gestures (mudrā) and incantations, and throws magic stones with Sanskrit characters written upon them into the serpent’s pond. In the Yamizo engi (Bandō reijō-ki #21), Kōbō Daishi pacifies the large serpent Odakamaru by brandishing a copy of the Heart Sutra. The rare cases of actual combat generally do not involve holy men. In the Hiki Iwadono engi (Bandō reijō-ki #10), for example, a famous general, Saka no Ue Tamuramaro, is sent by the emperor to Mount

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26 See the probably fourteenth-century version of the tale in Ishiyama-dera engi (HANAWA 1926, vol. 28a, pp. 95–118); see also Ishiyama-dera engi emaki (KADOKAWA SHOTEN HENSUBU 1966). The eighteenth-century version of the engi is recorded in Saikoku reijō-ki, pp. 88–97.

Iwadono in Hiki to kill a noxious serpent that has ruined the local crops by causing snow in the summer and thunderstorms in the winter. In the tale the general kills it with an assist from Kannon, who sends a snowfall that marks out the dark outline of the beast and protects him until he can shoot his arrows. As a violent solution to the problem, the engi is comparable to the Hitachi fudoki tale of Matachi discussed above, as well as the well-known story of Susano-o’s subjugation of the Koshi no yamata no orochi in the Kojiki (chapters 19 and 20).28

The Ōya-ji engi offers a rather interesting variation of the motif of confrontation (#2 in the text). We have already described the beginning of the story where the poisonous serpent (dokuhebi) has polluted the spring source and destroyed the fields, making life impossible for the inhabitants of Ōya. In the tale, the serpent is pacified by three wandering Buddhist ascetics. These unnamed figures arrive mysteriously from Mount Haguro, Gassan, and Yudono to proclaim that they will banish the serpent by means of the subjugating power of petition and prayers (gobuku no hihd 隆伏の秘法). With a bodhisattva-like compassion they save the crops and perform spiritual austerities on the villagers’ behalf. Then, happily for some and with misgivings by other villagers, they enter the valley. Nothing is heard for ten days until the three ascetics triumphantly return to tell the villagers that they have ended the depredations of the snake forever. Before leaving, the ascetics invite them to go and see. When they enter Ōya, the villagers gaze up at the cliff above the stream to find the images of the senju Kannon along with the two accompanying figures of Fudō and Bishamonten. The three images emit a dazzling spiritual light that bathes the surrounding mountains and valley in a golden hue. “There was not one person—young, old, man, or woman—who did not weep. And they say from that day forward, the villagers respected the asceticism of Mount Yudono and converted to Kanzeon. Many entered the Buddhist path.” The story concludes by noting that the spring where the poisonous serpent lived is now where the villagers worship Benzaiten. It has become a pure lotus pond from which flows “the unusually luminescent mountain water of Ōya-ji” (Ōya-ji kikei no sansui 大谷寺奇景の山水なり).29

28 These are examples of Thompson’s type A.531.2, culture hero (demi-god) overcomes snake. See THOMPSON 1955–1957, vol. 1, p. 122. The exception is in the Kami no Daigo-ji engi (Sanjoku reijô-ki #11), where the ascetic Shōbō cuts the head off the snake of Mount Omine in Yoshino to found the shugendo jun no mineiri route to Kumano, but this tale is the prelude to, not an actual part of, the story of Shōbō’s founding of the temple (see SWANSON 1981).

29 Bando reijô-ki, p. 298. This engi is one version of Ōya-ji’s origin. Another version, first recorded in the Shimotsuke fudo-ki (1688), says the senju image was carved in one night in
In this first meeting the three mysterious Buddhist ascetics whose “compassionate power” banishes the serpent are *yamabushi*. They come from Dewa Sanzan, the famous Shugendo center of the three sacred mountains of the old province of Dewa (now in Yamagata Prefecture). Sakurai Tokutarō has convincingly argued that tales of this sort may in fact reflect historical memory. The penetration of Buddhist ascetics into the mountains throughout Japan had the potential for causing great religious conflict. Their status as outsiders, their strange dress, and especially their unfamiliar religious practices were all potentially disruptive to local villagers with their own local kami cults. Like the legendary En no Gyōja or Shōdō Shōnin, *yamabushi* were especially disruptive because they sought to gain magico-religious power by practicing ascetical seclusion, fasting, and meditation in the mountains. This involved violating the conventional village separation between human and divine realms, a division that, as we have seen, was established in early shrine origin myths (*jinja engi*) of the *yama no kami*, such as in the tale of Matachi. In the *Ôya-ji engi*, despite the opposition of some of the villagers, the three Buddhist ascetics violate this border by brazenly entering the mountain realm of the Ôya kami. What is important here, however, is how the story effectively defuses any fears surrounding the breaking of this taboo. The founding myth of Ôya-ji effaces any history of conflict over the entry of the Kannon cult with its natural image of the marvellous manifestation of the bodhisattva on the rock face.

*Serpent Subjugation through the Magical Power of Illumination*

While the general tale type may be common, the origin tale of the Ôya Kannon draws its distinctive features from earlier Buddhist snake subjugation stories. Ryôsei himself draws attention to this when he cites a Chinese story he thinks is very similar to the Ôya-ji tale. This is the story of a T’ang dynasty Buddhist hero, Kantaishi, who subjugated a man-eating water serpent living in Akkei (“evil valley”) in Choshû (Ch’ao Chou) Province (#3 in the text; *Bandô reijô-ki*, p. 298). But there are even earlier Buddhist tales about the Buddha’s own subjugation of *nāga* (*ryûjin*) or water serpent deities that were believed to have power over rain and fertility and were worshiped at sites near caves, streams, and pools. In these tales, the chaotic and malevolent side of

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Kônin 1 (810) by Köbô Daishi. In the current temple *engi* pamphlet, the *Bandô jûkyûban fudasho Ôya Kannon*, Köbô Daishi is cited as the founder/carver instead of the three ascetics.

See [Sakurai 1989](#), pp. 541-50.
the *naga* is intentionally exaggerated in order to underscore the mer­
ciful saving power of the Buddha.\(^{31}\)

One such story is from the Cave of the Shadow, a famous temple
that was for centuries an important Buddhist pilgrimage site. The
cave, located somewhere in southeastern Afghanistan, was visited by
many Chinese Buddhist pilgrims from Fa-hsien to Hsüan-tsang in the
mid-seventh century, who recorded one version of its foundation in
tsang’s tale is strikingly similar to the Ōya-ji *engi*. First, in the opening
section the area surrounding the site is described like Ōya with its
sheer rock face arranged like a *byōbu*. In the same way, the Cave of
the Shadow is described as a cavern surrounded with mountains that are
steep “like walls,” with a stream gushing from the cliff face. The cave
temple is also originally the abode of a malevolent serpent, *Gopāla*.

The following section of the text also parallels the Ōya-ji *engi* with its
description of the main image as a “shadow (ying, ei 㚸) of the
Buddha” that appears on the cave’s rock face. It was originally “bright
as the true form with all its characteristic marks,” but now...is only a
“feeble likeness” glimmering in the cave. Whoever prays before it
“with fervent faith, he is mysteriously endowed, and he sees it clearly
before him, but not for long” (BEAL 1881, vol. 2, p. 147). In like
manner, after tersely describing the Kannon image on the cliff face, the
Ōya-ji *engi* emphasizes the importance of faith in viewing it: “They say
those whose sins are weighty do not see its form, but only see the plain
cliff face” (Bandō reijō-ki, p. 297). Finally, the remainder of the Cave of
the Shadow tale is about the origin of the Buddha’s glowing image.
Like the origin story of the glowing Kannon image in the Ōya-ji *engi*,
Hsūan-tsang’s version shows how the Buddha can subjugate a malevo­
lent serpent without any explicit violence. The Buddha simply travels
to the cave out of pity for the local people. When Gopāla sees him, he
is instantly converted, accepting the precept against killing and vow­
ing to defend the Buddhist law. When he also begs the Buddha to
take the cavern as his abode, the Buddha replies,

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When I am about to die; I will leave you my shadow, and I will
send five arhats to receive from you continual offerings. When
the true law is destroyed, this service of yours shall go on; if an
evil heart arises in you, you must look at my shadow, and
because of its power of love and virtue your evil purpose will
be stopped.
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(Beal 1881, vol. 2, p. 94)

\(^{31}\) See BLOSS 1973, pp. 37–38. For a study of snake subjugation tales in Chinese
Buddhism, see FAURE 1987.
It is the sight of the glorious body of the Buddha, first in gross physical form and then, after the Buddha leaves his shadow, in his brilliant spiritual form through the magical power of its illumination, that converts Gopala to Buddhism and stays his evil purpose.

The Cave of the Shadow story focuses on the magical power of illumination (komyo jinzuuki 光明神通力) of the Buddha. As Randy Kloetzli has noted, of all the miraculous powers possessed by the Buddha, the issue of spiritual light is perhaps the most ubiquitous in the Mahayana scriptures (1983, pp. 103-106). When rays of light issue from a buddha or bodhisattva they are usually spiritually efficacious: like the teaching of the Buddha himself the rays elevate beings to a higher spiritual plane—giving them enlightenment, freedom from doubt, and five kinds of “superknowledge” (gozu no shinsen 五通の神仙) to see and hear the buddhas of the ten regions with divine eyes (tegen 天眼) and ears (tenni 天耳). This is exactly what happens to the serpent in the story. It is magically transformed by the rays emanating from the body of the Buddha, with Gopala turning into a Buddhist convert.

Magical transformation by the release of spiritual light is also at the heart of the Oya-ji engi. In the sutras, Kannon is a celestial bodhisattva of light. The Kannon-gyo portrays Kannon as “the spotlessly pure ray of light, the sun of wisdom that banishes all darkness, that can subdue the winds and flames of misfortune, and everywhere give bright light to the world.”

In the Oya-ji engi, in place of the Buddha, we have the three mysterious Shugendo ascetics from Dewa Sanzan. Here there is the obvious correspondence with the three sacred mountains of Dewa, with Mount Haguro the center devoted to the worship of Kannon. The Haguro ascetic is more than what he seems—he is one of Kannon’s thirty-three forms, a human manifestation (kenin 化人). This corresponds closely to Hsüan-tsang’s Saiuki-ki account, which notes that for those unable to ascend Mount Potalaka and “dwell below,” “if they earnestly pray and beg to behold the god, sometimes [Kannon] appears as Ts‘-tsai-t‘ien (Isvara-deva), sometimes under the form of a

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32 See Hurvitz 1976, p. 318. Several engi in the Bando reijō-ki have accounts of jūichimen and senju Kannon images appearing (yōgo 影向) and emitting a dazzling light that saves beings from suffering. Another example that bears a close resemblance to the Oya-ji engi is from the Shimotsuke Izuru engi (Bando reijō-ki #17). When Shōdō Shōnin came from Mount Futara to Izuru, he found a natural stone image of the jūichimen Kannon in a cave there. After conversing with him about religious matters, the image turned back toward the recesses of the cave facing west (toward Amida’s paradise) and emitted a spiritual light.

33 The sacred mountains of Yudono and Gassan enshrine Dainichi and Amida, respectively.
yogi...” (Beal 1881, p. 233). The ascetic’s true nature only becomes fully revealed after the brilliant form of the senju Kannon on the cliff face. But an air of mystery remains because at the climax of the tale the face-to-face meeting between serpent and ascetics is omitted. The fact that the ascetics (Kannon and his attendant deities) have prevailed is dramatically revealed only after the fact, when the villagers, with the ascetics’ approval, enter Ôya and have a collective vision of it aglow with the radiant Kannon flanked by the divine attendants Fudô and Bishamonten, and, at the end of the tale, Benzaiten. Simply by manifesting a radiant presence, Kannon has fulfilled his vow to save those who have met with suffering wrought by dangerous dragons and poisonous snakes. As stated in the Kannon-gyô:

[O]ne might encounter evil rāksasas
Poisonous dragons, ghosts, and the like.
By virtue of one’s constant mindfulness of Sound-Observer,
They would not dare do one harm.
Or one may be surrounded by malicious beasts,
Sharp of tooth and with claws to be dreaded.
By virtue of one’s constant mindfulness of the Sound-
Observer,
They shall quickly run off to immeasurable distance.
There may be poisonous snakes and noxious insects,
Their breath deadly, smoking and flaming with fire.
By virtue of the Sound-Observer,
At the sound of one’s voice they will go away of themselves.

(Hurvitz 1976, p. 318)

Like Gopâla in the Cave of the Shadow tale, it is clear that the Ôya serpent is transformed from a life-threatening into a life-giving divinity, the deity Benzaiten (Sarasvati) from the Hindu-Buddhist pantheon. Benzaiten is a perfect choice for the poisonous snake’s new form. The goddess, originally the personification of the Sarasvati river in India, is described in great detail in such Shingon-related sutras as the Dainichi-kyô and the Saishôô-kyô. It is in the Kâranda-vyûha sûtra, however, that Benzaiten is directly linked to the senju Kannon. In the sutra, Kannon is portrayed as a kind of cosmic Ísvara with innumerable arms and eyes. The sun and moon spring from the eyes; Brahma and the other gods issue from the shoulders, Nârâyana

34 One of Kannon’s manifestation bodies was an upâsaka. See Hurvitz 1976, p. 315.
35 There are no rock carvings of either Fudô or Bishamonten that accompany the main image on the cliff at Ôya, nor is there any evidence that there ever was.
36 Similar Benzaiten transformations can be found elsewhere in the Bando reijô-ki, for example, in the Edo Asakusa engi (Bando reijô-ki #13). See Bando reijô-ki, pp. 274-75.
from the heart, and the goddess Sarasvati from the teeth (Dayal 1932, p. 49). By the Tokugawa period, Benzaiten had become a popular fixture of folk religiosity. An idea of what Benzaiten faith was about is given, for example, in volume forty-six of Amano Sadakage's 天野信景 (1661–1738) famous collection of essays, the Shiojiri 塩尻. For Tokugawa-period worshippers, Benzaiten was venerated as the personification of wisdom (zai 才) and, if a different Chinese character was used for the goddess’s name, good fortune leading to riches (zai 財). Amano emphasizes that, along with the goddess Kudokuten, Benzaiten is a goddess whose wisdom and compassion, ultimately, are a manifestation of the essence (honji 本地) of the bodhisattva Kanzeon, who in the Tokugawa period was typically venerated as a goddess herself (Miyata 1987, p. 263).

In Japan, Benzaiten, whose images are often found near water sources at springs, ponds, rivers, and caverns, also became closely associated with dragons and snakes. Sometimes she is portrayed as a serpent-subjugating deity. One famous example comes from the Enoshima no engi recorded in the Enoshimafu. At Enoshima island near Kamakura, a famous pilgrimage center, “Benten” descended (suigaku 垂跡) to a cave of a kami (shinkutsu 神窟) on the island. She eventually marries and thereby stops the rampages of an “evil dragon” who dwells within the cave (Miyata 1987, p. 266; Getty 1962, p. 128). An image at Enoshima also has her in a warlike aspect with a sword in hand and a serpent and tortoise at her feet. She frequently took on the aspect of a snake herself, the upper body human-like and the lower body snake-like, holding a sword in one hand and a sacred gem in the other, resembling a nāga-like figure. Moreover, in her Buddhist form she, like Kannon, also “illuminates the three worlds with the immeasurable light that radiates from her body,” which may well have influenced her most popular portrayal in Japan as a white snake (Bakshi 1979, p. 122). As one of the seven gods of fortune (shichi fukujin 七福神), she was popularly worshiped in Tokugawa Japan as a benevolent goddess of “all kinds of flow, viz. the flow of love, music, wealth, fortune, beauty, happiness, eloquence, wisdom, victory, and also the flow of children” (Bakshi 1979, pp. 109–10). Where the original kami is malevolent, life-threatening, and dark, the new cult

37 See Bakshi 1979, p. 118. Hayashi Razan relates that when Taira no Tokimasa went to Enoshima to pray to the Goddess, she appeared first as a beautiful woman and then turned into a sea snake. See Getty 1962, p. 128.

38 She is portrayed as a white snake in the Chikubushima engi (Saikoku reijō-ki #30). See Saikoku reijō-ki, p. 193.

39 According to Bakshi, in Japan Benzaiten is also sometimes portrayed as Ryūmyō, a manifestation of Kannon (1979, p. 125).
figure of Benzaiten is the exact opposite—a deity of love, life-affirmation, and light who, along with the bodhisattva Kannon, is worthy of worship for all sorts of spiritual benefits.

To summarize, the first meeting is the charter myth of Ōya-ji. It recounts the mysterious circumstances behind the temple’s origin and the transfiguration of the bad dokuhebi into the good Buddhist assistant Benzaiten. By the end of the first tale, not only the serpent but also the entire site of Ōya has become transfigured by Kannon’s spiritual light (kōmyō), which bathes the surrounding mountains and valley in a golden hue.⁴⁰ The rays transform Ōya into a mountain of spiritual light. As Ryōsei points out, Ōya has become a Kōmyō-san, the Mountain of Spiritual Light, another name for Fudaraku given in the Kyū kegon-gyō because “there is always a spiritual light that emanates from the trees and flowers on the mountain. On the mountain the spiritual light of great compassion shines and the signs of the bodhisattva’s presence are everywhere” (Bandō reiō-ki, p. 356; T #733, 35.472).

Through the magic of Buddhist sacred narrative, Ōya has been refashioned from an indigenous kami cult site into a mythically mandalized image of Kannon’s paradisiacal abode. With its transformed configuration as a Japanese Kōmyō-san with Kannon in residence, Ōya-ji has become a natural staging area for the salvation of suffering beings—Kannon’s own Pure Land field (jōsetsu) of merit (kudoku). The shining presence of Kannon at the end of the first tale is proof that the living spiritual body of Kannon is present at Ōya in the same way as the Cave of the Shadow image was not an imitation but a true likeness of the Buddha himself, whose body, according to the Kuan fo san-mei hai ching 鏡仏三昧海経, had actually penetrated and remained within the solid rock. As we shall see, just as pilgrims to the Cave of the Shadow can “see something in no wise different from the Buddha’s own body, and (will gain thereby) the canceling-out of retribution for a period of 100,000 kalpas,” so too can pilgrims to Ōya by meeting the true image of Kannon attain release from various forms of karmic evil (SOPER 1949–1950, pp. 280–81).

Meeting Kannon—Ōya as a Pilgrim’s Paradise

There is a second type of meeting in the Ōya-ji engi. This meeting is between the Ōya Kannon and the pilgrims who come to be blessed

⁴⁰ As such, it fits the category of light that transfigures the world without blotting it out in Eliade’s morphology of mystical light. See Eliade 1969, chapter one, “Experiences of Mystical Light,” especially pp. 75–77.
with a miracle. In Christian saints’ legends, the original miracle is Christ’s resurrection, which is reflected in many forms in the tales, such as the decapitated martyr who is revivified or the ill person who recovers miraculously (Luthi 1970, p. 37). In Kannon engi, the original miracle is Kannon’s compassionate vow to save beings from suffering in all its forms—“from fears of calamity, threat, confusion, bondage...death, miserable conditions, unknown hardships, servitude, separation from loved ones,” and so on (Cleary 1987, p.152). The bodhisattva promises in the Kannon-kyō that anyone can be saved by “the hearing of his name” and by “the sight of his body” (Hurvitz 1976, p. 316).

The major thrust of the reijō-ki is that one can hear Kannon’s name and see Kannon’s body by going on the pilgrimage. By going to the numinous locales, one gains the divine ears to hear the bodhisattva’s words of compassion and the divine eyes to visualize Kannon and his Pure Land paradise on Mount Fudaraku. The mythical model is given most notably in the Shin kegon-kyō. In the final book of the sutra, “Entering the Realm of Reality,” Sudhana (Zenzai Doji 善財童子), a pilgrim in search of enlightenment, hears about Kannon’s spiritual abode on Mount Potalaka from a householder, Veshthila. As soon as he sees Avalokiteśvara expound the doctrine of “the light of great love and compassion” to a throng of enlightened beings, Sudhana realizes that reliance on a “spiritual benefactor” is an essential refuge for his salvation (Cleary 1987, p. 151). The bodhisattva then enlightens him further about what he can do to save him from suffering:

I appear in the midst of the activities of all sentient beings without leaving the presence of all buddhas, and take care of them by means of generosity, kind speech, beneficial actions, and cooperation. I also develop sentient beings by appearing in various forms: I gladden and develop them by purity of vision of inconceivable forms radiating auras of light, and take care of them and develop them by speaking to them according to their mentalities, and by magically producing various forms... by appearing to them as members of their own various races and conditions, and by living together with them.

(Cleary 1987, p. 152)

This same model lies at the heart of the pilgrim’s tales in the Ōya-ji engi. Those pilgrims who at critical moments in their lives hear about and then go to see the Ōya Kannon are saved from suffering. There are two such meetings narrated in historical sequence in the Ōya-ji engi. Both meetings dramatize, like the tale of Sudhana in the Shin
kegon-gyō, that karmic rewards accrue from directly venerating the form of an enlightened being.

As we have seen, the first pilgrim’s meeting occurs sometime during the Daidō (806–810) and Könin (810–824) eras, at the end of the first tale. The villagers initially encounter Kannon indirectly, disguised as a kenin, one of the three mysterious ascetics who visit the site. After the ascetics invite them to enter, the villagers meet Kannon a second time when they gaze at “the strange sight” of the radiating auras of the bodhisattva, Fudō, and Bishamonten. It is this “pure vision” of Kannon that elevates them spiritually, just as it has transformed Oya into a Buddhist reijō. For these first lay pilgrims, the “light of great love and compassion” that saves them from the snake also effectively turns them into converts of Kannon, their spiritual benefactor.41

Going to see the deity to obtain these worldly benefits is also the major theme of the second tale about the orphan Gen Saburō. This tale has nothing to do with local collective village concerns over fertility of the land and so on. The orphan Saburō is a bona fide lay pilgrim who travels from the distant province of Mikawa on his own personal quest to find his lost father. The story opens in the Shoan era (1171–1175) when Saburō is born to a poor peasant late in life. When the boy is three, his father has to leave for corvee duty in Kamakura. While there the father falls in love with another woman, moves away to Utsunomiya, and forgets about his wife and young child. The years pass and nothing is heard from him. When Saburō is eleven his mother becomes sick and dies. Her lasting sorrow is that her child would have to live as an orphan, a life that is “like a boat sailing without a rudder, without an island to lay its anchor.” But in the end, Saburō’s sorrowful fate is averted because of his fortuitous decision to go to Oya-ji. His meeting with Kannon follows the basic model of unhindered progress to the reijō that we have already seen in the Ishiyama-dera engi. Initially, the destitute boy hears about the Ōya Kannon from a deity of a local shrine (chinja 鎮社). In response to his earnest prayers to be reunited with his father, the kami tells him to travel to Oya-ji. Begging along the way, Saburo makes his way there and sees Kannon personally one night when the bodhisattva appears before him by walking out in the form of a monk from the inner sanctuary. In two dream oracles, Kannon tells Saburō that if he asks the name and home province of the pilgrims at Ōya he will eventually find his father. Following this advice, he recites Kannon’s name at night and

41 There are also conversion stories related to the Cave of the Shadow. The Buddhist pilgrims Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang both mention seeing a radiant form when they visited the cave; see Falk 1977, p. 283.
interrogates each pilgrim by day until finally, after several months at
the temple, he is happily reunited with his father at the front gate of
Oya-ji. The moral of the story is simple. The sincerity of the filial child
will inevitably be rewarded: “How indeed could there not be a divine
response of blessings from the Great Compassionate One, the solicitous
guide?” (Bando reijo-ki, p. 299). The “divine response” is the mani-
festation of the enlightening form of Kannon that guides Saburō to
meet his father. It is a graphic illustration of the bodhisattva’s vow in
the Shin kegon-gyō to save all those who have suffered from separation
from loved ones.

But why is Oya-ji such an auspicious site for such felicitous meet-
ings—not only between pilgrims and the bodhisattva, but also
between lost fathers and orphaned sons? The tale with its motif of
reunion at the reijo is based upon an origin myth of Mount Fudaraku
from a much earlier sutra, the Kanzeon bosatsu ojō jōdo hon’en-gyō 觀世音
菩薩往生浄土本縁経. In the tale, Saburō’s life as an orphan is com-
pared to being cast adrift on the sea without a safe harbor to rest. It is
a nice metaphor for the human condition. But it also suggests the
opposite image—a life saved from the sea of pain (kukai 苦海) by land-
ing at Kannon’s paradisiacal isle; Fudaraku is, if anything, a safe har-
bor for orphans and other castaways lost in samsara. It offers a place
to anchor the pilgrim’s life upon the firmament of the bodhisattva
way.

The Hon’en-gyō gives the origin myth behind this image of Fudaraku
in its tale of the two orphans, Sōri and Enri, who were born to an old
couple, the wealthy man named Chōna and his wife Manashira, a long
time ago in Southern India. When they are children, their mother
becomes very sick. Before she dies, Manashira begs her husband to
take good care of them. He remarries after her death so he can better
take care of his children, but this proves impossible to do when a
famine strikes the land. The father decides to travel to Mount
Dannara in search of food. While he is away the stepmother decides
that the children are a burden. She sails with them south to a desert
island and ends up abandoning them on the beach to starve to death.
When the children realize what she has done, they vow to become
bodhisattvas in their next life to save suffering beings. When the
father finds out what his wife has done, he travels to the island to
search for them. All he finds is their bones. Holding their bones in his
arms in tears, Chōna eventually dies on the island as well, vowing to

42 In all probability this was a forged Chinese scripture from the Six Dynasties period.
save all beings from suffering. At the end of the tale, it is explained that the mother was Amida, the father, Shakamuni, the older brother, Kannon, and the younger brother, Seishi. The island where they made their vows is, of course, Fudaraku. Here the vows of the castaways eventually transform them into bodhisattvas and the desert island of suffering into a Pure Land paradise of repose. In Fudaraku, father and children are reunited into one great spiritual Buddhist family for the salvation of all beings. Ōya-ji, by extension, as a temple evocative of Fudaraku, provides an ideal setting for reunions of orphans with their lost parents.

The power of stories such as these, as Stephen Crites has suggested, lies in the fact that “the symbolic worlds they project, are not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling places. People live in them” (1971, p. 295). In the Ōya-ji engi, Ōya-ji is not a monument, but a spiritual abode—or better put, a sanctuary—where pilgrims can dwell, not only physically, in close proximity to Kannon and the transformed kami, but spiritually as well (Knipe 1988, p. 111). The tale of Saburō reveals that this abode is none other than the refuge of great compassion that, if entered, can spiritually transform the pilgrim’s way of life. The bodhisattva path (mārga) does so by giving the pilgrim’s life a direction and, by revealing how the separate scenes of life are in fact interconnected, providing a sense of life’s larger meaning: it is, after all, Saburō’s awakening to the spirit of compassion through his unwavering filial piety that initially orients him, leading him to Ōya-ji and, finally, with Kannon’s help, to a reunion with his long-lost father. Saburō’s reverence for his father as well as the bodhisattva’s compassionate reward is what frees him from suffering. By the end of the tale, like the reunited family of buddhas and bodhisattvas on Fudaraku, Saburō and his father are reunited through their compassionate regard for each other before the gate of Ōya-ji.

To sum up, the Ōya-ji engi was a powerful tool for proselytization for several reasons. First, it takes the symbolic world from earlier Buddhist sutra and avadāna literature and refashions them, giving them a context that is local and seemingly “uniquely” Japanese. In the tales, Kannon is no longer foreign but a local deity who has taken a place on Japanese soil. The tales accomplish this feat by describing the local site of Kannon’s hierophany in Buddhistic terms, as the bodhisattva’s paradise on Mount Fudaraku. Second, by using one type of founding myth of meeting (subjugating the kami through the issue of spiritual

light), the *engi* also naturalizes the presence of Kannon through an account of how the new deity has displaced—or better put—transfigured the old. Third, the tales emphasize the spiritual benefits that can accrue to the faithful who come on pilgrimage to Ōya-ji. The image of the villagers and Saburō in the tales offers not only a model of Kannon’s spiritual efficacy but also a model for being a pilgrim—it shows not only what to expect but also what one should do if one wants to be saved. Such descriptive and narrative techniques as these were vital for the indigenization of the Kannon cult at Ōya and the popularization of the Bandō pilgrimage.

*The junrei uta as an Innovative Mode of Contact*

But does the *reiō-ki* genre offer anything new in the way the temple proselytization and pilgrimage was undertaken, offering a new literary “mode of contact” to tie Kannon’s own sacred image directly to the lives of the lay Japanese pilgrims who, by the eighteenth century, traveled the Bandō route in increasing numbers? One innovation that created a new mode of contact between bodhisattva and believer is the *junrei uta* (pilgrimage songs, also known as *goeika* 行詠歌). Of course, Buddhist poetry (*shakkyōka* 訚教歌) developed early on in Japan (e.g., Princess Senshi’s [964–1035] collection, the *Hōshin wakashū* 発心和歌集, a collection of poems on the aspiration for enlightenment, compiled in 1012) (see Yamada 1989, pp. 97–101). But what made the *junrei uta* special as Buddhist poetry was that they eventually became part of the major devotional liturgy on the pilgrimage; Kannon pilgrims repeated them at each temple along the route.

According to popular tradition, the *junrei uta* were authored by the retired emperor Kazan, who, accompanied by his guide, Butsugen (Buddha Eye), and six other holy men, was believed to be the founder of the three pilgrimage routes.44 Ryōsei dates Kazan’s pilgrimage along the Bandō route at 990, only two years after he was supposed to have opened the Saikoku route (*Bandō reiō-ki*, p. 221).45 In fact, the *junrei uta* were written over the centuries by anonymous pilgrims who dedicated them to the temples they had visited. In the concise and simple format of thirty-one-syllable *waka* poems, the prayers provided

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44 Ryōsei reserved judgement on this. Some of the Bandō *junrei uta* were of poor quality and, therefore, seemed of doubtful authenticity. See *Bandō reiō-ki*, p. 216. Kazan did, however, travel to some temples on the Saikoku route and left his poems as an offering. See, for example, his poem in the *Kokawa-dera engi*, in Sakurai et al. 1974, pp. 46–47.

45 Ryōsei draws his conclusions from the *Sugimoto-dera engi* 杉本寺縁起. See also Shimizutani 1971, pp. 458–59.
poetically a pure vision of the numinous sites as well as praise for the
spiritual power that resided there. By Ryōsei's time, they had become
a fixed liturgy, often collected in small printed volumes for use by the
pilgrims during their journey. In his preface to the Bandō reijō-ki,
Ryōsei claims that he based his work on copying engi from the temples
he visited (he did the pilgrimage three times), stories he heard
(kuchizutae 口つたへ) from "old men," and old records (kyūki 旧記) he
discovered during his researches. Concerning the latter, Ryōsei men­
tions discovering a document that recorded the junrei uta (sanjūsansho
eika 三十三所詠歌) for the Bandō route (Bandō reijō-ki, p. 216). When
Ryōsei wrote the Bandō reijō-ki, he followed the practice of other eight­
teenth-century engi compilers by combining all these materials to
make his new reijō-ki collection. He inserted the poem-prayers within
the engi and added a short didactic section and additional tales to
illustrate their religious meaning.

In the Ōya-ji engi, the poem-prayer is found between the temple
foundation tale and the tale of Saburo, the first lay pilgrim:

\[
\text{na o kiku mo/ fukaki megumi ni/ Ōya-dera/ inoru makoto no/shirushi}
\text{naru kana}
\]

Even when I hear your name, I am deeply blessed, Ōya-dera,
The wondrous outcome of my heartfelt prayers.

(Bandō reijō-ki, p. 299).

The positioning of this poem-prayer in the body of the engi is cru­
cial for tying the threads of a pilgrim’s life to the temple itself.
Because of its legendary origin, the poem-prayer symbolizes the

46 Concerning his sources for the Bandō reijō-ki, Ryōsei mentions discovering a “small engi
volume” at Sugimoto-dera under the pedestal of the main image, an “old record” (koki 古記)
dated Shōka 2 (1258) that he discovered at the sutra repository on Mount Tsukuba, and the
unnamed junrei uta collection, with no mention about where he found it. Shimizutani
Kosho argues it is a text from Sugimoto-dera, an engi/junrei uta collection that is mentioned
briefly in another Bandō guide, the Bandō sanjūsanshō doki 坂東三十三力所道記 (1701) or
the Bandō junrei uta 坂東巡个歌 (date unknown), the worn woodblocks of which are still
stored there (1971, p. 375).

47 In this respect Ryōsei imitated Ensō’s earlier engi collection for the Chichibu route,
the Chichibu engi reigen entsuden. For a full discussion of the Bandō reijō-ki’s literary
antecedents, see Shimizutani 1971, pp. 398–419.

48 This poem-prayer is different from the one in general circulation today in the stan­
dard pilgrimage guides: na o kiku mo/ megumi Ōya no/ Kanzeon/ michibikitamae/ shiru no shi­
ranu mo. “The mere sound of (the bodhisattva’s) name is blessed. O Ōya Kanzeon! Lead
both the knowledgeable and the ignorant (to the Pure Land).” See, for example, Hirahata
1985, p. 133; Shimizutani 1971, p. 90. This junrei uta is from the so-called vulgate collection
(rufubon 流布本) printed in several editions in the Genroku 14 (1701), Kyōho 6 (1711), and
Meiwa 3 (1766) periods respectively. Twenty-two of the poems collected in Ryōsei’s text are
different from those in the vulgate text. See Shimizutani 1971, p. 467.
sacred historical link between the founding of the local temple by the wandering holy men and the pilgrimage route to it by Kazan. Moreover, the junrei uta also forges a link between the founding tale and Saburō’s story with its pun on ōya or oyaji, which signifies both the temple itself and his “parent” or “old man,” and kiku, which signifies both Saburō’s hearing about Oya Kannon from his local kami and his asking pilgrims their names (na o tou 名を問ふ) to find his lost father. Here the poem-prayer weaves Saburō’s miracle tale into the institutional life of meetings at Ōya-ji. The junrei uta is also the key liturgy for the pilgrims who come to the temple. By reciting the poem-prayer before the senju image, the pilgrim not only hears the temple’s name but also becomes mindful of the sacred history of the temple—Kannon’s initial radiant manifestation on the cliff face, Kazan’s founding of the pilgrimage, and Saburō’s miraculous reunion with his father at Ōya-ji. Becoming mindful by reciting the poem-prayer, the pilgrim gains the “purity of vision” to see the Ōya Kannon as it really is—not as an inanimate statue, but as an inconceivable form radiating an aura of spiritual light, a mysterious and compassionate presence that in the past has been deeply involved in freeing the faithful from suffering. At this ritual juncture, when the reciter gazes upon the cliff face, he or she becomes the latest pilgrim to meet the Ōya Kannon and to be bathed by its spiritual blessings. The pilgrim becomes karmically tied to Ōya’s sacred history as the latest causal link (en) in the chain of the salvation.

Does the Ōya-ji engi create a new literary mode of contact between the Kannon of Buddhist scripture and the lives of the Bandō pilgrims who worship at Ōya-dera? I think it does. The Ōya-ji engi creates a karmic chain of salvation that begins with the appearance of Kannon, whose mysterious activities (fushigi no innen) create the proper (that is, the properly Buddhist code) soil for “the seed of Buddhahood to arise” (engi) (the context, Kannon’s Fudaraku reiō abode). As a now localized deity, Kannon produces a drama of wonders (reigen) and miracles (kidoku) making up the sacred history (engi) of the temple that, narrativized in the engi, attracts pilgrims to come to the temple. The Ōya-ji engi also promotes a two-way communication. The pilgrim who is attracted to Ōya by hearing the tales about the marvelous image also communicates with the author of blessings. The pilgrims appear before the Kannon Hall as a sanctuary, and, while gazing at the image, offer their own Buddhistically coded message by repeating the junrei uta as they worship. Their prayers create a ritual link with Kannon by binding them karmically (kechien 結縁) to the bodhisattva, a condition that results in the benevolent response of a transfer of merit (ekō). Understanding the Ōya-ji engi in this way helps us to appreciate how
were powerful vehicles of religious instruction and experience in eighteenth-century Japan. Rather than being the fossilized remains of an important medieval sacred genre, reijō-ki gave new life and new meaning to the old engi stories. By adding the junrei uta, Kannon reijō-ki offered a new mode of contact that tied pilgrims directly in worship to the salvation history of the numinous site. As a product of the social-historical, institutional, and cultic contexts of temple pilgrimage as well as the medium that gave them representation, reijō-ki helped to ensure the continuing vitality of the Kannon pilgrimage in Japan into the modern era.

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