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TRANSLATION

Tsukumogami ki 付喪神記
to (The Record of Tool Specters)

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According to Miscellaneous Records of Yin and Yang, after a span of one hundred years, utsuwamono or kibutsu 器物 (containers, tools, and instruments) receive souls and trick people. They are called tsukumogami. In view of that, every year people bring out the old tools from their houses and discard them in the alleys before the New Year. This event, called susuharai 煤払 (lit. “sweeping soot,” year-end house cleaning), is carried out to avoid misfortune caused by tsukumogami tool specters but a year short of a hundred.

This custom of renewing the hearth fire, drawing fresh water, and renewing everything from clothing to furniture at the New Year is thought to have started from the proud extravagance of the well-to-do, but now we understand the custom is meant to prevent the calamities caused by tsukumogami.

Around the era of Kōhō 康保 (964–967) perhaps, according to the usual custom of Sweeping Soot, old tools were thrown away from houses both inside the capital and in the surrounding area. Those abandoned instruments got together to discuss their fate: “We have faithfully served the houses as furniture and utensils for a long time. Instead of getting the reward that is our due, we are abandoned in the alleys to be kicked by oxen and horses. Insult has been added to injury, and this is the greatest insult of all! Whatever it takes, we should become specters and exact vengeance.” In the middle of these heated discussions, a Buddhist rosary named Ichiren Novice (Ichiren nyūdō 一連入道) cut into the debate: “Everyone, it must be our karma to be discarded like this. We should return hostility with benevolence.” Hearing the Novice, a club named Rough John (Aratarō 荒太郎) became angry and yelled, “You meddling Novice! Generally speaking, it is half-baked Buddhist priests that people can’t stand to look at. Go away!” Aratarō then beat Ichiren so badly that the Novice’s rosary knot was nearly severed. Ichiren Novice was near to death, and only by the help of his disciples did he escape.

Thus, the discussion went on and each was asked to voice an opinion. Professor Classical Chinese Literature (Kobun sensei 古文先生) said: “The beginning of Creation is chaos and there is no form for humans, grasses, or trees. But because


1. In’yōzakki 陰陽雑記. The work is assumed to be in classical Chinese. However, nothing about this work is known; there is no known text with this title.
**Figure 1.** People discard objects during the *susuharai*. From *Tsukumogami* scroll, property of Kyoto University Library (Kyoto Daigaku Fuzoku Tosho-kan Shozō). Courtesy of Kyoto University Library.

**Figure 2.** The abandoned objects discuss their revenge. From *Tsukumogami* scroll, property of Kyoto University Library (Kyoto Daigaku Fuzoku Tosho-kan Shozō). Courtesy of Kyoto University Library.
of yin-yang energy and the heavenly furnace, things are given temporary shapes. If we chance upon the art of yin-yang and heavenly craft, we, inanimate beings, will surely be given souls. Aren’t such stories as the old pebbles’ talking² and Mr. Gu’s turning into a carriage³ testimony to the transformation of beings at the time of yin-yang change? So let us wait for the setsubun 節分 (the lunar New Year’s Eve), when yin and yang change their places and shapes are formed out of entities. At that time we must empty ourselves and leave our bodies to the hands of a creation god (zōkashin 造化神). Then we will surely become specters.” Everyone wrote down what the professor said on pieces of cloth and left.

Meanwhile, although Ichiren Novice was a pious man, he could not help but feel bitter and he insisted on going back to vent his anger. His disciples were able to restrain him, just barely, but he continued to seethe with resentment.

Hitosuji ni / omoi mo kiranu / tama no o no / musuhoboretaru / waga kokoro kana

Like a string of rosary beads, my mind cannot be severed from angry thoughts.

2. The story appears in Zuo Zhuan 左伝 (Chronicle of Zuo, ca. fourth century BCE), the earliest Chinese narrative history. Quoted in the head note of WASHIO 1992, 16.
3. The reference is unknown.
I wish I could fall and disappear with my disciples, for my life is momentary, just like dew on the grass in an alley.

New Year’s Eve arrived at last. The old tools emptied themselves as Professor Classical Chinese Literature had told them, and entered into the bosom of the creation god. Since the tools lived meritoriously for more than one hundred years and the creation god had the power of transformation, no sooner did the two forces combine than the old tools became vengeful specters. Some tools became men or women, old or young, others took the shape of demons or goblins. Still others became beasts such as foxes and wolves. These various shapes were indeed fearful beyond description.

The tsukumogami discussed where they should live. “If it’s too far from

4. Traditionally, on the night of setsubun, people scatter beans, one for each of their years alive, saying “oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi” (demons out, fortune in). In some rites, a male from the community goes to a house pretending to be an oni (wearing a paper oni mask) and is chased out while people scatter their beans.
human habitation, it would be inconvenient for obtaining food.” So they decide to move to the place behind Mt. Funaoka 船岡山,5 deep in Nagasaka 長坂.6

From there, tsukumogami ranged in and out of the capital7 to avenge their grudges. As they took all kinds of humans and animals for food, people mourned terribly. But since specters are invisible, there was nothing that people could do but pray to the Buddhas and gods. Unlike the mortals who had cast them aside, the vengeful specters were having a great time celebrating and feasting—building a castle out of flesh and creating a blood fountain, dancing, drinking, and merrymaking. They even boasted that celestial pleasures could not surpass theirs.

5. Mt. Funaoka, which is more like a hill, is located northwest of the capital, Kyoto (present-day Kita-ku).
6. Nagasaka is a mountainous road that leads to Tanba province (an area that straddles present-day eastern Hyogo prefecture and the middle part of Kyoto). It is located farther northwest of Mt. Funaoka.
7. Kyō-Shirakawa 京白河. City of Kyoto and Shirakawa, which is an area outside the capital, east of Kamo River. Shirakawa is known as an important road with a checkpoint barrier as well as a place of scenic beauty.
Reider: The Record of Tool Specters

Topic: Flower

Haru tatsu to / iu sono hi yori / waga gotoku / sakura mo hana no / nasake tsukuramu

On the very first day of spring, perhaps the cherry blossoms have become sentient like me

Ika ni shite / yōtaru hana zo / yamazakura / miru hito hoto ni / kokoro mado-wasu

How did mountain cherry blossoms get magical power? Their beauty enchants all who see them

Chinese poetry expresses one’s heart. Without talent for articulating the beauty of nature, we are no different from the old tools without souls we once were:

吾変明皇按楽來  I have changed myself into Minghuang\(^8\) to play music

花驚褐鼓一時開  Startled by my drum,\(^9\) [trees] simultaneously burst into bloom

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**Figure 6.** The *tsukumogami* worshipping the Great Shape-Shifting God. From *Tsukumogami* scroll, property of Kyoto University Library. Courtesy of Kyoto University Library.

8. Minghuang 明皇, Brilliant Emperor, is another title of Emperor Xuan Zong 玄宗 (reigned 713–755) of the Tang 唐 Dynasty.

9. David Chen (Professor, The Ohio State University, personal communication) kindly pointed out that the character 褐, a commoner’s clothes, is mistaken for 羯, an ancient barbarian tribe in the northwest of China. According to Dr. Chen, the 羯 tribesmen made a good drum of a special design known as Jie drum 羯鼓, which was adopted by early Chinese musicians, and this was the
Japanese is a divine country where everyone believes in Shinto. While we have already received our forms from the creation god, we have not worshipped him, and this is as if we were nonsentient beings like trees and rocks. I propose that we make the creation god our patron and worship him. That way we will be sure to have a long life with abundant posterity.

Thus a shrine was built soon in the recess of Mt. Funaoka and was named the shrine of the Great Shape-Shifting God (Henge daimyōjin 変化大明神). They chose a Shinto priest’s headgear for a priest, bells for shrine maidens, and wooden clappers for kagura performers,10 and they offered prayers every morning and observed rituals every evening. Though they were evil and violent specters, they

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10. Kagura literally means “music of the gods”; it is the appellation for the most representative performing art of Japanese religious music. The etymology of kagura is kami no kura, the “seat of the kami”—the kami are seen as dwelling in the kagura performance. Averbuch 1995, 6.
Figure 8. The divine boys appear above the Palace. From *Tsukumogami* scroll, property of Kyoto University Library (Kyoto Daigaku Fuzoku Toshokan Shozō). Courtesy of Kyoto University Library.

Figure 9. The divine boys attacking the *tsukumogami*. From *Tsukumogami* scroll, property of Kyoto University Library (Kyoto Daigaku Fuzoku Toshokan Shozō). Courtesy of Kyoto University Library.

(The remarks of the divine boys and *tsukumogami* on the illustration: “All of you, we know what you’ve done. We’ve come to punish you. But if you stop killing people and decide to embrace Buddhism, we will spare your lives.”

“Thank you, thank you! From now on we will not have any evil thought and we will convert to Buddhism. Please spare us.”)
were pious. It is like that great thief, Dao Zhi 盗跖,\(^{11}\) who followed the five cardinal Confucian virtues.\(^{12}\)

They also proposed to have a religious festival as other shrines did, and they made a portable shrine. In the deep night of the fifth day of the fourth month, they made a procession eastward along the First Avenue.\(^{13}\) They made a festival float mounted with a decorative halberd, and other elaborate decorations.

At that moment the Prince Regent's party\(^{14}\) was proceeding westward along the First Avenue to the Imperial Palace through Tatchimon Gate 達智門\(^{15}\) for

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11. A famous thief who was active during the time of Confucius (551–479 BCE).
13. The route of the tsukumogami's procession going eastward along the First Avenue corresponds to the route of hyakki yagyō 百鬼夜行 (Night procession of one hundred demons) in “Ongyō no otoko Rokkakudō no Kannon no tasuke ni yorite mi o arawasu koto” 隠形男依六角堂観音助顕身語, the thirty-second tale of Volume Sixteen of Konjaku monogatarishū (See Tyler 1987, 99–101. For the Japanese text, see SNKBZ 36: 271–76.
14. Kanpaku denka 関白殿下. Fujiwara Saneyori 藤原実頼 (900–970) becomes Kanpaku or Regent in 967, which corresponds to the fourth year of the Kōhō era, the background for this story. According to Ōkagami (The great mirror, ca. 1085–1125), his younger brother, Fujiwara no Morosuke 藤原師輔 (908–960), encountered the hyakki yagyō. See note 17.
15. One of the twelve external gates of the Greater Imperial Palace or Daidairi 大内裏. Tatchimon is located far east of the north side of the Greater Imperial Palace.
a special investiture. Here the Regent’s party encountered the *tsukumogami*’s procession. Astounded, the escorts and outriders of the Regent’s party fell from their horses in a swoon of fright while other attendants were stricken as well. The Regent, alone of his party, was not agitated or frightened. From inside his carriage, he glared angrily at the specters. A flame suddenly spurted from an amulet the Regent kept on himself, and in no time the flame spread and attacked the *tsukumogami*. The specters fled for their lives before the flames.

The Regent returned home, for the incident prevented him from visiting the Imperial Palace, but he reported this strange encounter to the Emperor at dawn. The Emperor was astonished and immediately had a diviner see to the matter. According to the diviner’s report, restrained behavior was required, so the Emperor ordered offerings to be made to various Shinto shrines and for Buddhist priests of the exoteric and esoteric schools to pray in their temples.

Enquiring about the miracle of the Regent’s amulet, the diviner discovered

16. The Prince Regent’s encounter with the *tsukumogami* on his way to the Imperial Palace refers to the story of Fujiwara no Morosuke in *Ôkagami* (snkbz 34: 166–67. For an English translation, see McCULLOUGH 1980, 136).

17. The amulet (of *Sonshô Darani*, see note 19 below) carried by the Regent that protects him from the demons is described in “Sonshô darani no genriki ni yorite oni no nan o nogaruru koto” 依尊勝陀羅尼験力遁鬼難語, forty-second tale of Volume Fourteen of *Konjaku monogatarishû*. (See TYLER 1987, 237–39. For the Japanese text, see SNKBZ 35: 508–12.)
that a certain bishop had copied Sonshō Darani 尊勝陀羅尼\(^\text{18}\) and had prayed for the sake of his patron, the Regent. The Regent then kept the amulet on him everywhere he went. Hearing the story, the Emperor issued an order to leave all matter of prayers in the future to the bishop. The bishop declined the request again and again, but an imperial order was hard to refuse. He finally agreed to carry out the Great Rite of Sonshō Darani at Seiryōden 清涼殿.\(^\text{19}\) The attending priests were all excellent, and skilled in the Yogācāra teachings (yugakyō 瑜伽教). Smoke from the ritual burning of mystic wooden sticks filled the court and prayers resounded in the palace.

On the night of the sixth day, on his way to Seiryōden to listen to the service, the Emperor saw a brilliant light just above the palace. Inside the light were seven or eight extraordinary-looking armed divine boys (gohō dōji 護法童子). Some had swords and others had bejeweled staffs—they all flew northwards. The emperor was moved to tears, understanding that the attendants of two myōō 明王 (Vidyārāja)\(^\text{20}\) had appeared to conquer the evil specters. The emperor then

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\(^\text{18}\) The full name is Butchō Sonshō Darani 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼 (Dhāraṇī of the victorious buddha crown). This dhāraṇī was used to prevent natural disasters, secure longevity, and ward off evils.

\(^\text{19}\) The Emperor’s Residence within the Imperial Palace compound.

\(^\text{20}\) Nimyōō 二明王. They are Fudō myōō 不動明王 (Acala Vidyā-rāja), the Immovable Protector of Dharma, and Gōzanze myōō 降三世明王 (Trailokya-vijaya), Conqueror of the Three Worlds.
went to the place where the service was being held and he worshipped the principal Buddha image. After the service ended, and all the rituals were over, he summoned the bishop and said, “It’s not that miracles of Shingon Buddhism have only begun now, but the miraculous appearance of the divine boys is due to your pious practice.” The bishop was thankful for the imperial reverence for Buddhism and bowed out of the royal presence with tears of gratitude.

In the meantime, the divine boys flew to the tsukumogami’s den. Sacred “Wheels of Dharma” (rinpō 輪宝) whirled around in the air; flames from them attacked the tsukumogami and with little effort, the divine boys conquered the specters. The divine boys did not destroy the tsukumogami however. Full of mercy, they said, “If you forswear evil, promise not to harm humans, and revere the Three Treasures of Buddhism and seek buddhahood, we will spare your lives. Otherwise, you shall all perish.” The terrified specters forswore their vengeance and vowed to observe Buddhist doctrines.

Afterwards, the tsukumogami gathered together all shaken with fear—their close brush with doom fresh in their minds. One specter said, “We have incurred divine punishment because we took many lives and did much that was evil. But observing our penitence, they have generously spared our lives. We should aban-
don the quest for fleeting glory and follow the way of Buddha.” The rest of the 

*tsukumogami* agreed and immediately sought spiritual awakening.

They discussed who would be their mentor in Buddhism. “That Ichiren 

whom we scorned is a revered master, known for his experience in the doctrine 

and practice of the various Buddhist schools. Let us ask him to guide us. What a 

shame that we humiliated him last winter. But if we show our repentance, he will 

perhaps benevolently forgive us.” So saying they visited Ichiren’s dwelling.

As for Ichiren, [he had become the most pious of Buddhist priests, and was 

now called Holy Ichiren],[^21^] he was deeply weary of this world since last win-

ter’s incident, so he became a recluse in the deep mountains. He made the wind 

through the pine trees his friend, and thus awoke to the twelve links in the chain 

that bind us to suffering (*jūni innen* 十二因縁). He listened to the sound of 

water in the valley and thus cleansed one hundred and eight? polluting thoughts 

from his mind.[^22^] One evening a faint sound of the evening bell in the distance 

made Holy Ichiren think, “The day is almost over,” when he heard a knock 

on the door. “Who could it be at such an hour?” he thought as he opened the

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[^21^]: Ichiren’s title changes from *nyūdō* 入道 (Novice) to *shōnin* 上人 (Holy Priest) at this time.

[^22^]: *hyaku hachi no bonnō* 百八煩悩. One-hundred-and-eight *kleśa* or afflictions. The number 

“one hundred eight” signifies many.
door and was surprised to see specters of various extraordinary shapes gathered about his doorstep. Astonished, Holy Ichiren asked, “Who are you? Are you demons to shake my religious faith?” The tsukumogami replied that they were the specters of the familiar old tools and explained their situation—how the creation god transformed them into specters and the Buddhist divine boys awakened their religious faith. To this, Holy Ichiren replied, “I was wondering what happened to you all since then. I’m so happy that not only you visit me but also you have become religious.” Among the old tools, the club that beat Holy Ichiren nearly to death was especially repentant for his behavior. The holy man, however, comforted him, “Don’t say that. It was that very incident that led me to withdraw from the world. Thus you should be called my mentor in the way of the Buddha.”

Soon Holy Ichiren shaved their heads and had them don Buddhist garb. Starting from the ten Buddhist precepts given to a novice, under the guidance of Holy Ichiren, they progressed to receive more complex precepts.27 One day the

23. Intoku honshōō nyorai 因徳本性王如来
24. Chōju daisenō nyorai 長寿大仙王如来
25. Myōshiki jizaiō nyorai 妙色自在王如来
26. Hokkai taishōō nyorai 法界体性王如来
27. gusokukai 具足戒 (upasampadā). Buddhist precepts for monks and nuns. There are two hundred and fifty rules for the fully ordained Buddhist monk, and three hundred and forty-eight for the fully ordained Buddhist nun.
tool priests said to the holy man, “We understand that each and every Buddhist doctrine in the cannon opens a passage to Buddhahood, but a pace of progress towards enlightenment depends upon the profundity of teachings. If possible we would like to receive profound teachings and attain Buddhahood swiftly.”

Ever modest, Ichiren replied, “Although I am a priest of limited ability, under the guidance of virtuous priests I have studied teachings of various sects that came to Japan. The profundity of Shakamuni Buddha’s teachings varies depending on the capacities of the sentient beings, but they all partake of the virtue of the Dharmadatu, and we cannot easily discuss their advantages and disadvantages. When it comes, however, to the immediate attainment of Buddhahood in this very body (sokushin tongo 即身頓悟), it resides solely in the power of the Three Mystic Practices of the Shingon esoteric sect. Long ago, when Kōbō Daishi弘法大師30 preached the teaching of immediate attainment of Buddhahood, the master priests of various sects doubted it and did not follow his teaching. Consequently, important priests of various sects gathered at the Imperial Court and debated the doctrinal interpretations. The priests all delivered powerful speeches like Kasen’en迦栴延 (Kātyāyana)31 and Furuna富留那 (Purna),32 but none surpassed Kōbō Daishi’s eloquence, and his discourse on samādhi (meditative states) for enlightenment was as clear as glass. As he quite logically argued the teachings of the attainment for Buddhahood in this very lifetime (sokushin jōbutsu 即身成仏), the scholarly priests of every school at the debate were rendered speechless.

“Then the Emperor said, ‘The excellence of your discourse is doubtless. But I still wish to see the proof of it.’ Whereupon Kōbō Daishi sat facing south, and no sooner did he exercise the Three Mystic Practices, than his body was fused with Mahāvairocana: on his head was the crown of Five Wisdoms, emitting a halo of five colors from his back. The Emperor bowed his head, his subjects and priests prostrated and worshiped Kōbō Daishi who had become Shana

29. *sanmitsu* 三密. They are *shin-kū-i* 身口意 (the action of body or *mudra*, speech or incantation of mantra, and mind or concentration on the Principal Buddha),
31. One of the ten great disciples of Gautama Buddha or Shakamuni. Kasen’en is famous for his debating skills.
32. One of the ten great disciples of Gautama Buddha or Shakamuni. Furuna is noted for preaching.
33. *gochi* 五智. They are the: 1) wisdom of knowing the quintessence of all existences; 2) mirror-like wisdom, which reflects all phenomenal things as they are; 3) wisdom of observing the equality of all things; 4) wisdom of observing the distinctive features of all phenomena; and 5) wisdom of accomplishing metamorphoses. Mahāvairocana has a crown bearing five miniature figures of Five Wisdom Buddhas.
After awhile, Kōbō Daishi returned to his human form and thus demonstrated to them the doctrine of *shōbutsu funi* 生佛不二 or the non-duality of a living human and Buddha. Any doubt about the immediate realization of Buddhahood was solved on that day and from then on Shingon esoteric Buddhism has prospered. Everyone, I urge you to pursue the teaching of the Shingon sect and attain enlightenment,” and every one of the tool priests joyfully embraced the Shingon teachings.

As *tsukumogami* were all from birth great vessels (capable of holding vast knowledge), the reality and wisdom of the Two Mandalas as preached in the King of Sutras (Mahāvairocana Sutra) were transmitted to them completely, with nothing left out. Holy Ichiren said, “That Ryūchi Daishi (Nāgabodhi)34 of old was waiting for Konchi (Vajrabodhi)35 and Kōchi (Amogha-vajra)36 for eight hundred years so took an elixir to (extend his life and )transmit esoteric Buddhism. As for me, fortunately I am blessed with you disciples and can teach all doctrines of the Shingon sect. My wish is realized.” So saying, at the age of one hundred eight, Ichiren entered the state of *samadhi* by reciting *mantras* and attained Buddhahood in the sitting posture, there, before his disciples. Immediately the western gate of his hut opened, releasing a brilliant light and the room transformed into the Paradise of Mahavairocana.

To witness a person attaining enlightenment is a thing unheard of even among the most advanced bodhisattvas at the tenth stage on the path, let alone ordinary and stupid mortals. However, due to the skillful means of miraculous grace, the practitioners of the Shingon sect are sometimes able to see it. Witnessing Holy Ichiren attain Buddhahood, the old tool monks applied themselves to the ascetic practices all the more.

After some time, one old tool monk declared, “While living together like this is good to teach one another and deepen our knowledge, we may become lenient toward each other and this may disturb our practice. That’s why the scripture says, ‘Go deep into the mountains and seek the way of Buddha.’ So we should go to the deep mountain valleys, severing any connection with the secular world,

34. A Buddhist priest in South India and the fourth patriarch in the lineage of esoteric Buddhism. He had extraordinary supernatural power and is said to have lived several hundred years in order to transmit the esoteric teaching to Kongōchi.

35. Konchi signifies Kongōchi (713–741), the fifth patriarch in the lineage of Shingon esoteric Buddhism. Having a revelatory dream of Kannon Bodhisattva, he moved from India to China in 720 and taught esoteric Buddhism in China. He was revered by Emperor Xuanzong (玄宗, 685–762) and translated a number of esoteric scriptures in Chang-an and Lo-yang.

36. Kōchi signifies Fukū Sanzō (Amoghavajra 705–774, also known as Fukū Kongō 不空金剛), the sixth patriarch in the lineage of Shingon esoteric Buddhism. He was a disciple of Kongōchi and translated a great number of scriptures that he had brought from his trip to India and Sri Lanka.
and devote ourselves to training.” The rest of the tool monks agreed, and though reluctant to part, they went separate ways. One decided to live on the carpet of moss between rocks in deep mountains; another, under a pine tree in a valley.

Thus, each tool monk matured its ascetic practices and attained the state of Samadhi in their very bodies. Depending on the principal Buddha or Bodhisattva each tool revered for his or her ascetic practices, the character of their attainments varies. Some master the mantra of Kudonsen 瞿曇仙37 and attain the power of enlightenment associated with that Buddha and his mantra (jimyō shicchi 持明悉地), others attain the power of enlightenment of all the various buddhas (shobutsu shicchi 諸仏悉地) by abiding in the central realm of the mandala [where Dainichi Buddha resides and whence all other Buddhas emanate] and from whence one sees the true nature of all things (chūdai hosshō 中台法性).

Regarding the teaching of realizing Buddhahood by nonsentient beings, although both Tendai 天台 and Kegon 華厳 sects also preach this, their teachings are amorphous and they have not mastered all the subtleties. Therefore, while other sects advocate only sōmoku jōbutsu 草木成仏 (the enlightenment of plants), the teaching of the Three Mysteries of the Shingon sect alone goes so far as to say sōmoku hijō hosshin shugyō jōbutsu 草木非情発心修行成仏 (plants and nonsentient beings become Buddhas by arousing the desire for enlightenment and performing ascetic and religious practices). There is nothing in the jikkai 十界 (ten worlds)38 that does not possess the virtue of the letter A 阿 [which is the substance of the universe, symbolizing the unity of the whole world; the origin of all elements of the world].39 If attainment of Buddhahood by awakening and training is possible for animate beings, how much more so for the nonsentient beings? Now listening to the tale of how these old tools came to spiritual awakening, you must believe even more in the profundity of the yoga of the Three Mysteries.

Scholars of the exoteric Buddhist schools say that according to Agon 阿含,40 oni and deities reside on he streets and in the houses, filling every inch of space. The exoteric Buddhists believe that the transformation of old tools into specters

37. An immortal mountain wizard who lived in ancient India.
38. They are, in descending order: bukkai 佛界 (realm of Buddhas), bosatsu-kai 菩薩界 (realm of Bodhisattvas), engaku-kai 緣覚界 (realm of Pratyekabuddhas), shōmon-kai 声聞界 (realm of srāvakas), ten-kai 天界 (heaven), jin-kai 人界 (world of men), shura-kai 修羅界 (world of aśura), chikushō-kai 畜生界 (world of animals), gaki-kai 餓鬼界 (world of hungry ghosts), and jigoku-kai 地獄界 (hell).
39. “A” is the first sound in the Sanskrit alphabet and it embodies the mystic truth in esoteric Buddhist belief. According to esoteric Buddhism, all phenomena are originally “unproduced” or uncreated, and this principle is symbolized by the letter A. The one who meditates on A will attain Buddhahood.
40. A generic term for “hinayāna” Buddhist sutras, as well as a specific group of sutras (the Āgama sutras).
is due to the deities and oni possessing them. They ask, “how could inanimate objects have souls?”

Indeed, the difference between esoteric Buddhism and exoteric Buddhism is great. The self-nature of the letter A exists inherently in both the animate and inanimate, and the uncreated A does not disappear or become exhausted. How then, could the tools—also inanimate objects—need to borrow the nature of others to become themselves?

If you wish to know the deepest meaning, quickly escape from the net of exoteric Buddhism and enter Shingon esoteric Buddhism.

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