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"The Karmic Origins of the Morning-Bear Mountain": Preliminary Research Notes on *Asamayama Engi*

Anna Andreeva
University of Heidelberg

INTRODUCTION

The world of Japanese mountain religion, *shugen* 修験, and its relationship with Buddhism has long attracted the attention of scholars, both in Japan and in the West. However, due to the implementation of strict laws and Shugendō's eventual prohibition in the Meiji period, the dearth of surviving records documenting different types of mountain practice has created a certain gap in the understanding of Japanese religiosity, particularly in the pre-modern period.

The sweeping institutional changes and reformulation of state policies toward the forms of religious expression during the Meiji period caused-irrevocable alterations to the majority of Japanese cultic institutions. Japan's many sacred mountains were subjected to a series of campaigns and mounting external pressure to redefine themselves according to the new government regulations. For example, soon after the promulgation of the decree of separation of Buddhist and Shintō deities (Jpn. *shinbutsu bunri rei,* 神仏分離令) in March 1868, a movement was launched to firmly affix Shugendō practitioners under Buddhist authority, thus imposing the necessity for subordination on the *shugen* groups. Such motions caused much resistance and change at the local level, before Shugendō was completely prohibited in 1872. In this way, a centuries-long tradition of cultural and religious hybridity between Buddhism and Shintō (Jpn. *Shinbutsu shūgō*, 神仏習合) "came to an abrupt end."[1]

Despite these historical circumstances, the religious traditions and ritual systems of Japan's sacred mountains continued to inform academic work. The lifelong studies by renowned Japanese experts, such as Murayama Shūichi, Gorai Shigeru, and Miyake Hitoshi, kept the studies

of the diverse traditions of Shugendō afloat and provided a firm foundation for this research field.[2] In the West, studies of Shugendō and mountain cults were pioneered by Nelly Naumann, Gaston Renondeu, Hartmut Rotermund, H. Byron Earhart, Carmen Blacker, Anne Bouchy, Paul Swanson, Royall Tyler, and Allan Grapard, and were continued by Sarah Thal, Max Moerman, Barbara Ambros, and others.[3] A 2009 symposium for the study of Shugendō at Columbia University, organized by Bernard Faure, attracted much needed attention to the problems in the study of the Japanese mountain practices and reinvigorated the state of research with a much anticipated volume on Shugendō.[4]

In Japan, as in most of East Asia and, indeed, the world, mountains have always inspired veneration and diverse forms of religious expression. Mountains, such as Miwa or Makimuku, located in central Japan, have been active as prolific ritual centers since prehistoric times, judging by the abundance of archaeological remains found in their vicinity. Since records began, the mountain ranges of Katsuragi, Yoshino, Ōmine, and Kumano attracted an unending stream of practitioners who sought a spiritual congress with deities and the acquiring of "miraculous powers" (*ken,* 験). Mountain practitioners and mendicant holy men, known under various guises such as *yamabushi* 山伏, *shugenja* 修験者, *gyōja* 行者, or *keza* 験者, underwent lengthy periods of training, often in dangerous conditions, in rock caverns or on steep cliffs and summits. Those who subjected themselves to such arduous physical and spiritual experiences could claim a possession of supra-human capacities and were often seen performing divination, healing, or religious rituals for the benefit of private donors and answering the religious needs of their local communities.

The routes connecting important sacred peaks and the networks of mountain guides, *sendatsu* 先達, already began developing in medieval times, but mountain religion itself had little formal organization before the Edo period (1600–1868). Such religious specialists acted as local *shugen* mentors, accompanying practitioners to the remote sacred areas and ensuring their progress in mastering basic and more advanced teachings and rituals practiced within the compounds of each cultic mountain or mountainous range.

The inner workings of many combinatory and ritual systems of worship in different types of mountain religion, especially in their pre-modern guise, still remain largely unexplored. For example, the elements of Daoist worship, such as the five elements (Jpn. *gogyō,* 五

行), techniques of astral divination, and the *yin-yang* principles, known in Japan as Onmyōdō 陰陽道, survived in many forms of Japanese religious practice during the pre-modern period, not in the least in the mountain religion of *shugen*. On the other hand, the teachings and rituals of esoteric Buddhism (Jpn. *mikkyō,* 密教), introduced and systematized mostly by monastic lineages affiliated with Shingon and Tendai temples, had permeated the worship of Japanese deities, *kami* 神; exerted a palpable influence on the development of Pure Land, Zen, and non-esoteric traditions; and undoubtedly played a sizable role in the emergence of different forms of Shugendō.

Thanks to these influences, mountain religion, too, can be seen as a conglomerate and repository of a multiplicity of different religious customs originated in India, China, and Korea. Add to that the specific physical settings and locale of each mountain, its "embedded-ness" into local and regional demographic, political, economic, and cultural discourses and their fluxes, and there is almost no ending to the process of constant redefinition of mountain cultic sites. For example, a handful of texts explaining the origins of sacred mountains in the Yamato area that remain from before the Edo period reveal a world of combinatory religion that rivals most intricate religious systems in its complexity and sheer breadth of cultural and religious references. Recent contributions to this research field have benefited from these references and have provided a framework for future analysis and study.

Japan is abundant in hills, mountains, and mountain areas that have been venerated since ancient times and connected by pilgrimage routes in the pre-modern period. While the historical centers of the mountain religion in Japan, such as Yoshino, Ōmine, Kumano, Haguro, Tateyama, and Iwaki (themselves large hubs of religious networks and combinatory worship), have been well mapped out and researched, there are still plenty of mountains whose origins, ritual systems, and networks of relations still require scholarly attention.

The following notes are dedicated to the case of Mt. Asama 朝熊, a mountain located in the Mie Prefecture, and its connections to other significant cultic sites and sacred areas that played an important role in the history of Japanese religions. This mountain has previously appeared in the excellent research of Anne Bouchy,[5] in which she investigates the assimilation of the sea and mountain cults and worship of composite deities, such as Sengen 浅間, the deity of Mt. Fuji, who

is still venerated in the eastern coast of Kii Peninsula. Her research also draws attention to the appropriating influence of Shugendō on the seafaring cults and the impact of these developments on the lives of local communities. In particular, the *takemairi* 岳参り cult at Mt. Asama, associated with the Oku no in 奥の院 of Kongōshōji 金剛証寺 temple, located on the mountain's peak, has been long connected with the pacification of the dead. Bouchy explores this cult in relation to the notions of marine netherworld and funerary practices, still ongoing in the Kii seaside, and transformation of the sea deities into the mountain deities.

The current study proposes to concentrate on one of the texts about Mt. Asama, surviving from the late medieval period, *Asamayama engi* 朝熊山縁起. It is envisioned that future research will concentrate on historical aspects of the development of the ritual and symbolic system of Mt. Asama, its involvement in esoteric Buddhist and combinatory practices, and its relationship to other sacred sites, such as the two shrines of Ise, Mt. Miwa, Hakusan, and others. It is hoped that the study of the textual sources related to Mt. Asama will also cast light on the esoteric *kami* cults proliferating in the Ise area during the medieval period. On the other hand, these research notes will offer some thoughts on how Buddhist practitioners conceptualized time and memory.

MT. ASAMA AND THE QUESTIONS IT POSES

Mt. Asama is located in Mie Prefecture, dividing the areas of Ise 伊勢 and Shima 志摩. At 553 meters high, it is a relatively small mountain, but its round shape, steeply rising slopes, and position in the vicinity of the two grand shrines of Ise (Jpn. *Ise jingū,* 伊勢神宮) make one suspect that in the past it was a site that naturally attracted the attention of mountain practitioners and religious specialists of all kinds.

Its name, which, when written with Japanese characters, can be literally translated as the "Morning-Bear Mountain," has intrigued me somewhat for a long time. Moreover, the actual climbing of the mountain during my research trip to Ise during 2004–2005 and witnessing the vista that opened up from the mountain's peak has continued to stir my curiosity ever since. This personal encounter inspired me to learn more about the historical background of this landmark and, more importantly, its role in the mountain pilgrimage and formation of Shintō-Buddhist combinatory practices in the areas of Ise and Shima during the pre-modern period.

The mountain itself is rather steep and deeply forested. The very top of it reveals a great perspective: one can see a magnificent view of Toba Bay 鳥羽湾 and the areas of Ise and Uji-Yamada during the day, and a vast, starry landscape at night. A saying describing this mountain as offering "eighteen provinces in one view" certainly rings true. Anyone who performed the same journey would have no doubt that this mountain offered a unique ground for mountain training and was one of the most important landmarks for the religious practitioners from the areas of Ise, Shima, and beyond.

The religious history of Mt. Asama in pre-modern times provokes some queries. During the Edo period, its location near the Ise shrines and shores of Toba Bay made this mountain an attractive destination for pilgrims coming from other regions to pay homage to the deity of Ise on Ise *mairi* 伊勢参り. One folk song proclaims that the Ise pilgrimage was surely incomplete without a visit to Mt. Asama.[6] The Ise shrines dedicated to the imperial deity Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神 were a site of worship for the Japanese imperial family since the ancient period, and at all times served as a major attraction for visitors to Ise. Seen in this light, the popular tune described above betrays a rich history that is uniquely shaped by the proximity to such a symbolically powerful sacred site.

One of the commemorative steles on top of Mt. Asama, dated 1724, informs us that Mt. Asama, along with the inner and outer shrines of Ise, was a site of a thousand-day pilgrimage (Jpn. *Naikū Gekū Asamagatake senjitsu mairi,* 内宮外宮朝熊嶽千日参). Kubota Osamu notes that the first indications of such a joint "three shrine pilgrimage" (Jpn. *sangū mairi* 三宮まいり) were already emerging during the Muromachi perio,d, around the year 1487.[7]

It was also reported that in clear weather the very peak of Mt. Fuji 富士山 could actually be seen across the bay. This convinced visitors that there was no need to make a lengthy and costly journey to Kantō to worship Japan's grandest mountain. It was only necessary to visit the Ise shrines, climb Mt. Asama, and worship Mt. Fuji from afar. Even now, there is a small platform, just enough to fit an observation hut on one of the mountain slopes, which faces Ise Bay in the direction of Mt. Fuji.[8]

One has to be reminded that Mt. Asama has been the site of veneration of Sengen bosatsu 浅間菩薩, the deity of Mt. Fuji, at least since the Edo period. As is often the case in Japan, the Chinese characters

representing the name of Sengen can also be read *asama*; thus, the two sites and their deities could be easily seen as related.[9] The creation of such lingo-symbolic relationships based on homophony, and strengthening them further through the establishment of local festivals and corresponding cults, was surely one of the vital strategies for attracting followers, religious practitioners, and donors. It could be said that such a strategy may even have been at times reinforced in the hope of gently precluding pilgrims from central Japan from travelling any further, making Ise and Mt. Asama their final destination. On the other hand, the existence of links between Mt. Asama and Mt. Fuji attracted visitors from the Kantō region, thus creating a vibrant circulation of goods, people, practices, and ideas during the Edo period.

At the very peak of Mt. Asama, there is a Buddhist temple, Kongōshōji, "Temple of the Vajra Sign [of Esoteric Enlightenment]." At present it is formally affiliated with the Rinzai Zen 臨済禅 school, but as the temple's name indicates, at the time of its foundation, esoteric Buddhist tradition and practice played a very significant role.

According to its foundation legend, the temple was said to have been established by the founder of the Japanese Shingon school, Kōbō Daishi Kūkai 弘法大師空海 (774–835) in the second year of Tenchō 天長 (825), long after his return from Tang China. In the third year of Meitoku 明徳 (1392), the temple was reclaimed by the monk Tōgaku Monryū 東岳文昱, who was well versed in the doctrine and practice of Rinzai Zen. Since then, Kongōshōji was said to remain within the confines of the Five Mountain (Jpn. *Gozan,* 五山) system of Zen temples dominating the Kantō region.

In addition to the spectacular views opening from the peak, one of the most visually impressive sites on the temple precincts is its memorial ground (Jpn. *tōba,* 堰場). This is an area that forms labyrinthine pathways walled by tall boards, commemorating services performed for the deceased and displaying their posthumous Buddhist names and titles. The boards, up to a few meters high, are arranged in a series of corridors, which, to a dedicated viewer, would appear to represent a path or a lane that is made up of objects whose sole function is that of preserving memory. This is no surprise, of course, given the historical association of the mountain with the cults of dead. However, the symbolic ways in which this sacred mountain and its temple have been connected to the production and upkeep of memories still provokes many queries and will be at the background of these research notes.

At present, there are two directions in which the study of the texts related to Mt. Asama and its system of beliefs could develop. Firstly, of paramount importance is the mountain's historical connection with Ise shrines and *shugen* practices. One of the aims of ongoing research is to define the role this mountain played in the construction and development of esoteric *kami* worship in the areas of Ise and Shima before the Edo period. Clarifying these relationships could help to cast more light on the role of medieval *shugen* practitioners, the emergence of Ise Shintō, and patterns of circulation of secret theories about buddhas and *kami* in which Rinzai Zen and other practitioners had apparently actively participated.

In addition to other angles of research that have already been undertaken, Mt. Asama should thus be approached as a cultic site with a ritual system historically connected to the ritual system of Ise and the networks of Buddhist facilities in the vicinity of the two Ise shrines. Surviving records documenting its past should thus be seen in the light of multilateral relationships, such as those between local Buddhist temples located at Ise and metropolitan Buddhist complexes patronizing them; between individual practitioners affiliated with concrete facilities and different forms of religious practice; and between buddhas, *kami,* and more intricate composite deities, which were enshrined at those sites before the Edo period and Meiji Restoration.

Secondly, of great interest is the relationship between the ritual system of Mt. Asama and the ways by which pre-modern Buddhist practitioners conceptualized time and memory. Throughout the history of Buddhist presence at Mt. Asama, different strategies for such construction can be seen. The investigation of these strategies can help to answer the questions of how and why this sacred mountain and its temple were able to position themselves so successfully at the crossroads of multiple religious pilgrimages, and how they accentuated the importance of Buddhist practice for creating meaningful links between past, present, and future.

The methodology of such an investigation is of vital importance. One of the metaphors that could be found useful in the survey of this significant but little-studied mountain is the notion of a "polyphonic system." This means that the researcher has to be acutely aware that the mountain's cultural landscape is constantly reconstructed and shifting. It consists of a multiplicity of threads and voices intertwined and acting in unison in precisely such ways that make this mountain's

identity sufficiently distinct, while leaving it both uniquely specialized in generating certain meanings and at the same time widely open to interpretation. By borrowing the notion of a "polyphonic novel" from Mikhail Bakhtin,[10] I do not seek to insist on viewing the physical site purely as a text—although it is certainly one approach to be considered—but to highlight the texture, complexity, and movement of ideas, practices, and historical events and the shifting nature of relationships between them that constituted the sacred site of Mt. Asama.

MT. ASAMA IN HISTORY: PRACTICES, TEXTS, AND PEOPLE

Mt. Asama's location to the northwest of the Ise shrines is almost identical to that of Mt. Hiei 比叡山 in relation to Kyoto. Mt. Hiei, located in the province of Ōmi and its temple Enryakuji 延暦寺, the stronghold of Tendai Buddhism, was a large monastic and military complex that protected the entrance to the Heian capital from the northwestern quarter, a direction that was long considered a gateway for malevolent spirits.

While the Ise shrines had a ritual taboo on all things Buddhist, nearby Mt. Asama was long associated with Buddhist practice. For example, since the Nara (710–794) and Heian (794–1185) periods it was a site where mountain ascetics went to perform the ritual of "posing a question and retaining [the answer]" (Jpn. *gumonji hō,* 求聞持法).

This ritual entailed reciting the *dhāraṇī* of the deity Ākāśagarbha (Jpn. Kokūzō bosatsu, 虚空蔵菩薩) one million times during a certain period of time. This was said to lead practitioners toward a realization and experience of cosmos, which was achieved through a ritual union with Kokūzō manifesting itself as the morning star, Venus (Jpn. Myōjō, 明星). In Japan, performing this ritual was considered a perfect way of strengthening one's memory. For Buddhist monks the benefits of practicing this ritual were embodied in quick learning of the sutras, iconographies, cosmologies, other rites, and doctrinal commentaries. Some clerics engaged in this practice in distant mountainous areas in order to achieve a certain "natural wisdom" (Jpn. *jinenchi,* 自然智). The leading figures of Japanese Buddhism, such as Saichō 最澄 (767–822), Kūkai 空海 (774–835), and Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282), were known to have performed it.[11]

The worship of Bodhisattva Kokūzō, especially its manifestation as the "Bright [Morning] Star," was seen as closely related to the momentous event of Buddhist awakening. A practitioner ascending the

mountain to perform the *gumonji hō* on its slopes or its peak during the night would intone the Sanskrit *dhāraṇī* while gazing into the open sky awaiting the appearance of Venus before dawn and experiencing a jolt of sudden awareness of space, cosmos, and time—ultimately, a new, awakened self. It is easy to envisage this practice as connected with the formation of knowledge about stars, astronomy, and time-keeping. However, quite how this practice related to the improvement of memory still needs to be considered in closer detail.

A more palpable connection between Mt. Asama and the Ise shrines appears in the Heian period, when the members of the shrines' ritual lineages began to be more actively involved in various forms of Buddhist worship. It was during that period that Mt. Asama became a site of worship of the future Buddha Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku bosatsu, 弥勒菩薩) and his pure land and a site for sutra burials. Burying sutras was popular among court aristocracy in the late Heian period, when the ideas of *mappō* 末法, the latter days of the Buddhist dharma, permeated almost all aspects of life of the Japanese society. Effectively, this practice involved copying the Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Lotus Sutra* (Ch. *Miaofa lianhua jing,* 妙法蓮華経; Jpn. *Myōhō rengekyō*, *T*. 262), the *Sutra of Immeasurable Meaning* (Jpn. *Muryōgikyō,* 無量義経, *T*. 276), the *Sutra of Contemplation on Bodhisattva Samantabhadra* (Jpn. *Bussetsu kan Fugen bosatsu gyōhōkyō,* 仏説観普賢菩薩行法経, *T*. 277), and the *Wisdom Heart Sutra* (Skt. *Prajnāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*, Jpn. *Hannya haramitta shin gyō,* 般若波羅蜜多心経, *T*. 251). The sutras were then buried in specially made containers in the sacred area. At Mt. Asama, such area became associated with the pure land of Miroku, the Tosotsu heaven 兜率天.

Former *kannushi* 神主 priests of the Ise shrines could privately engage in Buddhist worship upon their retirement from the shrine duties. Given the historical context, it is not surprising that shrine priests, too, had to be involved in ensuring their own Buddhist salvation and creating ritual links between the somber present of declining dharma and luminous future in the company of buddhas and bodhisattvas. One example was the *negi* 禰宜 priest of the inner shrine Arakida Tokimori, who buried a container with a copy of a Buddhist sutra on Mt. Asama in 1173. The sutra burial ground continues to exist on the Kongōshōji grounds until today.

Mt. Asama was also a site to a small shrine, Asamayama jinja 朝熊山神社. This shrine was seen as the auxiliary to the Ise shrines (Jpn. *Ise*

jingū Asamayama jinja, 伊勢神宮朝熊神社), although the relationship between the two is yet to be clarified.[12] The mountain became gradually incorporated into the ritual system and pilgrimage network of the Ise shrines. It is in the context of this relationship and its development that the construction of Mt. Asama's esoteric Buddhist identity and the writing of *Asamayama engi* have to be considered.

Indeed, there are indications that the triple pilgrimage, encircling the inner and outer shrines and Mt. Asama, was already emerging during the medieval period. Despite the taboo on all things Buddhist at Ise shrines, the steady stream of the Buddhist pilgrims who travelled to Ise from Nara and Kyoto has been documented since the 1180s. Prominent Buddhist monks, such as Chōgen 重源 (1121–1206), Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213), and Eizon 叡尊 (1201–1290), sometimes alone, but often accompanied by a large number of fellow monks, travelled to Ise to pay homage to the imperial deity, consult its oracles regarding the reconstruction of important Buddhist temples and statues, present gifts, pray for the pacification of enemies and political stability, and gain secret knowledge about Japanese native deities, *kami*. The monk Tsūkai 通海 (1234–1305), himself a descendant of a hereditary clan of ritual specialists at the Ise shrines, left a detailed record of what such pilgrimages could be in a text entitled *Ise Daijingū sankeiki* 伊勢太神宮参詣記.

Even though the Buddhist monks were prevented from worshipping the imperial deity directly, the ritual lineages of *kami* priests who served at both inner and outer shrines—the Watarai 度会, the Arakida 荒木田, and the Ōnakatomi 大中臣—had their own family temples, *ujidera* 氏寺, where the members of these families could retire. Toward the end of the thirteenth century, old metropolitan Buddhist temples, such as Saidaiji, Onjōji, and Daigoji, began establishing their own branches (Jpn. *matsuji,* 末寺) and small Buddhist facilities known as "separate halls" (Jpn. *betsuin,* 別院) in the vicinity of the Ise shrines and the shrine families' temples in order to facilitate the flow of their own practitioners wishing to train or practice there.

By the fourteenth century, the number of such facilities in the area of Ise and Shima was considerable. At the same time, these temples, often connected with powerful Buddhist and mountain monastic complexes, were emerging as the hubs of intense ritual and intellectual exchanges. For example, Sengūin 仙宮院, a small temple adjacent to the Sengū shrine 仙宮神社 (located in the Watarai district

of Ise);[13] Sekidera 世義寺, linked to the powerful Tendai temple and a center of mountain religion, Onjōji 園城寺; and Kōshōji 弘正寺, the branch temple of Saidaiji 西大寺, became the places where many secret theories regarding Japanese *kami* and Buddhist deities were recorded and exchanged.[14] The texts, such as the *Secret Records of Sengūin* (Jpn. *Sengūin hibun,* 仙宮院秘文), *Oral Transmissions of the Great Deity Amaterasu* (Jpn. *Tenshō Daijin kuketsu,* 天照大神口決), *Records of Wiping the Nose* (Jpn. *Bikisho,* 鼻帰書), *Records of Divine Spirits of Heaven and Earth* (Jpn. *Tenchi reikiki,* 天地霊気記), and the *Karmic Origins of the Great Bright Deity of Miwa* (Jpn. *Miwa daimyojin engi,* 三輪大明神縁起), were circulating among Buddhist monks stationed in the vicinity of the Ise shrines.

Secret rituals of *jingi kanjō* 神祇灌頂, the *abhiṣeka* initiations involving *kami* and fearsome deities of esoteric Buddhism, as well as esoteric interpretations of the "Divine Age" (Jpn. "Jindai," 神代, the section in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* describing the deeds of Japanese *kami*) were other products of that environment shared by the Buddhist monks and *kami* priests described above. Among the most notable examples of their intellectual exchange were compilations by the retired member of the Arakida family, Tadaoki 匡興, better known under his Buddhist name Dōshō 道祥 (b. 1348), who resided in the area of Izō Kanbe 伊雑神戸 on the Shima Peninsula. He copied the texts about *kami* extensively, eventually producing one of his most remarkable collections, the *Personal Verbatim Account of Nihon shoki* (Jpn. *Nihon shoki shikenbun,* 日本書紀私見聞) in 1428.

The connections between Mt. Asama, the Ise shrines, and the esoteric Buddhist environment, as well as Mt. Asama's role in the Buddhist movements described above, still appear under-researched. But it is precisely this direction that further research should be aiming to take. The position of Mt. Asama as a protective mountain of the Ise shrines prompts one to think that in the medieval period it was inseparable from the more esoteric manifestations of the supposedly pure site of Ise, where the imperial *kami* resided. If these cultic institutions and their respective spheres of influence are viewed in connection, more can be understood about the shades and dimensions of the various forms of Buddhist practice, the patterns of circulation of esoteric theories about *kami* and other deities, and, more broadly, the history of medieval Japan.

ASAMAYAMA ENGI

In a recent work on Mt. Miwa and its religious identity,[15] I came across a text about the origins of Mt. Asama entitled the *Karmic Origins of Morning-Bear Mountain* (*Asamayama engi,* 朝熊山縁起). The Buddhist term *engi* 縁起 is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *pratītya-samutpāda* and literally means "karmic origins." In pre-modern Japan, such texts were often compiled in order to build correlations between local *kami* and Buddhist deities, ritual practice and places of worship, and legendary figures and concrete physical structures. It has been often remarked that *engi* were instrumental in constructing certain visions of sacred mountains and shrines, which were connected to their promotion as sites where the Buddhist cults thrived. In this sense, *Asamayama engi* (hereafter, the *Engi*) is not an exception from the rule.

It is a short text in three chapters, with a colophon dated the eighth year of Eishō 永正 (1511).[16] From the colophon it can be understood that the surviving copy of the original manuscript was made somewhere in the Mino 美濃 Province.[17] This could mean that before that time, local practitioners from Mino may have been involved in pilgrimage to the Ise shrines and mountain austerities at Mt. Asama. One of them had a chance to record the foundation story of this special mountain and take it with him back to Mino. Little is known of the author of this surviving copy of the *Engi*, apart from his name, Shinkai 真海 (b. 1453), and his Buddhist title, "Dharma-Seal, Provisional Archbishop" (Jpn. Hōin gon daisōzu, 法印権大僧都).

The *Engi* opens with a short note explaining the geographical position of Mt. Asama in the areas of Ise and Shima and outlines the status of its temple Kongōshōji as a resting place of the Immovable Wisdom-King, Fudō myōō 不動明王 (Skt. Acala *vidyārāja*). From this opening note it is already clear that the text proposes to set out the relationships between the physical landscape and esoteric Buddhist deities inhabiting it—in this case, a wrathful manifestation of cosmic Buddha Dainichi 大日 (Skt. Mahāvairocana) and a deity important to the ritual discourse of *shugen* practices, Fudō, the "Immovable King of Wisdom."

The first chapter, entitled the "Secret of Mt. Asama" (Jpn. "Asamayama [no] hi," 朝熊山秘), is said to be based on a certain text, known as the *Record of Wide Transmission of the Divine Mirror* (Jpn. *Jinkyō kōdenki,* 神鏡広伝記), which is attributed to Kōbō Daishi (Kūkai). This chapter explains how the patriarch of the Shingon school and main

systematizer of the teachings of esoteric Buddhism in Japan arrived in Mt. Asama.

In the first year of Tenchō (824), Kūkai was performing a ritual of "asking-hearing-holding" (for improving memory; Jpn. *gumonji no hō,* 求聞持の法) on top of Bright-Star Rock (Jpn. Myōjō no iwa, 明星石)[18] at Zengōnji 善根寺, near the Nari River in the province of Yamato.[19] At the darkest hour of night, a child-prince appeared from emptiness (Jpn. *kokū,* 虚空) and said: "I will show you my seat (Jpn. *za,* 座) at the peak of Mt. Asama in the province of Ise. Practice austerities there when the Bright Star appears, and you will surely attain [enlightenment]."

Following the instructions of the divine child, Kūkai goes to Mt. Asama, where he discovers a small, abandoned temple. He begins his austerities at the Cavern of Three-Pronged Vajra (Jpn. Sankodō, 三鈷洞). There he encounters a mountain deity, who urges him to perform the *gumonji* rite and revive the practice of ascetics on Mt. Asama. Following the request of the deity, Kūkai performs the rite and meets with other *kami*, led by Amaterasu. The imperial deity introduces the story of a rock on Mt. Asama where the primordial deities Omodaru 面足 and Kashikone no mikoto 惶根尊 first descended to earth. Mt. Asama is thus envisioned as a site of creation, the Cloud-Sea Peak (Jpn. Kumomi no mine, 雲海峰), a cultic site intrinsically connected with the workings of *yin* and *yang* and a primordial womb where the scores of future "seed-children" (Jpn. *sue musubi no taneko,* 末むすび種子) are emplaced.

The *Engi* uses these metaphors of procreation in order to induce a sense of urgency about the continuous and uninterrupted emergence of new generations of righteous Buddhist practitioners, *kami* priests, and mountain ascetics. Such pleas are repeatedly voiced by the imperial deity Amaterasu who, judging by the *Engi*'s unfolding narrative, happens to be a great conversationalist.

Moreover, for the duration of the story, various deities, such as *kami* (mostly of obscure origins) and the esoteric deities Kokūzō, Benzaiten, Fudō, and Miroku, are constantly appearing around Kūkai, making appeals, pronouncing oracles, and being invoked as parts of a mandalic vision of Mt. Asama and its manifestation as a pure land. This abundance of voices, characters, and figures is truly what makes one think of this particular *Engi* as a "polyphonic" text. The divine beasts (such as Golden Bear, 金色の熊), wish-fulfilling gems (Jpn. *nyoi hōju,* 如意宝珠), three imperial regalia (Jpn. *sanshu jinki,* 三種神器), flying

relics, magic jewels ensuring longevity, and the substance described as "Bright-Star [or Venus] water" (Jpn. *Myōjōsui,* 明星水) also appear in the *Engi* and join in this divine and carnivalesque dance of solicitation around Kūkai.

Among these, Bodhisattva Kokūzō plays one of the major roles, because it is designated by Amaterasu as a deity "protecting [its] future" (Jpn. *waga sue mamori no hotoke,* 吾が末守りの仏). Kokūzō, truly luminous and bright, epitomizes the sun deity itself and appears as a manifestation of the five wisdoms of esoteric Buddhism (Jpn. *gochi,* 五智), which is most likely to be an implied reference to the supreme Buddha Mahāvairocana (Jpn. Dainichi).

The second chapter is entitled the "Great Secret of the Protective Deity [of Mt. Asama]" (Jpn. "Chinju no daiji," 鎮守の大事). It builds upon the relationships discussed in the previous sequence, while providing more details on the mandalic layout of Mt. Asama and describing the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 correlations between *kami* and buddhas who inhabit this sacred site. It is the deity Amaterasu herself who explains these important settings:

> The Seven Divine Treasure spirits dwell here. First is Amaterasu's mother, Benzaiten 弁財天 [*honji* is Treasure-Hat Jizō, 宝冠地蔵]. The second is rough deity, *kōjin* 荒神 [that is, Fudō, 不動]; it is the entrance [Dainichi, 大日] to Prosperity [Monju, 文殊]. The third is Kasuga Daimyōjin 春日大明神 [*honji* is Śākyamuni, to the right of the rough deity]. The fourth is Miwa Myōjin 三輪明神 [to the left of Benzaiten, *honji* is Shōten, 聖天]. The fifth is Niu myōjin 丹生明神 [Shō Kannon, 聖観音, Kasuga is on the right]. The sixth is Hakusan 白山 [Eleven-Headed Kannon, 十一面観音, Miwa is on the left]. The seventh is Kiyotaki gongen 清滝権現 [Wish-Fulfilling Kannon, 如意輪観音]; the Three-Shrine garden is in the middle. The person who wants to experience the true faith will come on pilgrimage and will be reborn after meeting Amaterasu and obtaining the Seven Treasures.

As often is the case with texts closely connected with *shugen* traditions, Mt. Asama is described as a lotus, a symbolic sacred site which is inhabited and whose sacrality is validated by selected Buddhist deities and *kami*. At the first glance, this particular collection of deities seemingly appears chaotic. But as often is the case with many foundation stories, these relationships might be providing vital clues as to what kind of places and cults the people who practiced at Mt. Asama were interested in or felt an affinity to. The above passage demonstrates that it was surely important to construct some sort of link to the sites

of important *kami* worship and large Buddhist complexes. In this case, such were the Kasuga shrine, Mt. Kōya, Mt. Hakusan, Mt. Miwa, and the Daigoji temple. The next step of the research would be to map out these relationships with more precision and supporting historical evidence.

The third and final chapter of the *Engi* is entitled the "Secret of the Red-Spirit Child" (Jpn. "Shakushō dōji no koto," 赤精童子の事). In it, Amaterasu manifests itself as a divine Rain-Treasure Child (Jpn. Uhō dōji, 雨宝童子), holding a red jewel and making a vow to protect Mt. Asama. In this more esoteric form, the imperial deity reveals at once its connections to the elementary needs of pre-modern societies, such as procuring the rain and ensuring the timely rotation of sun, moon, and stars, and presents an answer to the more complex religious desires: constructing memorial sites, worshipping esoteric deities, and finding new effective techniques for Buddhist salvation in the latter days of the Buddhist dharma (Jpn. *mappō*). This chapter, most puzzling of all, requires deeper consideration, especially in connection to the esoteric Buddhist environment that proliferated in the vicinity of the Ise shrines in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The compilation of the *Engi*, if its colophon of 1511 is to be trusted, must have been connected to the Rinzai Zen lineage, at the time supported by the system of the Five Mountains (Jpn. *Gozan,* 五山). The text reveals little about possible ritual connections with this stream of Buddhist practice, but that just adds another layer to the dynamics of pilgrimage, ritual system, and religious development of Mt. Asama and, ultimately, the Ise shrines and their surrounding Buddhist milieu.

Even a preliminary assessment of *Asamayama engi* suggests the possibility that its further reading may cast light on the development of cultic movements in the Ise and Shima areas and beyond. An investigation of other texts associated with Mt. Asama, such as *Asamayama giki* 朝熊嶽儀軌 and *Shōchō Kumasha shinkyō sata bumi* 小朝熊社神鏡沙汰文, and their cross-reading with texts from the Ise, Miwa, Hakusan, and other traditions, could help us map out the world of medieval oral transmissions (Jpn. *kuden,*口伝) with more precision. More materials preserved at Ise's Jingū bunko 神宮文庫 may shed light on the extended history of this peculiar "polyphonic mountain."

Kubota Osamu has described *Asamayama engi* as an example of a text from the Ryōbu Shintō 両部神道 tradition, written by a member of the Sanbōin 三宝院 lineage at Daigoji who came to Ise to practice *shugen*.[20] The Sanbōin connection to Mt. Asama is certainly plausible;

however, its lineage's involvement in the medieval mountain practices has recently been contested. What is more, it is probably fruitless to reduce the contents of such a text to a single hand or treat it as a contribution by one lineage. Such singularity leads to an important but little-studied combinatory ritual system simply being overlooked. Star worship, improving memory, venerating the dead, creating the links between the past and the future—all these practices built on the diverse methods provided by esoteric Buddhism, Zen, *kami* traditions, mountain practice, and possibly the remnants of some vintage Daoist practice interacting together—that might be a better description for a text such as *Asamayama engi*.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

These short notes briefly introduce and survey the ritual traditions of Mt. Asama in Ise Prefecture during pre-modern times. It was understood that even within this relatively short late medieval text, a multiplicity of concepts, rituals, deities, symbols, and locations is being implicated and intertwined in a specific way. The themes that reflect the use of these items can be roughly mapped out as follows, although in no particular order.

Nature wisdom, *gumonji hō* rite, increasing memory, worship of Venus

The worship of Kokūzō, worship of stars and planetoids, memorial rites

Orientation toward the future and afterlife (sutra repositories)

Construction of Mt. Asama as a pure land

Ise shrines, mountain religion in the Ise area

Mt. Asama as a lotus, eight *kami* and buddhas inhabiting the lotus-mountain

Kokūzō as a protective Buddha of the Japanese emperor

Kokūzō bosatsu as a cosmic matrix, the true embodiment of cosmos

Esoteric Buddhism, Amaterasu as Uhō dōji

Amaterasu as a male esoteric deity, wisdom king Fudō myōō

It is further proposed that the *Engi* should be investigated on two levels. One approach could be historical: one can try to recover the forgotten pilgrimage links and temple connections through the patterns emerging in the *Engi* and corroborate it with more historical evidence. The second approach is through the analysis of concepts and symbols appearing in the *Engi*. For example, on the basis of linguistic, symbolic, and metaphoric devices seen at work in the text, one can search for traces of certain patterns and strategies of religious expression. Also, the researchers can look at the history of the wider region (Ise as a center of Buddhist and esoteric pilgrimage) and its broader time-span (from the ancient until the early modern period).

Future research should also cast light on how the "polyphonic" texts and cultic sites function. One helpful way of unraveling this problem could be through a use of the notion of "cultural memory," recently an important topic in contemporary cultural studies. As the leading expert on the subject Mieke Bal explains, cultural memory "has displaced and subsumed the discourses of individual, psychological memory and of social memory,"[21] and so that could be precisely how it was in pre-modern Japan. The inner mechanisms of the "memory work," essentially a collective cultural construction, are seen as conscious movements for the sake of the present. Influential cultural theorists, such as Pierre Nora,[22] also talk about certain "memory sites," *lieux de mémoire*, which are otherwise inert, or material sites associated with the past that become actively invested symbolically for a present purpose.[23] This means that at sacred sites, such as Mt. Asama, the past was constantly redefined, appropriated, and reshaped to answer contemporaneous "present" needs and desires. I suspect that it was not the only case in pre-modern Japan.

NOTES

1. Klaus Antoni, "The Separation of Gods and Buddhas at Ōmiwa Shrine in Meiji Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22, nos. 1–2 (1995): 143.

2. Murayama Shūichi, *Yamabushi no rekishi* 山伏の歴史 (Tokyo: Hanawa shōbō, 1970); *Gorai Shigeru chosakushū* 五来重著作集, ed. Akata Mitsuo 赤田光男 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2007); Miyake Hitoshi, *Shugendō girei no kenkyū (une étude des rites religieux à propos du shugendō)* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1970); Miyake Hitoshi, *Shugendō Shidō no kenkyū* (orig. pub., 1895; rev. ed., Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1999); Miyake Hitoshi, *Shugendō: Essay on the Structure of Folk Japanese Religion* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Monograph Studies, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003); and Miyake Hitoshi, *The Mandala of Mountain:*

Shugendō and Folk Religion, introduction by Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2005), just to name a few.

3. Nelly Naumann, "Yama no Kami: die Japanische Berggottheit," Teil I: Grundvorstellungen, in *Folklore Studies* 22 (1963): 133–366 and Teil 2: Zusatzliche Vorstellungen, in *Folklore Studies* 23 (1964): 48–199; Gaston Renondeu, *Le Shugendō: Histoire, doctrine et rites des anachorétes dits yamabushi*, Cahiers de la Société Asiatique 18 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1965); Hartmut Rotermund, *Die Yamabushi: Aspekte ihres Glaubens, Lebens und ihrer sozialen Funktion in japanischen Mittelaltern,* Monographien zur Völkerkunde 5 (Hamburg: Kommissionsverlag Cram, de Gruyter und Co., 1968); Anne Bouchy, "*Atagosan gongen no ki,*" "*Atagosan ryōsha daidai kyakumi ryaku engi,*" "*Ise, Asamadake ryaku engi,*" and "*Tamakisan gongen engi,*" in *Sangaku shūkyōshi kenkyū sōsho* 18, Shugendō shiryōshū II, ed. Gorai Shigeru (Tokyo: Meicho shuppan, 1984), 83–84, 84–87, 108–110, 148–155; commentaries: 742–743, 743–744, 745–746, 755–757; Anne Bouchy, "Shima, Ise no Yakushi shinkō," in *Yakushi shinkō, Minzoku shūkyōshi sōsho* 12, ed. Gorai Shigeru (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1986), 123–185; Anne Bouchy, "The Cult of Mount Atago and the Atago Confraternities," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987): 255–277; Anne Bouchy, "Le littoral, espace de méditation. Cultes des monts Sengen, Asama, Aominé et systèmes de représentation chez les gens de la mer de la côte orientale de la péninsule de Kii," *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* 9 (1997): 255–298; H. Byron Earhart, *A Religious Study of the Mount Haguro Sect of Shugendō: An Example of Japanese Mountain Religion* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970); Carmen Blacker, "Initiation in Shugendō: The Passage through the Ten Stage of Existence," in *Initiation,* ed. C. J. Bleeker (Leiden: Brill, 1965); Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1975); Paul Swanson, "Shugendō and the Yoshino-Kumano Pilgrimage: An Example of Mountain Pilgrimage," *Monumenta Nipponica* 36, no. 1 (1981): 55–84; Paul Swanson and Royall Tyler, eds., "Shugendō and Mountain Religion in Japan," special issue, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16, nos. 2–3 (1989), esp. the bibliography to the editors' introduction; Alan Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions," *History of Religions* 21, no. 3 (1982); Alan Grapard, "Japan's Ignored Cultural Revolution: The Separation of Shinto-Buddhist Divinities and a Case Study: Tōnomine," *History of Religions* 23, no. 3 (1984); Alan Grapard, "Lotus in the Mountain, Mountain in the Lotus: *Rokugō kaizan nimmon daibosatsu hongi,*" *Monumenta Nipponica* 41, no. 1 (1986); Alan Grapard, "Linguistic Cubism: A Singularity of Pluralism in the Sannō Cult," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, nos. 2–3 (1987): 211–234; and Alan Grapard, "The Textualized Mountain—Enmounted Text: The Lotus Sutra in Kunisaki," in *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, ed. G. J. Tanabe, Jr. and W. J. Tanabe (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989). Recent studies are Anne Bouchy, "Du légitime et de l'illégitime dans le shugendō ou 'Sang de Buddha,' 'sang des êtres des montagnes,'" in *Légitimités, legitimations—La construction de*

l'autorité au Japon, ed. Anne Bouchy, Guillaume Carré, and François Lachaud (Paris: coll. "Études thématiques" 16, EFEO, 2005), 111–177; Sarah Thal, *Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods: The Politics of a Pilgrimage Site in Japan, 1573–1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Caroline Hirasawa, "Early Foundation Legends of Tateyama," *Journal of Human and Cultural Sciences* 37, no. 3 (2006); Max D. Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 235 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Barbara Ambros, *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: The Ōyama Cult and Regional Religion in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008); and Anna Andreeva, "The Karmic Origins of the Great Bright Miwa Deity: A Transformation of the Sacred Mountain in Pre-Modern Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 65, no. 2 (2010): 245–295. Forthcoming studies on the mountain ranges, politics, and practices of Ōmine and Katsuragi are also much anticipated.

4. See Bernard Faure, Max Moerman, and Gaynor Sekimori, eds., *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie*, special issue on Shugendō, 18 (2009).

5. Bouchy, "*Atagosan gongen no ki,*" "*Atagosan ryōsha daidai kyakumi ryaku engi,*" "*Ise, Asamadake ryaku engi,*" and "*Tamakisan gongen engi*"; Bouchy, "Le littoral, espace de méditation."

6. "If you pay homage to the august [shrines of] Ise, drop in to Mt. Asama! If you do not come to Asama, that's a one-shrine pilgrimage." *O Ise mairaba, Asama wo kake yo! Asama kakeneba, kata sangû*「お伊勢参らば朝熊をかけよ、朝熊かけねば、片参宮」.

7. Kubota Osamu 久保田収, "Tenshō daijin to Uhō dōji—Asamayama no shinkō wo chūshin to shite" 天照大神と雨宝童子—朝熊山の信仰を中心として, in *Ise shinkō I* 伊勢信仰 I, ed. Hagiwara Tatsuo et al. (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1984), 143–144.

8. This site was connected to the activities of the local Fuji confraternities (Jpn. *Fuji kō,* 冨士講) active in the area during the Edo period.

9. Bouchy, "Le littoral, espace de méditation," 270–271.

10. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

11. Sonoda Kōyū 園田香融, *Heian bukkyō no kenkyū* 平安仏教の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1981), 27–52; and Lucia Dolce, ed., "The Worship of Stars in Japanese Religious Practice," special double issue of *Culture and Cosmos: A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy* 10, nos. 1–2 (2006): 8-9.

12. For example, see a text entitled "Instructions about the Divine Mirror of the Small Morning-Bear Shrine of the Grand Shrines of Ise" (*Shōchō Kumasha shinkyō sata bumi,* 小朝熊社神鏡沙汰文), which describes the incident when the divine mirror of Asamayama shrine was broken and lost. *Gunsho ruijū* 群

書類従, *Jingi bu* 神祇部, scroll 12; *Shintō taikei* 神道体系, *Jingū hen* 神宮編, 2.

13. Suzuki Yoshikazu, "Sengūin hibun no kenkyū" 『仙宮院秘文』の研究, in *Ise shinkō I* 伊勢信仰 I, ed. Hagiwara Tatsuo et al. (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1984), 199–222.

14. Mark Jacobus Teeuwen, "The Kami in Esoteric Buddhist Thought and Practice," in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, ed. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000), 111.

15. One example of such multiple visions is described in the above-mentioned text entitled *Miwa daimyōjin engi* 三輪大明神縁起. For annotated translation see Andreeva, "The Karmic Origins of the Great Bright Miwa Deity."

16. I base these research notes on the Japanese version of *Asamayama engi*, ed. Sakurai Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎, which appears in Sakurai Tokutarō, Hagiwara Tatsuo, and Miyata Noboru, eds., *Jisha Engi,* Nihon shisō taikei 20 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975), 77–87. Translations in progress are author's own.

17. The southern part of the modern-day Gifu Prefecture.

18. In order to perform the *gumonji* rite, one had to perform prayers to the Bright Star, Venus, which was considered a manifestation of Bodhisattva Kokuzō 虚空蔵, so here the *Engi* is clearly linking the name of Kūkai to this practice.

19. Possibly the Nari River in the Taira district of the Ikoma Province in Yamato, the area associated with the activities of the legendary founder of Shugendō En no Gyōja 役行者. The location of Zengōji is unknown, but the Nihon shisō taikei editors suggest that it might be a reference to Senkōji 千光寺, a branch of Daigoji 醍醐寺 temple in Kyoto.

20. Kubota, "Tenshō daijin to Uhō dōji—Asamayama no shinkō wo chūshin to shite," 147.

21. See, for example, Mieke Bal et al., eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH and London: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1999).

22. Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*: *Under the Direction of Pierre Nora*, English-language ed. with foreword by Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (NY: Columbia University Press, 1996).

23. Kathleen M. Ashley, "Creating Family Identity in Books of Hours," in "The Cultural Processes of Appropriation," ed. Kathleen M. Ashley and Veronique Plesch, special issue, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, no. 1 (2002): 145–165.