



Iyanaga Nobumi 彌永信美, *Daikokuten hensō: Bukkyō shinwagaku I* 大黒天変相—仏教神話学 I

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Iyanaga Nobumi, *Kannon henyōtan: Bukkyō shinwagaku II*
観音変容譚—仏教神話学 II

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THIS SET OF WORKS constitutes the first serious attempt ever conducted to develop an approach to Buddhist studies that the author calls “Buddhist mythology.” Iyanaga Nobumi, who previously studied under Rolf A. Stein of the Collège de France, offers an elaborate study of mythological representations of the Buddhist

divinity Daikokuten (Sk. Mahākāla) and bodhisattva Kannon (Sk. Avalokiteśvara) throughout Asia to attempt to demonstrate not merely that Buddhist art, architecture, and literature included a developed mythology but that Buddhist mythology should constitute a basic approach within Buddhist studies.

It would be an understatement to call these works a “great read.” Beginning with the Introduction to the first volume, I realized that I was reading work that transcends academic scholarship. While, as I will later explain, such a condition does at points prevent the level of meticulous analysis ideal to academic works, Iyanaga has spent these past 15 years or so drawing together an impressive compendium of sources into a narrative that is irresistibly engaging. Iyanaga’s use of the Japanese language can only be compared with the great scholars of Japanese literary-religious studies, figures such as Abe Yasurō in our era; it is clear that he has spent much of the time in writing these works not only in analyzing the works at hand but also in carefully constructing a discipline in convincing as well as edifying language.

I recently read an article that bewailed the loss of virtually all *truly* independent films on the American scene. I have to note that the field of the study of religion and, particularly, of Buddhist studies in the United States, while witnessing an array of “popular” or pseudo-theological works on Buddhism—almost invariably produced by “mainstream” commercial publishers—has in the main made no sustained effort to support the production of scholarly works by non-professionals or, for that matter, to complement the “popular” works with accessible scholarly productions (with the noted exception of some of the work by Donald Lopez). We speak largely to each other and tend to either use arguments weighted heavily with theoretical analysis (or, primarily, name-dropping) that can be engaged only by the mutually initiated in the institution or avoid theoretical discussions to such a degree that we fail to speak across disciplines within the institution, let alone outside of it. We, in short, as Foucault could have told us, live and operate within the academic institution and, as a colleague familiar with the American military complex recently noted, our institution is perhaps as martial and hierarchical as the latter.

Thus I welcome the engaging and brilliant work of Iyanaga, who unabashedly rejects notions that works produced in academic institutions are necessarily superior to those created outside. His is, like none other of which I am aware in Japan or the States, legitimate research on Buddhism conducted outside of the confines of the academy. Moreover, in spite of the fact that, as he admits, Iyanaga does not have sustained professional training in reading Buddhist Chinese nor the array of other languages via which Buddhism was transmitted throughout Asia (1: 59–60), his analyses are carefully conducted and provide what are sometimes novel yet compelling interpretations.

First, however, let us return to Iyanaga’s prologue and introductory methodological discussion. Iyanaga repeatedly reminds the reader of his debt to Rolf A. Stein, and makes special note of Stein’s brief overview of “mythologie bouddhique,” published originally in *Dictionnaire des Mythologies* (Yves Bonnefoy ed.), and incorpo-

rated, we may note, into a one-volume English language edition of the work translated and edited under the direction of Wendy Doniger (*Asian Mythologies*, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 119–36). It is indeed clear that the academic lineage to which Iyanaga is indebted in the work is especially that of Stein (1: 17), drawing directly on the approach of structuralist mythology originally outlined by the great French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1: 28–29), although the larger bodies of work of French scholars at *Hōbōgirin* (for which Iyanaga has written) and Americans such as Doniger form an additional context of recent influence.

Iyanaga first addresses the pre-Stein absence of the study of Buddhist mythology. This absence, he notes, is not unique to Buddhist studies insofar as scholars of Christian and Islamic studies similarly have had a tendency to view mythological features as marginal to those traditions—presuming a strict distinction between theirs and religion in non-literate cultures, commonly associated with *myth as such* (*nama no mama no shinwa*). Iyanaga grants, at the same time, that the advanced and abstract character of many teachings in major religions such as Buddhism, as well as the fact that Buddhist teachings incorporated “Hindu” deities prominently among its heavenly divinities, have constituted impediments to the development of Buddhist mythology (1: 30).

Iyanaga clarifies the parameters of the methodology of Buddhist mythology as regards the representations or deities or venerables (*son*) in all forms of Buddhist literature. He makes it clear that the approach is not interested in the nature of such figures, but rather the discourses regarding them produced in cultural contexts (1: 33). That is, Buddhist mythology as a discipline does not search for the original or “true” form or nature of a figure such as Maheśvara (J. Daijizaiten), who upon examination is represented in at least five distinct ways in Buddhist works (1: 34–35). For the very same reason, it is ultimately inaccurate even to speak of Buddhism’s incorporation of Hindu deities insofar as any assumption that they are, in truth, Hindu in orientation betrays a substantialist position (1: 36). Moreover, the incorporation of Amaterasu, Hachiman, and other kami into the Japanese Buddhist pantheon is a form of assimilating deities into Buddhism (*shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合) that (while developing according to specific historical conditions), rather than unique to Japan, is common throughout Buddhist Asia. That is, for the Japanese, heavenly deities such as Indra and Brahmā were from the very beginning *Buddhist* figures, and the incorporation of native kami through the discourse of origin-trace (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹) simply followed traditional Mahāyāna thought, which assimilated divinities into the Buddhist cosmos through the notion of expedient devices (Sk. *upāya*, J. *hōben*) (1: 40).

Explaining further the approach of Buddhist mythology, Iyanaga makes it all the more clear why he has stressed its anti-substantialist position. Buddhist mythology is not about examining the divinities as such but rather their narratives (*monogatari*) or, we might say, their employment. Thus Iyanaga takes to task most of those scholars who have written accounts concerning divinities in Buddhist dictionaries; such accounts have described figures such as Mahāvairocana, Acala, and

Mahākāla generally in isolation—by implication, attempting to understanding their respective “original forms” (*honrai no sugata* 本来の姿) from their changing “function” (*kansū* 函数) in thought as represented in Buddhist tales, ignoring as well their relationship with other divinities or venerables (Buddhas, bodhisattvas) (I: 42–44).

Mythic thought is, in other words, fundamentally fluid in character and, revealing the multiple variations of motifs or elements, expresses in myth their polysemy and dynamism through the form of connective images. Iyanaga uses a physicist’s metaphor of multiple universes moving unceasingly in space-time, each of which houses astronomical numbers of atoms: mythic elements, like these atoms, engage each other in continually shifting combinations to produce distinct structures. Moreover, the image of each solar system produced thereby, with its sun and planets, might be imagined as equivalent with what dictionary-writers have defined as an individual divinity, which is in fact marked by multiple and fluid mythic elements. As a concrete example, Iyanaga offers the “running Mahākāla” (*hashiri Daikoku*) image of Chūzenji in Nikkō in its description in a late-eighteenth-century Japanese work and its apparent connections with narratives introduced in medieval Japan concerning Skanda (J. Idaten), the brother of Gaṇeśa and son of the deity Śiva, and who is known in Hindu mythology for his racing competition with his sibling. If, as Iyanaga puts it, a connection can be established between Mahākāla and Gaṇeśa (J. Shōden/Shōten), the context for the development of the running Mahākāla may be better understood. And he finds the proof for such a connection in the pairing of Mahākāla and Gaṇeśa as the twin protector deities at gates to Nepalese Buddhist temples; this, he submits, can be seen to correspond to the three-aspect Daikoku (comprising of Bishamonten, Daikokuten, and Benzaiten) and Tōji’s three-aspect Yasha/Matarajin (comprising of Dakiniten, Shōden, Benzaiten), which were established in medieval Japan as gate-protectors and indicate the interchangeable position of Gaṇeśa and Mahākāla. Thus, in Iyanaga’s view, the mythic interchangeability of these divinities as expressed in Buddhist architecture here provides initial evidence of a possible connection between the running Mahākāla and the Gaṇeśa/Skanda racing narrative; such evidence, of course, does not indicate the direct influence of the racing narrative—instead, expressing the apparent activity of a consistent mythic “logic” at work at Nepalese temples and Kyoto’s Tōji as well as in Hindu myth and Japan’s legend of running Mahākāla (I: 45–49).

The context within which mythic logic produces such variations, according to Iyanaga, can be best examined by considering the fluidity model: each mythic narrative springs from the matrix of a structure of mythic thought, a system which constantly changes and yields multiple variant myths. In turn, each myth that is diffused—absent some other intervening factor—possesses a form similar to or equivalent with the original myth. At the same time, if that which is diffused is an entire structure of mythic thought, it gives rise to myths of a different form, albeit ones which continue to belong to the same or a similar system. Furthermore, in the event of the interaction of two systems of mythic thought marked by similar elements,

independent myths carrying the same logic yet taking a different form can conceivably emerge. In this way, we can imagine numerous galaxies of mythic-thought structures connecting and combining to produce a great universe of Buddhist myth that takes shape on top of the massive “platform” of Buddhist culture in the East Asian world (I: 49–50).

The method of Buddhist mythology, as outlined by Iyanaga, is of course not historical in character: operating at the systemic level, it investigates the structure of myth. The story, not the storyteller, is the focus, since myth is fundamentally authorless and narratorless. At the same time, while the dynamism of myth may be best reflected through oral storytelling, Buddhist mythology has as its focus primarily written documents that in varying degrees may or may not reflect orality (I: 50–52). Indeed, Iyanaga notes that although mythology is fundamentally distinct from historical/ideological studies, it can serve as one of the preliminary examinations conducted in the larger effort to understand the relationship between mythic thought and ideological history. Thus a full understanding of the mythological significance of figures such as *dakiniten* deities and the bodhisattva Kannon can provide one of the bases for analysis of the mystico-political ideas undergirding the medieval *tenmō* system (I: 18–20). The goal of Buddhist mythology, then, is to analyze the logical relationships (connotations and associations) between myths and to study the permutations of the structure of mythic images, but it ideally enables scholars to know the culture and thought of Buddhist believers in their respective historical and geographical contexts—operating as an indispensable tool for interpreting the meaning of their cultural and spiritual histories (I: 55–58). Such is Iyanaga’s methodological recipe for what he calls, with shades of Lévi-Strauss, “intellectual *bricolage*” (*chiteki burikorāju* 知的ブリコラージュ) (I: 59–62), partially a defense in response to perceived institutional bias against non-professionals, and the starting point for a thinker’s rush that we might best think of as the study closest in spirit to the free-thinking of works like Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* to date in the field of Buddhist Studies.

From here, I was surprised by the fact that Iyanaga moves immediately to discuss the cult of Mahākāla, leaving his discussion of the contextual relationship between Buddhist mythology and Indian religious thought for Chapter 6 (I: 261–96) of Part II of the volume. However, a close examination of what seems a strange mode of organization indicates that Part II, which occupies the rest of the work, is modeled on plays or other works of literature—each chapter begins with a list of the main characters (*omo na tōjō jinbutsu*) and consulted primary sources. In this way, Iyanaga returns to the enigma of the Mahākāla/Daikoku connection in the beginning, and the plot of this study follows a narrative more than a dissertative or historical style of presentation—specifically, written with a Japanese audience in mind, in an effort to account for Buddha-kami assimilation as a pan-Asian rather than particularly Japanese phenomenon. There are, in this context, points at which the author, probably in connection with this mode, might have attempted to have been more rigorous in his citation method: he has a tendency, perhaps also related to his work

for *Hōbōgin*, to draw dictionary/encyclopedia definitions into the main narrative rather than building his argument independently, based on primary sources. Instead, for example, of inserting discussions of dictionary or encyclopedia accounts into endnotes, he begins his discussion of Mahākāla with a lengthy consideration of such accounts (1: 74–78); while considerations of linguistic training are sometimes relevant (and perhaps an attempt at reader-friendliness?), it would seem that in doing so the author relies too heavily at points on such accounts, and also provides only his own modern translation in textual quotations (preferably including original Chinese quotations as well). Such stylistic quibbles aside, the work displays a meticulous citation effort throughout, including features such as line-references for accounts in texts of the Taishō canon as well as their careful dating.

Iyanaga discusses the varied meanings of the terms Daikoku and Mahākāla, and finds early sources concerning the latter in Hindu mythology, including a connection between the ambiguous “blackness” associated with the figure and that of the consort of Śiva, Kālī. He finds the first “clues” to Mahākāla’s position in Buddhism in three T’ang Chinese monks’ writings. Yijing, for example, depicts Mahākāla as a guardian divinity of the kitchen or treasury gate in Indian Buddhist temples of his era that was especially associated with providing food for the sangha; moreover, he describes Mahākāla as originally devoted to the three treasures and black due simply to the repeated polishing of the image with oil. At the same time, Śubhakarasiṃha/Yi-xing’s and Amoghavajra/Liangbi’s accounts concerning Mahākāla are quite different, depicting the figure respectively as essentially a deity of war and transformation of Maheśvara/Śiva who, like a host of other demonic figures, possesses divine power, holding all manner of treasures and magical medicines and wandering in a graveyard-forest; this figure, Iyanaga notes, is very similar to the Hindu Mahākāla while his demonic minions, represented as Dākinī or other devils, offer their protection through the offering of human flesh/blood. In Iyanaga’s view, Yijing’s depiction of Mahākāla offered the prototype for the Japanese belief in Daikoku as a deity of good fortune; the latter authors’ works proved the model, in turn, for the esoteric Buddhist image of Mahākāla as a frightening protective deity, directly influencing the representation of that figure in the Womb Realm mandala in Japan (1: 83–98).

Having probed what seem to have been the sources that had the greatest influence over the development of these two distinct images, Iyanaga turns then to the mythological connections between Mahākāla and ogresses (especially Hārītī, Dākinī, and Kālī; 1: 101–35), death/rebirth rites (a brilliant analysis made in connection with tales of King Kalmāṣapāda, slayer of a thousand kings—himself a flying Dāka (male “dākinī”), and eater of children, like Hārītī, who likewise had the gift of flight—and connected stories of conversion of the outlaw Aṅgulimāla; 1: 137–72), the “strange” disciples of Śākyamuni (e.g., figures such as Mahākāla, represented in the *Theragāthā* as an arhat who wrote a verse, based on his meditation on impurity in the graveyard, about a “black” woman named Kālī who looked after remains

there; he was described in the *Vinaya* as being falsely associated with cannibalism there, karmically related to actions as a *yakṣa* flesh-eating demon in a previous life; and a lay Mahākāla mistaken for a thief and killed, similarly related to his own thievery in a former birth (I: 173–218). Iyanaga draws special attention to the fact that the arhat Mahākāla was described on at least two occasions as obese at times when large numbers were cremated at the graveyard (since he ate the offerings), and makes note not only that the Hindu Mahākāla was sometimes depicted as pot-bellied but that the array of attendants of Śiva, including Gaṇeśa, were viewed as such—and that, on the other hand, the figure of Skanda was represented as extremely thin. Finally, Iyanaga provides an extensive analysis of the arhat Piṇḍola, known for his gluttony, and stresses the commonality of themes especially between Daikoku/Mahākāla, Hārītī, Gaṇeśa, and Piṇḍola, including their positions as protector-deities of kitchens, gluttony, begging bowls, rice cakes, and so on.

From here, Iyanaga connects Mahākāla as well to the “deity of impurity (who dispels it through compassion)” Ucchuṣma (J. Ususama;), who is likewise associated with Skanda, Hārītī, and themes such as child cannibalism/protection and gate protection (I: 219–60). Following a study of the context for Buddhist mythology in Indian religious thought (I: 261–96), Iyanaga spends the rest of the work—with the exception of a contextual analysis of Kubera—focused on Mahākāla and related divinities in premodern Japanese Buddhism. Along the way, he clarifies what are the four basic images of Daikokuten in Japan: the frightening tantric image in the Womb-Realm mandala; a warrior representation seen especially in Tendai temples; the figure in regular clothing, often associated with good fortune, and virtually unique to Japan; and the “three face” Daikokuten image combining him with Bishamon and Benzaiten, also specific to Japan (I: 300–303). He ties the frightening tantric figure with the Śaivite myth of an evil son of Śiva named Andhakāsura, who was overcome later by Śiva in his frightening form (Bhairava), sometimes called his Mahākāla form, and shares numerous iconographic and other features with the tantric image of Mahākāla in esoteric Buddhism (I: 312–36).

Iyanaga traces the images of the bag and mouse/mongoose that typically accompany the deity of good fortune Daikoku, via a close examination of continental texts as well as esoteric Japanese works concerning the Daikokutenjin hō rite. He turns not only to tenth century Japanese Shingon texts, but also to Vaiśravaṇa (=Kubera) and images from Dun Huang and elsewhere that had an influence over the transmission of so-called “Tobatsu Bishamonten” images of Japan, which share the bag and mouse associations (among others) with Daikoku (I: 337–442). Later, he goes on to offer an extended analysis of the mythic association of Gaṇeśa with the mouse, bag, and large belly, demonstrating ties not only with Daikoku, but also with figures such as Kubera, Hārītī and her son Piṅgala (I: 503–44). He concludes the work with extremely informative discussions—of great interest to scholars of premodern Japanese religion—of the connections between Daikoku and other (especially medieval) “strange” fortune deities in Japan as well as of the strange character (*igyōsei* 異形性) of medieval Japanese tantra, drawing on and comple-

menting the brilliant work of scholars such as Abe Yasurō and Tanaka Takako (I: 545–650).

For purposes of space—and especially due to the fact that the mythic corpus related to Mahākāla/Daikoku constitutes the core of this two-volume study—I turn now to summarize the second volume, *Kannon henyōtan*, in much more abbreviated form. Part I of this study essentially constitutes an extension of the investigation concerning the mythic elements related to Śiva—as the prologue notes, “the voyage continues.” In this case it is focused specifically on myths surrounding his sons Skanda (J. Idaten) and Gaṇeśa (Shōden). It is especially Skanda with which Iyanaga is concerned here, and he provides an exhaustive examination of not only matters such as Skanda’s running and his status as a temple-gate guardian but also his connection with Avalokiteśvara (Ch. Guanyin/J. Kannon; e.g., mutual pairings as guardian with Maitreya) and especially images of causing begging bowls to fly; Iyanaga convincingly argues that the latter association is connected with themes related to wealth/food/rain conferral in the East Asian context (II: 33–113). He also clarifies that Idaten’s position as protector of the temple kitchen was superseded in some cases by Mañjuśrī, especially in certain tantric and Ch’an/Zen traditions, partially in connection with his association with the monastic canteen, begging bowls and image as a child (II: 115–51). His discussion of Gaṇeśa is concerned specifically with the figure Nandikiteśvara (J. Kangiten; also Sk. Vināyaka), and explores matters such as this figure’s sexual associations with Avalokiteśvara and related mythic subjugation by the fierce deity Kuṇḍalī (J. Gundari, II: 153–230), especially associated with esoteric Buddhist ritual throughout Asia.

Iyanaga’s analysis of the feminization of Avalokiteśvara, Part II of this study, might be viewed by scholars as a brilliant mythological companion-piece to Chün-fang Yü’s recent *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), which also explores this matter in the Chinese historical and literary context. Following a study of the eighth-century Japanese queen Kōmyō, in which he draws on the inspiration of Stein and the work of Abe Yasurō and others to analyze the medieval Japanese “mythological logic” associating her with both sensuality and purification—and with Kannon (II: 233–56)—Iyanaga traces the Buddhist scriptural and other textual (and artistic) antecedents to the feminized Kannon, particularly to the Mahāyānist use of the discourse of *upāya*. Such “devices” include not only the possibility of Buddhist figures taking on female form, but also the use of sexual temptation as a method of promoting salvation, especially evident in tantric ritual and literature (II: 257–304). He then analyzes the development of the variant forms of images of Kannon as a mother figure, particularly in China and Japan (II: 305–27). For Iyanaga, ultimately, the mythological-feminized Kannon, like all of the other major figures of his study, is intimately connected to the corpus surrounding Śiva, insofar at least as her esoteric Buddhist roots are connected, as suggested earlier, with Gaṇeśa (Kangiten)—and it turns out now as well directly with Śiva—in the form of the Thousand-Armed-Thousand-

Eyed Kannon, the Eleven-Faced Kannon, the Wish-Fulfilling Wheel Kannon as well as in figures such as the Potalaka (J. Fudarakuten) Kannon, Fish-hook (Fukuken-jaku) Kannon, and other specifically esoteric forms (II: 329–52).

Following an “intermezzo”—a discussion that employs Foucault’s notion of the “problematization” of sexuality in eighteenth- to twentieth-century western society to argue for the arbitrary rather than rational basis for attention to sexuality, especially in mythological contexts, where interpretation never ends (II: 353–62)—he examines stories of Princess Miao-shan (especially those relating her to Thousand-Armed Guanyin/Kannon) and other Guanyin figures in premodern China (II: 363–411). Iyanaga then continues with a consideration of the genealogy of such figures in the larger Asian context (II: 413–550) and suggests, ultimately, that the feminized Kannon can be dated in China to as early as the late sixth century and in Japan to roughly the era of the ninth to thirteenth centuries, including a mythological analysis of Nyoirin Kannon in the medieval context (II: 551–604). He completes his study of Kannon with an analysis of the original forms of Avalokiteśvara, arguing forcefully against claims that Kannon was originally a female deity prior to entering East Asia while at the same time giving consideration to the possibility of a general filiation with the goddess Mitra and the feminization of Maitreya (II: 551–676). Iyanaga’s epilogue to this study returns to the sacks carried by Hotei (Ch. Budai) and Daikoku, clarifying the connection between Hotei, Piṅḍola, the Chinese monk Qici, and Maitreya, and links the images of Daikoku and Ebisu to a faith among some in the efficacy of their theft and to wealth rites promoting theft (!) in medieval Japan.

As is clear, these works are in many ways an intellectual feast: sometimes organizationally suspect, yet exhaustively covering an array of images to a degree that these studies together comprise a virtual encyclopedia of Buddhist mythology. Indeed, I would estimate that these works will set the standard for research on Buddhist mythology for the foreseeable future, and constitute necessary reading for scholars of Buddhism, especially for those specializing in Japanese Buddhism. One wonders at some points whether the author, in spite of his anti-substantialist position, creeps in the direction of trying to find the “original forms” of some figures, such as in his narrative journey to India and central Asia in Volume II, Chapter 14, in search of Kannon. However, he is indeed careful at most points to avoid repeating the antiquarian mistakes of early scholars in Buddhist studies, while at the same time attempting to appropriate their concern with the *longue durée* and concerns with cross-disciplinary questions. These works by Iyanaga might have been instead titled “Śiva in Buddhism” (*Bukkyō ni okeru Shiba*) because the mythological corpus related to Śiva is such a ubiquitous presence in Buddhist literature. The complexities of this Śaivite corpus and its mythological universes, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, will surely continue to draw the attention of scholars of Asian religions for a long time to come. And as an important step in this direction, we can only

hope that these works will be translated soon into English and attract a larger readership.

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