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6 "To Overcome the Tyranny of Time": Stars, Buddhas, and the Arts of Perfect Memory at Mt. Asama

The transcultural and hybrid nature of religious practices in premodern Japan can be best understood in terms of historical relationships between cultic sites, local deities (*kami* 神), Buddhist divinities, and (sometimes) celestial bodies. In order to get a full picture of these relations, one should add to this mixture the diverse groups of religious practitioners who inhabit or visit these places for ritual purposes, to accumulate spiritual power, or for doctrinal or religious training.

Cultic sites, being a permanent feature of the geographical landscape, act as a nexus for the symbolic and ritual relationships between divinities and practitioners. Networks and relationships between cultic sites depend on their facilitators – that is, religious institutions and individual practitioners. Such networks are subject to change, being established for a certain period of time; they are also easily disrupted by social, economic, or political circumstances. The temporal points of the supposed or imagined origins of such networks and relationships – as well as their shifts, reconfigurations, or abrupt terminations – become encoded in cultic sites' religious identity and cultural memory, as expressed through texts, rituals, and images. Taken together, cultic sites act as nodes for certain kinds of religious practice; each site can be somewhat similar or related to the other sites nearby, but it can also be markedly different.

One prime but understudied example of such phenomena is Mt. Asama (朝熊山), a mountain rising 555 metres above the sea level, near the present-day town of Toba (鳥羽市) in the eastern part of Mie prefecture in Japan. Located a few kilometres to the northwest of the Ise shrines (Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮) – Japan's most important sacred complex, which enshrines the tutelary deities of the imperial house – Mt. Asama was for some time a centre of pilgrimage and ritual practice in its own right, attracting priests from nearby Shinto shrines, mountain ascetics, Buddhist monks, and itinerant holy men from remote provinces. Between the late twelfth and sixteenth centuries (and perhaps already much

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earlier), this mountain was repeatedly conceptualised as a ritual and memorial site associated with the veneration of stars and the acquisition of perfect memory. Performed during the night among the mountain's forests and caverns, the ritual of *Gumonji-hō* (求聞持法, lit. "inquiring and retaining [in one's mind]") focused on contemplating the star Venus, worshipping the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha (Kokūzō 虚空蔵), and reciting *dhāraṇī* – lines of Sanskrit syllables thought to be imbued with special potency – over an extended period of time. This practice, known to mountain ascetics in Japan since at least the eighth century, was said to endow those who performed it with the utmost lucidity of mind and sharpness of perception, to grant perfect memory, and also to increase merit, prosperity, and virtue.

Ritual texts from the Muromachi (室町, 1336–1573) and Edo (江戸, 1600–1868) periods describe the complex nature of worship at Mt. Asama and provide ample clues as to how and why this mountain became associated with ritual practices aimed at attaining perfect memory through worshipping stars, local deities, and Buddhist divinities. In large part, Mt. Asama's history was shaped by processes of recontextualising ritual, astrological, and astronomical knowledge that had originated in Central Asia, India, and China at different periods and arrived in Japan as part of the corpus of Buddhist teachings and practices, along with techniques of directional and calendric calculation and geomantic divination. In Japan, the understanding of Buddhist and other traditions, including astronomical knowledge, was reconfigured to suit particular needs, landscapes, and purposes and was merged with local traditions of *kami* worship. As a result of this long-term transcultural movement – combined with localisation – Buddhist deities, concepts, and images became central to religious discourses and practices at Mt. Asama and remained a crucial part of the site's cultural memory before and, to some degree, after the Meiji period (1868–1912).

6.1 Suppressing the "Wrong" Memories

During the third month of 1750 (Kan'en 寛延 3), the Buddhist temple located atop Mt. Asama in the Watarai (度会郡) district of Ise initiated a rare public display of its principal image (*honzon* 本尊) of bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha (Kokūzō). A number of sacred historical images or statues are usually preserved in temples as inaccessible, secret objects (*hibutsu* 秘仏); they are periodically put on display at events called *gokaichō* (御開帳, lit. "the august unveiling"). Such events are conducted to remind parishioners of the temple's core identity as

a religious institution and to collect funds from the attendant public for the upkeep of temple property (Fowler 1991–92; Rambelli 2002; Horton 2007).[1]

This particular event occurred a few months after the transfer of the two Ise shrines to a new site (*shikinen hengū* 式年遷宮) was completed in 1749 (Kan'en 寛延 2). The shrines' relocation was a major procedure in the religious, economic, and – to some extent – political life of Japan. It took place every twenty years, necessitated an extensive fundraising campaign, and required the attendance of the members of the imperial family (Teeuwen and Breen 2017). During the ceremonial opening of the *honzon* and subsequent festivities, the temple on top of Mt. Asama, called Kongōshōji (金剛証寺), also displayed a ritual banner bearing the following description of its other principal image[2]:

> 天照太神影向尊像雨宝童子
> *Tenshō daijin yōgō sonzō Uhō dōji*
> The deity Uhō Dōji, the provisional manifestation of Tenshō Daijin

With this banner, the divine ancestor of Japan's imperial house and the principal divinity of the Ise shrines, the solar deity Amaterasu (天照, or Tenshō Daijin, as it was known in Buddhist circles), was announced to worshippers within the precincts of a Buddhist temple as the hybrid Shinto-Buddhist divinity Uhō Dōji, the "Rain-Treasure Child."

Kongōshōji today preserves an Uhō Dōji statue dating from the Heian period (905–1185, possibly the latter half of the tenth to the twelfth centuries), which is likely to have been that very *honzon*. It is a wooden sculpture of an androgynous deity with fleshy cheeks and a benign, calm facial expression, carved from a single block of Japanese *hinoki* cypress. On top of the deity's head rests a four-layered treasure stupa (*hōtō* 宝塔), and the deity's long hair flows over both shoulders. The deity stands on a block of mountainous rock and is dressed in simple Tang-style, long-sleeved robes, resting its right hand on a one-pronged *vajra*-jewelled staff and holding a *cintāmaṇi* jewel in its left hand.[3] According to temple legend, the statue of this divinity, formally called Kongō Sekishō Zenshin

1 The functions of secret images are often more diverse. See the broader discussion from the viewpoint of semiotics in Rambelli and Reinders (2012, esp. ch. 4, "The Ways of Not Seeing," 134–70).

2 During the *gokaichō*, such banners usually stand in front of the temple gates and in an immediate vicinity of the hall where the image is installed. They may also be placed at the entry point to the mountain or in the vicinity of nearby villages, especially if many temple parishioners and patrons reside there.

3 For references and photographs of this statue, see Nara National Museum (2007, 164; for annotation in Japanese, see p. 303).

Uhō Dōji (金剛赤精善神雨宝童子, Protective Deity of the Adamantine Red Jewel, Rain-Treasure Child), was carved by the Buddhist monk Kūkai (空海, 774–835), the architect of Japan's esoteric Buddhist tradition of Shingon and also the alleged founder of Kongōshōji. Representing the appearance of Amaterasu as it descended from heaven to earth (according to the myth, in the province of Hyūga [日向] in Kyushu), Uhō Dōji was a medieval deity that was also revered as a manifestation of the central divinity of esoteric Buddhism, the cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana (Dainichi 大日) (Faure 2016, 276–79).

To commemorate its own identity at the time of that event, the temple also issued its own foundation history, entitled *Ise Asama dake ryaku engi* (伊勢朝熊岳略縁起, *Abbreviated Karmic Origins of Mt. Asama at Ise*; hereafter, the *Ryaku engi*), as a woodblock-print pamphlet. Although oral transmissions regarding the origins of Kongōshōji had circulated widely among the mountain ascetics who came to Mt. Asama prior to the publication of this pamphlet in 1750, the temple history was properly recorded by a Kongōshōji abbot only in 1662 (Kanbun 寛文 2).[4] Since the pre-1662 versions of the *Ryaku engi* most likely existed in the form of handwritten books or scrolls, they would only have been available to select temple clergymen, and not to the wider public. Both the 1662 record and the subsequently published version referred to several poems attributed to the imperial deity Amaterasu, glorifying Mt. Asama as the imperial deity's dwelling place and explaining that

> Mt. Asama is a sacred peak where the sages of immortality dwell. On its southern foot, there is the shrine on the Isuzu River (五十鈴宮) [that is, the Inner Shrine of Ise, Naikū (伊勢内宮)]. In the southwest, there is the Uji shrine (宇治宮) [dedicated to the Divine Grandchild Ninigi, the ancestor of the imperial family]. In the west, there is the Toyouke shrine (豊受宮) [the Outer Shrine of Ise, Gekū (外宮)]. Because these three great deities eternally dance around this sacred mountain, the nearby Akeho pond (明星の池)[5] has been invoked in poetry as the "pond of stringed jewels of sun, moon, and stars."[6]

4 Kubota (1980, 143–58, esp. 150–51); Kodama (2000, 390–411). Other Kongōshōji documents, including the earlier text *Asamayama engi* (朝熊山縁起), recorded in 1511, are preserved as original manuscripts at Tōji Kanchiin, in Kyoto. This core text of the Asama tradition and other similar manuscripts preserved at the Jingū Bunko (神宮文庫) archive at Ise may have been the source for the aforementioned 1662 version of the *Ryaku engi* and will be discussed below. The significance of the Japanese term *engi* will be revisited later, in the section titled "Ākāśagarbha, Kūkai, and Amaterasu in the *Asamayama Engi*," Section 6.4, pp. 136–143 of the current chapter.

5 Literally, the "pond of the Bright Star" or the "pond of *myōjō*, the star Venus." The Japanese characters *akeho* (明星) can also be read as *akaboshi*, which is a homophone for the "red star" (赤星). The relationship between *myōjō* as the Bright Star, Venus, and the colour red will be clarified later in this chapter.

6 *Ise Asama dake ryaku engi* 伊勢朝熊岳略縁起, in Gorai (2000, 108–10).

Elsewhere, the Kongōshōji foundation histories also explained that Mt. Asama has been a place of the most devout Buddhist and mountain ascetic practice since its beginning. They described how the founder of the temple (for this, read Kūkai) prostrated himself on the ground and worshipped the Bright Star (*akaboshi* or *myōjō* 明星), that is Venus. In response, Japanese deities – including the aforementioned Uhō Dōji, the three avatars of Kumano (*Kumano sansho gongen* 熊野三所権現), and eight myriads of other *kami* – appeared before him and proclaimed that Mt. Asama was a sacred mountain around which the deities Tenshō Daijin (Amaterasu), Tenson Daijin (Divine Grandchild Ninigi), and Toyouke Daijin eternally oscillated (*yūgi shitamafu* 遊戯し給ふ). At that point, as a sign of divine approval (*shō* 証),[7] the aforementioned Uhō Dōji momentarily appeared to Kūkai in its form as the imperial deity Amaterasu and proclaimed an oracle:

> I will manifest myself in a sacred image that will protect many generations of the Divine Grandchild [Ninigi]'s descendants [i.e., Japanese emperors]. This image, full of virtues and solemnly decorated, will appear in bright luminescence from the cavern of the Bright-Star Water (*myōjō sui* or *akaboshi no mizu* 明星水).[8]

What has been narrated above appears as a plain, unobtrusive story, a local legend meant to encourage patrons' donations by revealing the mytho-historical premises of Kongōshōji's construction as well as the divine landscape of Mt. Asama and nearby sacred sites. This narrative invoked the divine ancestors of Japan's imperial house, enshrined at Ise, placing them within the history of the Buddhist and mountain ascetic practices at Mt. Asama. Moreover, it emphasised strong mythological connections between the imperial deity, the mountain, and Japan's influential Shingon tradition. A characteristic of this type of narrative was the alignment of the distant divinities of Buddhism with local deities (*kami*). In modern scholarship on Japanese premodern religiosity, this phenomenon is known as *honji suijaku* (本地垂迹), literally meaning "buddhas as original ground and local deities as manifest trace" – a notion that will be discussed further in the following sections (Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003, 1–54).

The aforementioned temple history printed by Kongōshōji in 1750 for distribution to the public was issued in the aftermath of a rare major event – the ritual transfer of the two Ise shrines, which took place once every twenty years and always attracted a surge of new pilgrims to the region (Teeuwen and Breen

7 Presumably, to commemorate this mythic event, the temple was given the name Kongōshōji (金剛証寺, Temple of Adamantine Proof).

8 *Ise Asamadake ryaku engi*, in Gorai (2000, 108–10); Kubota (1980, 150–52).

2017, 139–62). No doubt these prints could be acquired easily by pilgrims travelling *en masse* to Ise and paying homage to nearby Mt. Asama.

Yet Kongōshōji's activities had caused discontent and controversy at the Grand Ise shrines. A large complex consisting of two main and many subsidiary shrines, Ise was an ancient sacred site which had been dedicated to the imperial tutelary deity Amaterasu since at least the sixth century. In the *longue durée*, the shrines were exclusively reserved for ritual worship by members of imperial house. During the medieval period, the ritual transmissions of Japan's early mytho-histories regarding the Age of Gods (*kamiyo* 神代) had claimed that, akin to the Buddhist divinities of India, Amaterasu had made a vow to protect one hundred generations of Japanese kings.[9] This link between Amaterasu and Japanese *tennō* (天皇) rulers was the cornerstone of the shrines' identity and remained part and parcel of Ise's own historical ideology. This mattered greatly, especially in the aftermath of the medieval period, when the imperial house was split and impoverished and could no longer provide much subsistence or direct economic patronage to the Ise shrines.[10]

This caused a significant reorientation of the shrines' survival strategy, necessitating a shift in their relations with major donors even while they still maintained their historical links to the imperial house. By the year 1750, the Ise shrines were a centre of popular mass pilgrimage (*Ise mairi* 伊勢参り).[11] Although the Kongōshōji incident remains obscure in some respects, it is reasonable to suggest that the Ise priesthood objected to Kongōshōji's self-promoting activities at the time of a major ritual event in the shrine's calendar and also to the divergent portrayal of their official mythology by their Buddhist neighbours. In particular, the idea that the imperial cult could be appropriated by local temple clergy and travelling mountain ascetic groups in

9 This vow was, for example, referred to in one of the chapters of *Miwa daimyōjin engi* (*Karmic Origins of the Great Bright Miwa Deity*), recorded at the Ōmiwa shrine in Yamato around 1318. See Andreeva (2011, 289).

10 The institutional history of the Ise shrines has been discussed in detail in Teeuwen (1996), and more recently, in Teeuwen and Breen (2017).

11 In some years during the first half of the eighteenth century, the Ise shrines had attracted between two and three million pilgrims. On average, at least 400,000 visitors went to pay homage to the Ise shrines annually. It is notable that, while the shrine priests strove to maintain their formal links to the imperial house, for pilgrims coming to give thanks to the shrines, Amaterasu represented the deity primarily ensuring agricultural prosperity. See Breen and Teeuwen (2010, ch. 2, "Kami Shrines, Myths, and Rituals in Premodern Times"; on popular practices, see pp. 57–58); also Teeuwen and Breen (2017, ch. 7, "Pilgrims' Pleasures," 139–62).

order to appeal to a broad public and effectively divert economic resources may have been a major source of irritation.[12]

In a bid to suppress the contradictory sacred topography of the Ise and Asama deities presented by Kongōshōji, the Ise priests immediately issued a legal complaint, seeking to stop publication of the *Ise Asama dake ryaku engi*, citing similar, earlier transgressions as precedents. Such cases included a seventeenth-century campaign against Jōmyōji (常明寺), a subordinate of the Tōeizan (東叡山) temple complex in the Kantō region, which publicly sought to present itself as the structural Buddhist counterpart to the Ise shrines (*naiin* 内院) as well as other temples in Kyoto. In the fourth month of 1750, the court ruled that the case of the Ise shrines should be upheld. As a result of this ruling, Kongōshōji was forced to remove the "offensive" banner and stop publication of its history. Any further distribution of the woodblock prints of the *Ryaku engi* was prohibited. The same thing happened in 1846 (Kōka 弘化 3), when the temple attempted to republish its own history. At that time, to prevent future publications, the Ise shrines insisted that the printing woodblocks be burnt.[13]

In doing so, the Ise shrines sought to suppress the alternative memory of their own mythological history, as preserved by the Buddhist temple on Mt. Asama. This alternative history suggested that in the distant past, Mt. Asama had been a centre for an important Buddhist practice, which involved the combinatory, hybrid worship of multiple deities, such as Japanese *kami* (including the imperial ancestor Amaterasu), buddhas, stars, and celestial bodies. This practice was developed and transported further afield by the itinerant ascetics and non-elite practitioners of all stripes, some of whom dabbled in astrological and geomantic divination. Moreover, the role assigned to the imperial deity in this practice was subordinate to that of the Buddhist deities, different from those historically acceptable at Ise, and dependent on Kongōshōji's own constructions of space, time, and memory. Incidentally, the fact that Amaterasu had multiple Buddhist identities was not in itself in any way subversive. From the mid-eleventh century until the 1600s, Amaterasu was variously identified in Buddhist circles as a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon (観音, Sk. Avalokiteśvara, Ch. Guanyin) or the wisdom king Aizen Myōō (愛染明王, Sk. Rāgarāja) or, most

12 In fact, the Ise shrine clergy had objected to the inclusion of Mt. Asama in the *Ise mairi* since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century. In the *Ise sangū annaiki* (伊勢参宮案内記, *Guide to Ise Shrine Pilgrimage*) issued by the shrines in 1707, the popular practice of calling the pilgrimage to Ise *sangū* (三宮, "three shrines") was strongly rejected as "being extremely mistaken"; see Kubota (1980, 143); Knecht (2006, 246).

13 Kubota (1980, 151).

importantly, as a direct manifestation of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi (大日, Sk. Mahāvairocana), the omnipresent divinity of esoteric Buddhism.[14] However, since Kongōshōji was not formally connected to any imperial temples and had no direct links to the ruler's family, such appropriation of the divine ancestry and imperial agency must have been seen by the Ise clergy as widely off the mark. It contradicted the official mythology of both the Ise shrines and the imperial house and challenged Ise's claims to religious and institutional superiority.

6.2 Pre-existing Sacred Topographies

The Buddhist temple Kongōshōji did indeed have a different vision of Amaterasu's role in Mt. Asama's past. This was necessitated by the mountain's own cultic history and its position within a range of sacred landscapes and topographies that had emerged during premodern times. Initially a mountain with few – if any – particular religious affiliations, towards the late twelfth century, it became envisioned as one possible site for the descent of the future Buddha Maitreya (Miroku 弥勒) and an entry point into his Tōsotsu heaven, a paradisiac realm akin to Buddha Amida's (阿弥陀) Pure Land. During that time, mountain ascetics and religious practitioners, including the Ise priests, buried Buddhist sutras on Mt. Asama in the hope that they would survive during the age of degenerate dharma (Ch. *mofa* 末法, Jp. *mappō*) and ensure their rebirth in Maitreya's realm.[15] The bronze mirrors and copper or clay cylindrical sutra vessels, discovered on the mountain slopes in considerable numbers during the Edo period (1603–1868) and again by chance in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contain inscriptions indicating that such burials had been practised since at least the mid-twelfth century.

For example, one such artefact contained thirteen handwritten scrolls of Buddhist sutras; the inscription on the copper cylinder states that it was buried by the Buddhist nun Shinmyō (比丘尼真妙) in 1159 (Heiji 平治 1.08.15) to pacify the spirit of a deceased Watarai (度会) priest and to ensure his safe passage into the Pure Land. The colophon to a copy of the *Lotus Sutra*[16] contains a number of

14 On medieval Buddhist theories regarding Amaterasu, see Itō (2011).

15 See, for example, a discussion of the sutra burials in Heian Japan in Moerman (2007, 245–74); on the role of Miroku and on the sutra burials by Fujiwara no Michinaga (藤原道長, 966–1027), see esp. 261–65. See also Ruppert (2009, 110), and more recently, the discussion of similar ritual internments at Mt. Kinpu in Blair (2015, 160–89).

16 Sk. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*, Ch. *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華経, Jp. *Myōhō rengekyō*. In Japan, it's also most widely known as the *Hokkekyō* (法華経).

personal names of the Watarai, the hereditary priestly lineage in charge of the Outer Shrine of Ise. Other objects interred in the cylinder included three mirrors decorated with images of the Amida triad. Taken together, these objects suggest that Shinmyō's 1159 ritual internment on Mt. Asama may have been intended, on the one hand, to preserve Buddhist scriptures and images so they would survive throughout the degenerate age of *mappō*, until the arrival of a future Buddha, and on the other hand, to ensure that the deceased Watarai priest could successfully attain rebirth in either Miroku's or Amida's Pure Land.[17]

During the latter half of the twelfth century, both hereditary Ise shrine lineages, the Watarai and the Arakida (荒木田, who were in charge of the Inner Shrine), as well as people associated with them, regarded Mt. Asama as a sacred mountain that would endure through the time of *mappō* and survive until the coming of the future Buddha.[18] Yet another object, a large clay sutra container excavated from the sutra burial sites on the mountain slopes, reveals that it was commissioned by the *gonnegi* (権禰宜) priest of the Inner Shrine, Arakida Tokimori, in 1173.[19]

Previous studies of Ise shrines and medieval kami worship have already noted that some of the Ise clergy retired to the nearby Buddhist temples upon completing their shrine duties. The hereditary lineages of Watarai, Arakida, and Ōnakatomi usually established their family temples (*ujidera* 氏寺) in areas not far from the Ise shrines.[20] Mt. Asama had a small auxiliary shrine, called Asamayama jinja (朝熊山神社) which enshrined the deity Amaterasu in the

17 See the photograph of this particular object in Tokyo National Museum (2009, 56, fig. 26; for the annotation in Japanese, see pp. 179–80).

18 Peter Knecht (2006, 240–41). On the basis of his analysis of the *Ise sankei mandala*, depicting Mt. Asama and Kongōshōji as a part of the Ise shrines landscape, Knecht argues that Mt. Asama may not have been fully perceived as a Pure Land at the time of the mandala's creation during the later Muromachi period (1336–1573), but that it may have been related to the cult of Mt. Fuji in eastern Japan instead. Mt. Fuji appears in the upper-left corner of *Ise sankei mandala*; the local custom has it that Mt. Fuji's white peak can be seen from the top of Mt. Asama on a clear day. I thank Professor Shirayama Yoshitarō of Kōgakkan University for arranging a trip to Mt. Asama in February 2004. During that trip, the weather was clear, and some vague shape could indeed be seen in the far distance.

19 Tokyo National Museum (2009, 55, fig. 27; for the annotation in Japanese, see p. 180).

20 Itō (2011, 194–95). Some of these temples, especially the Arakida and the Ōnakatomi temples, had images of Avalokiteśvara (Kannon), namely, the Eleven-Headed Kannon (Jūichimen Kannon 十一面観音), as their principal buddhas. Evidence in support of this is a record by the Buddhist monk Tsūkai, in *Tsūkai Daijingū sankeiki* 通海大神宮参詣記 (*Records of Pilgrimage to the Grand Ise Shrines*, late 13th century), in Hanawa (1932, 759–812, esp. p. 793). Tsūkai was a resident monk at the temple Rengeji (蓮花寺) and had links to the Sanbōin (三宝院), the sub-temple of the esoteric Buddhist temple complex Daigoji (醍醐寺), southwest of Kyoto.

form of a small sacred mirror.[21] Like many local shrines, it was overseen by clergy from the Ise shrines[22]; a small Buddhist temple or a votive chapel may have also been located in its vicinity. Even though the Ise shrines enforced a strict protocol prohibiting all things Buddhist within shrine precincts, evidently the Buddhist life of Ise deities and priests was not so restrained. As is clear from the evidence above, for priests of the Ise shrines, their personal Buddhist goals as well as the geography of their fulfilment included Mt. Asama as a site of potential connection to Buddhist lands and divine realms.

Throughout the medieval period, Mt. Asama, positioned as it was to the northeast of the Ise shrines,[23] attracted itinerant holy men, diviners, and mountain ascetics linked with other important Buddhist temples, mostly but not exclusively of esoteric Buddhist persuasion. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, the Buddhist monk Tsūkai (通海), a descendant of the Ōnakatomi lineage, stated in his collection *Daijingū sankeiki* (大神宮参詣記, *Records of Pilgrimage to the Grand Ise Shrines*) that Buddhist monks hailing from the metropolitan temples in Kyoto and Nara had been coming to visit the Ise shrines since at least the 1180s; it was customary for them to pay homage to Mt. Asama from a distance.[24]

Some monks may have gone all the way up to the mountain peaks. Among these was the leader of the Nara temple Saidaiji (西大寺), Eizon (叡尊, 1201–1290), who came to Ise at least three times during the 1270s and 1280s.[25] Buddhist monks who had links to Shugendō practice and were stationed more permanently at

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He recorded his notes while residing at Ise around 1287. I have discussed this topic in Andreeva (2017, 175–90).

21 Hanawa (1932, 769). See, for example, a short text, entitled *Shō Asamayama sha jinkyō shō, satabumi* 小朝熊社神鏡沙汰文 (*About the Divine Mirror of the Small Asamayama Shrine near the Grand Shrines of Ise*), in Hanawa (1928, 356–85). For example, this text reports an incident in 1270 (Bun'ei 文永 6.11) in which the sacred mirror representing Amaterasu and enshrined on Mt. Asama was broken.

22 Hanawa (1928, 356–85).

23 Traditionally associated with the "demon's gate" (*kimon* 鬼門) in early Chinese geomantic divination and in Japanese Yin-Yang thought, northeast was a direction from which malevolent spirits could enter and threaten the important facilities. Mt. Asama, therefore, was envisioned as an outpost protecting the Ise shrines and as the seat of imperial deities from fairly early on. This geomantic notion may have even been considered in the foundation of the Ise shrines to the southwest of Mt. Asama in the sixth century. If so, this location would have been of a special significance to the practitioners involved in astral and geomantic divination.

24 Hanawa (1932, 794–99); Andreeva (2017, 175–90).

25 Nara kokuritsu bunkazai kenkyūjo (1997: 3–78). However, he does not mention his visit to Mt. Asama in 1273 specifically; see p. 38; see also Andreeva (2017, 175–79).

other small temples in Ise province may have followed his example.[26] For instance, Tsūkai reports that Eizon climbed Mt. Asama in 1273 (Bun'ei 文永 10.03), after his pilgrimage to the two Ise shrines. There, he paid his respects to the sacred mirror installed at the Asamayama shrine and observed the Buddhist image inscribed on it before proceeding to look at the cherry trees (*sakura*) on the mountain. Tsūkai, who lived at a temple near Mt. Asama and may have accompanied Eizon or other monks on such visits, described this image only as that of a Buddhist divinity wearing a crown.[27]

In 1392, Kongōshōji, the temple on Mt. Asama, was appropriated by clergy of the Rinzai Zen lineage, who were affiliated with the Gozan (Five Mountain) temples, supported by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (足利義満, 1358–1408). Little is known about possible ritual connections with this stream of Buddhist practice, but the Rinzai Zen patronage and administration undoubtedly added another layer to the dynamics of pilgrimage, ritual system, and religious development on Mt. Asama, and possibly also to the Ise shrines and their surrounding Buddhist milieu. The Japanese scholar of medieval Shinto Kubota Osamu has noted that the first indications of such joint "three-shrine pilgrimage" (*sangū mairi* 三宮まいり), which included Mt. Asama and the two Ise shrines, were already emerging during the Muromachi period, around the year 1487.[28]

During the late medieval and early modern periods, although it burned at least once, the temple continued to attract mountain practitioners and eventually entered the institutionalised structure of Shugendō. Even though Kongōshōji's heritage reminds one of its rich past as an esoteric Buddhist mountain temple involved in the production of medieval Shinto practices, it remains formally affiliated with the Rinzai Zen sect to this day.

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26 Both medieval historical sources and modern Japanese scholarship (Kubota 1980; Abe Yasurō 1985; Itō 2011) have pointed out that there was a considerable number of Buddhist temples in the vicinity of the Ise shrines and the broader Ise-Shima area. Among those were the Sengūin (仙宮院) in the Watarai district, a Shugendō temple linked to the Tendai temple complex of Miidera/Onjōji in Saga province, and Enmyōji (円明寺) in the Kusube district, linked to the Saidaiji Temple in Nara. There were also other temples specialising in Pure Land teachings and practice in the areas of Toba and Shima.

27 Hanawa (1932, 769–70); Andreeva (2017, 178–79). Tsūkai mentions other Buddhist monks from Daigoji who observed Sanskrit syllables (*shuji* 種子) on the shrine mirrors during the Kenkyū 建久 years (1190–99). His description could fit with the iconography of several deities: bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara (Kannon) and Ākāśagarbha (Kokūzō), or the cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana (Dainichi).

28 Kubota (1980, 143–44). This date could coincide with the period when the famous *Ise sankei mandala*, which included Mt. Asama in its iconography of the Ise shrines, was created. See n. 18.

On the basis of the surviving material evidence, it becomes clear that Mt. Asama first emerged as a Buddhist memorial site by the mid-twelfth century; it was most likely configured in such a manner by the religious figures linked to the Ise shrine clergy. This attests to the fact that, historically, the priests at the Ise shrine were actively participating in the Buddhist life of nearby cultic sites. Since then, it has been appropriated by different religious groups with distinct ritual and practical agendas, a process which can be discerned through a variety of ritual texts associated with this mountain. As a result, by facilitating the religious and ritual practices of its diverse users – Shinto clergy, mountain ascetics, and Buddhist monks of various denominations – during the medieval period, Mt. Asama became a polyphonic, polysemic sacred site, which combined the worship of imperial *kami*, stars, and Buddhist divinities and welcomed practitioners of all stripes. But how was it possible for such complex sacred topographies to emerge? And what significance did the celestial bodies have for the religious landscape of Mt. Asama?

6.3 At the Crossroads of Buddhist Networks

Before we proceed to answer these questions and discuss the religious history of Mt. Asama, a few explanatory notes are required to highlight the complex processes of cultural translation, transculturation, and appropriation of Buddhist elements that took place at Mt. Asama prior to the medieval period, in the broadest possible sense. Take, for example, just two aspects: the temple's principal Buddhist deity and the major ritual in its Buddhist practice. Both had diverse historic itineraries prior to their implantation and adoption at Mt. Asama, where they became an inseparable part of its distinct Buddhist topoi.

First, let us turn to the deity. Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, possibly with an Indic and Central Asian background, had been known in China since at least the early fifth century.[29] Following the arrival in China of several scholar-monks from Kashmir, Gandhāra, Sogdia, and other parts of India in the first half of the fifth century and later, several scriptures emerged – either translated from Sanskrit and other languages or compiled in China – describing in some detail the virtues of this deity and the contemplations in which it featured.

29 In her discussion of eidetic contemplations (Ch. *guan* 観, Jp. *kan*), Cynthea Bogel notes that the Buddhist sutras focusing on the contemplation of Ākāśagarbha were most likely composed in Central Asia and China during the late fourth to early fifth centuries; see Bogel (2009: 193).

For example, the Kashmiri monk Buddhayaśas (佛陀耶舍, active in China from 408 to 412) may have been among the first to introduce the texts featuring Ākāśagarbha; he is credited with an early translation of the *Ākāśagarbha sūtra* (Ch. *Xukongzhang pusa jing* 虛空藏菩薩経, Jp. *Kokūzō bosatsu kyō*, T. 405).[30] After his arrival in China in 424, the Kashmiri monk Dharmamitra (曇摩蜜多, 356–442), for his part, translated or compiled at least two more scriptures which contained instructions on contemplating Ākāśagarbha.[31] Later, eighth-century Indian and Central Asian scholar-translators working in China, such as Vajrabodhi (Ch. Jingang zhi 金剛智, Jp. Kongō chi, 671–741) and his prominent disciple, the Sogdian-Indian monk Amoghavajra (Ch. Bukong Jingang 不空金剛, Jp. Fukū Kongō, 705–774), also translated a number of scriptures featuring Ākāśagarbha. These subsequently acquired cachet in the esoteric Buddhist circles in Tang China. These scriptures, which emerged as a result of the appropriation of Buddhist teachings at the crossroads of Buddhist networks from Central Asia, India, and China, were transmitted as part of esoteric Buddhist tradition to ninth-century Japan by Kūkai, Saichō (最澄, 767–822), and others.[32]

In traditional Indian contexts, the deity's name, Ākāśagarbha, meant "Space Womb." Identified with dawn and celestial light, the deity was linked to the star Venus around the sixth century in China.[33] In East Asia, it was known under its Chinese name, Xukongzang pusa, which came to be transliterated in Korean as Heogongjang bosal and in Japanese as Kokūzō bosatsu; its perceptions and ritual functions remained subject to subtle modification and change, depending on sociocultural circumstances and geographical localities.[34] In seventh- and eighth-century China, it seems to have been favoured as a deity representing the sky

30 Mochizuki (1974–80, 2: 1138).

31 He translated the *Sutra of Divine Incantations of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* (Ch. *Xugongzang pusa shenzhou jing* 虛空藏菩薩神咒経, Jp. *Kokūzō bosatsu jinju kyō*, T. 407) and the *Sutra of Contemplation on the Boddhisatva Ākāśagarbha* (Ch. *Guan Xukongzang pusa jing*, Jp. *Kan Kokūzō bosatsu kyō* 観虛空藏菩薩経, T. 409).

32 To get a better sense of the transcultural character of China's Buddhist translators and the significance of their works for the Japanese context, see Abe Ryūichi (1999, 116–18).

33 *Mikkyō daijiten* (2007, 569). See also the short introduction in Dolce (2006, 3–45, esp. 7–9). The association between Kokūzō and Venus appears already in Buddhayaśas' early fifth-century translation of the aforementioned *Ākāśagarbha sūtra* (Jp. *Kokūzō bosatsu kyō*, 虛空藏菩薩経, T. 405) and subsequent Chinese translations, which are mentioned below. This deity was also described in Zhiyi's (智顗, 538–597) treatise on meditation, "Stopping and Contemplating" (Ch. *Mohe zhiguan*摩訶止觀, Jp. *Maka shikan* T. 1911._46.56b29) and his *Commentary on the Lotus Sutra* (Ch. *Fahua wenju* 法華文句, T. 1718).

34 A more detailed discussion of the images identified as Kokūzō and found in India, China, Korea, and Japan can be found in Hillary Pedersen (2010, esp. ch. 1, pp. 17–71, and p. 31).

and figuring in the set of eight bodhisattvas. This set was described in the "Sutra on the Mandala of Eight Grand Bodhisattvas" (Ch. *Ba dapusa mantuluo jing* 八大菩薩曼荼羅経, Jp. *Hachi daibosatsu mandara kyō*, T. 1167, translated by Amoghavajra, or T. 1168, translated by Faxian 法賢). In early seventh-century China, it was also enshrined in stūpas, paired with bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (Ch. Dizang 地蔵, Jp. Jizō), or invoked during confession and repentance rites.[35] In Japan, Kokūzō had certainly been known in the Nara temple milieu since at least the eighth century. It was installed as one of the attendant deities to the Great Vairocana statue at Tōdaiji. This deity was also evoked in the context of ritual practice by semi-lay priests (Jp. *ubasoku* 優婆塞, translating Sk. *upāsaka*), mountain ascetics, and esoteric Buddhists.[36] I will return to this point below.

Although Ākāśagarbha's early iconography proves to be highly diverse at times, in its more established form, this deity appeared wearing a crown of five gems representing five esoteric wisdoms (*gochi* 五智), holding a sword in its right hand and a lotus topped with a wish-fulfilling gem in its left hand. In this and other manifestations, it was perceived to be the guardian of a treasury of all-encompassing wisdom and achievement, with its powers pervading the five directions of space. In esoteric Buddhist iconography, as known in Japan, this deity – identified with dawn and celestial light – appeared as a central bodhisattva in the court of space (*Kokūzōin* 虚空蔵院) in the Womb-World Mandala (Sk. *Garbhadhātu*, Jp. *Taizōkai* 胎蔵界).

Second, let us turn to the primary Buddhist ritual practice associated with Mt. Asama. The Gumonji-hō ritual, in which Ākāśagarbha played a central role, was first fully described in a manual, translated in 716 by Śubhākarasiṃha (Ch. Shanwuwei 善無畏, Jp. Zenmui, 635–735), an Orissan monk from the Nālandā monastery, who arrived in China from India via Turfan.[37] Entitled

35 Zhiru Ng (2007, 52 and 161–62).

36 Bogel (2009, 25). She also notes that knowledge and technologies of the production of Buddhist statues, particularly the early esoteric varieties, may have been brought to Japan by artisans from Tang China who accompanied the famous Vinaya master Jianzhen (鑒真, Jp. Ganjin, 688–763) in the mid-eighth century, and images of esoteric deities were certainly witnessed by the Japanese Buddhist monks who travelled to China. Hillary Pedersen notes, however, that only a handful of images that can possibly be identified as Kokūzō survived from the eighth century in China; see Pedersen (2010, 27–28). As for the Japanese understandings of the term *ubasoku*, rather than referring to a ritual of bi-monthly confession described in the Vinaya, it was used to denote types of practitioners: namely, a novice, a layperson, and an ascetic; see Beghi (2011, 665, n. 2).

37 Śubhākarasiṃha was part of a group of Buddhist scholar-translators, based at Loyang in western Henan in central China, who worked on the translations of important Buddhist

"Method of the All-Winning Essence *Dhāraṇī* for Having Demands Heard and Upheld by the Space-Womb Bodhisattva Who Can Fulfil All Wishes,"[38] Śubhākarasiṃha's short manual presented a technique for summoning and contemplating the bodhisattva by making special hand gestures (*mudrā*) and reciting mantras an extensive number of times (*nenju* 念誦). As a result, the manual states, the deity would appear, gold in colour, wearing a crown with five buddhas on it, holding a white lotus in his left hand and a jewel in his right hand, and sitting on a lotus against a full moon disc in the middle of the night; promptly, "all sins and obstacles will be eliminated" (*issai zaishō shikkai shōmetsu* 一切罪障悉皆銷滅).[39] The aforementioned incantation came to be known as the Ākāśagarbha mantra.

Moreover, the Buddhist scriptures featuring this deity stated that those who engaged in ceaseless recitation of the Ākāśagarbha mantra would acquire the ability to remember and understand any Buddhist text without ever forgetting it. Elsewhere in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, as mentioned previously, Ākāśagarbha was associated with the Bright Star (*myōjō*, 明星), or Venus, perhaps, as a metaphor signifying an utter lucidity of mind and readiness for enlightenment. For example, these two conditions are described in Buddhayaśas' early fifth-century translation of the *Ākāśagarbha sūtra* in the following way:

> [On the association with Venus]
> 虚空藏菩薩摩訶薩。若不現身在其人前教發露者。是初發心菩薩。應於後夜合掌至心而向東方燒堅黑沈水及多伽羅香。請明星言。明星明星成大慈悲。汝今初出照閻浮提。大悲護我。可爲我白虚空藏菩薩摩訶薩。願於夢中示我方便。發露懺悔犯根本罪。令得大乘方便智眼。
>
> Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha (*Xukongzang pusa*) is a supreme enlightened being (Sk. *Mahāsattva*, Ch. *mohesa* 摩訶薩, Jp. *makasatsu*). If it does not manifest itself in bodily form,

scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese, many of them esoteric. Śubhākarasiṃha was most famous for his translations of *Susiddhi* (Jp. *Soshitsuji kyō* 蘇悉地経, T. 894) and the *Mahāvairocana sūtra* (Sk. *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi*, Ch. *Darijing* 大日経, Jp. *Dainichi kyō*, T. 848), on which he worked together with his student Yixing (一行, 684–727), a Zhenyan monk and an author of the *Commentary to the Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (Ch. *Darijing shu* 大日経疏, Jp. *Dainichi kyō sho*, T. 1796). Yixing – who was skilled in mathematics, astrology, Daoism, and calendrical studies – studied with another Indian monk, the translator and esoteric ritual master Vajrabodhi, mentioned above. Vajrabodhi's most prominent disciple was the aforementioned Amoghavajra, who was born in Samarkand in Central Asia and arrived in China around 715, and later went on an extensive pilgrimage to collect Buddhist texts in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and India; see *Mikkyō daijiten* (2007, 70–71, and on Shanwuwei/Zenmui, 1366–67).

38 Jp. *Kokūzō bosatsu nōman shogan saishō shin darani gumonji hō* 虚空蔵菩薩能満諸願最勝心陀羅尼求聞持法, T. 1145_.20.601–603.

39 T. 1145_.20.0602a01–06 and T. 1145_.20.0601c21, respectively.

> it will reveal the teaching in front of that person. It is a bodhisattva of the initial determination [to seek enlightenment]. In response, late at night [at dawn], press your hands together and focus your mind, facing the east, and burn hard black [sandalwood], fragrant aloe, or the incense of the Tagara tree. Call on the Bright Star [Venus] and say: "Bright Star, Bright Star, grant the great compassion. You always appear first and illuminate the Jambudvīpa. Grant me great compassion and protection. Transform me into a white bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, the supreme enlightened being. I beseech [you] to reveal the expedient means to me in a dream. I reveal and confess [my] transgressions and fundamental sins. Grant [me] the expedient means of the Great Vehicle and the wisdom-eye."[40]

> [On the association with perfect memory]
> 是虛空藏菩薩摩訶薩。即令彼人得於憶持不忘之力
> This Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha is a supreme enlightened being. Therefore, the people [who worship him] will be granted the power of keeping [their] memory and not forgetting.[41]

These conceptual linkages, documented by the early Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures arriving from the West, must have led to the association of Ākāśagarbha with Buddhist arts of memory. The foci of this early type of worship was the performance of penitential rites focusing on the star appellations and what subsequently became known as the Gumonji-hō after Śubhākarasiṃha's 716 Chinese translation. The Tang dynasty Buddhist catalogue of 730 included this and other scriptures and ritual manuals featuring Ākāśagarbha[42]; in the age of long-distance exchanges and the intensive formation of Buddhism as a transcultural force, these scriptures (although constantly modified as a result of translation efforts) travelled from Central Asia and Tang China further east, to Korea and Japan.

In Japan, the Gumonji-hō had been known and practised by both ordained monks and mountain ascetics, at least since the early eighth century.[43] Cynthea Bogel has noted that the memorisation of spells and scriptures was a prerequisite for entering the governmental programme of training for the priesthood[44]; thus, a ritual means for achieving perfect memory would have

40 T. 405_.13.0653a06–12.

41 T. 405_.13.0655a11–12.

42 Abe Ryūichi (1999, 116–17); Pedersen (2010, 23).

43 Notable monks from the Buddhist temples in Nara, including Dōji (道慈, d. 744), Gonsō (勤操, d. 827), and Zengi (善議, d. 812), have been known to practise the Gumonji-hō rite. Other sources suggest that the adepts of "natural wisdom" (*jinenchi* 自然智) and ascetics training in the mountains of Yoshino, Katsuragi, and Hakusan also practised it. Bogel also mentions a historical account from 732, which states that laypersons read and chanted sutras followed by incantations invoking Kokūzō, the Seven Buddhas Yakushi, and the Eleven-Headed Kannon; see Bogel (2009, 393, n. 83).

44 Bogel (2009, 161 and 393, n. 82).

been of vital importance for those seeking to become Buddhist monks and enter the ranks of the Buddhist clergy. Critically, it was this practice of Gumonji-hō and the realisation of its importance and efficacy that prompted young Kūkai to study Buddhism. In a semi-autobiographical account entitled *Demonstrating the Goals of the Three Teachings* (*Sangō shiiki* 三教指帰), which he initially wrote in 797 at the age of twenty-four, Kūkai described how he met a Buddhist priest who introduced him to the meditation of Ākāśagarbha, known as the Gumonji-hō, which promised perfect memory. Kūkai then went on to practise this meditation on the cliffs of Mt. Tairyū, in the province of Awa, and at Cape Muroto in Tosa (nowadays the prefectures of Tokushima and Kōchi in Shikoku).[45]

He subsequently travelled to China in 804, where he came into contact with Buddhist scholar-translators working in Sanskrit and Chinese. At the Qinglongsi (青竜寺) Temple, Kūkai studied under the esoteric master Huiguo (恵果, 746–805), who was himself a disciple of the much-mentioned Amoghavajra, a major figure in the propagation of esoteric Buddhist ritual at the Tang court. Upon Kūkai's return, the legacy of these masters – along with many more esoteric Buddhist teachings, ritual consecrations (Sk. *abhiṣeka*, Jp. *kanjō*, 灌頂), and icons – was transmitted to Japan, where they were further appropriated, reinterpreted, and recalibrated during the processes of establishing Buddhist traditions in Japan's local context.

Although known since the eighth century in the Buddhist temple milieu in Nara, the cult of Ākāśagarbha-Kokūzō played a major role in entrenching esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教) as a temple tradition attractive to elite aristocratic families and the imperial house of Japan. For example, a set of five Ākāśagarbha statues, based on the description in the *Yugikyō* (瑜祇経),[46] was brought to Japan by Eun (恵運, 798–869) from Tang China in 847 and installed in the Kanchiin (観智院) Hall of the imperial temple, Tōji (東寺), the main Shingon *mikkyō* compound in Kyoto.[47] In time, the Gumonji-hō became an essential part of ritual learning at temples such as Kōyasan, Sanbōin at Daigoji, and other monastic complexes which combined the study and practice of esoteric Buddhism with training at remote mountain retreats and, at times, with mountain asceticism. Hand-painted images of Kokūzō bosatsu

45 See the English translation of this passage in Abe Ryūichi (1999, 74).

46 The full title of this influential esoteric scripture, presumably a Chinese translation by either Vajrabodhi or Amoghavajra, is the *Sutra of All the Yogas and Yogis of the Vajra Peak Pavillion* (Ch. *Jingangfeng luoge yuqie yujia yuqi jing*, 金剛峯楼閣一切瑜伽瑜祇経, Jp. *Kongōbu rōkaku issai yuga yugi kyō*, T. 867).

47 On the sets of five Kokūzō at Shingon temples and their patronage by the Fujiwara, see the detailed argument in Hillary Pedersen's 2010 PhD dissertation, from the viewpoint of art history.

emerging from a bright moon or a star disc floating atop a ragged mountain can be found nowadays in museum and temple collections.[48] It is not clear whether Kūkai ever travelled as far as Mt. Asama in Ise. However, according to local tradition, he was credited with the construction or even "revival" of the Buddhist temple Kongōshōji in 825, after he allegedly practised the Gumonji-hō ritual there by worshipping Venus on the mountaintop and receiving the "Divine Vajra-Sign" as proof of his imminent enlightenment. Subsequently, at Mt. Asama, the historic connections between the Shingon teachings and the performance of Gumonji-hō were institutionalised and memorialised through foundational narratives and ritual texts which invoked Kokūzō, Kūkai, and the divine ancestor of the imperial house, the deity Amaterasu.

6.4 Ākāśagarbha, Kūkai, and Amaterasu in the *Asamayama Engi*

Let us return to the questions posed earlier: How was it possible for these complex sacred topographies to emerge at Mt. Asama? And what significance did the celestial bodies have for the religious landscape and institutional history of this mountain? What enabled the site to become the focus of a vision of history that rivalled that of the Ise shrines? These questions were posed primarily in order to explain the mountain's place in Japan's religious culture prior to the eighteenth century, and in particular to provide a context for Kongōshōji's 1750 conflict with the Ise clergy.

In part, these questions can be answered through a close reading of late medieval ritual texts associated with Mt. Asama. One of them, entitled *Asamayama engi* (朝熊山縁起, *The Karmic Origins of Mt. Asama*), particularly stands out.[49] Copied by the high-ranking Buddhist prelate Shinkai (真海, active around 1466–1512) in the late Muromachi period around the year 1511, from a manuscript preserved at a temple in Mino province (in the southern part of modern Gifu prefecture), this text is representative of Japanese shrine-temple histories explaining their karmic origins. The term *engi* can be traced back to the doctrinal concept of "dependent origination" (Sk. *pratītyasamutpāda*).

Such texts were usually produced by temple and shrine clergy and used as ritual and legal documents in early and medieval Japan, often with the implicit

48 See, for instance, items A–10498 (Kamakura period) and A–989 (late Heian period, 12th century) in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum.

49 *Asamayama engi*, in Sakurai et al. (1975, 78–87). This is not to be confused with a later text, *Ise Asama dake ryaku engi*, shortly referred to as *Ryaku engi* before.

purpose of claiming ownership over property or land; resolving issues of income, taxation, and *corvée* labour; or procuring funds to build new facilities after the destruction of earlier ones in fires or armed conflicts (Frölich 2007). Most importantly, to assert the legitimacy of the religious identity and ritual practice of temples and shrines, *engi* texts constructed decidedly Buddhist histories of Japan's local cultic sites and elaborated links between their divinities and Buddhist cosmology, Buddhist topography of the world, and major Buddhist deities and figures (Grapard 1982, 1987, 1992, 1998; Blair and Kawasaki 2015). In short, tapping into the transcultural history and resources of Buddhism in order to enhance their own authority, Japanese *engi* assumed their status as a kind of symbolic and cultural capital, asserting the historicity and power of local divinities and places. By forging the mythological links between local deities and the distant divinities of Buddhism, Japan's imperial lineage, or other famous Buddhist figures, local cultic sites thus created new ways of embedding transculturally mediated deities – such as Ākāśagarhbha – into their own landscapes.

Asamayama engi was an early precursor of the eighteenth-century *Ise Asama dake ryaku engi* (referred to as *Ryaku engi* above) and other similar documents preserved by Kongōshōji during the Edo period. As already discussed, temple publications based on these latter documents triggered the infamous legal dispute with the Ise shrines in 1750. In contrast, one could say that *Asamayama engi* represents the religious identity and cultural memory of Mt. Asama, narrated in Buddhist terms by practitioners associated with the site during the medieval period. Although the *Asamayama engi* was composed in the early sixteenth century, the rituals, myths, and oral transmissions that served as the very *raison d'être* for its compilation date back much earlier – at the very least, to the second half of the fifteenth century, roughly when Mt. Asama was considered integral to the religious landscape of the Ise shrines.[50] During that period, Mt. Asama was a training site for travelling mountain ascetics, known as *yamabushi* (山伏) or *shugenja* (修験者), most likely connected to the Sanbōin (三宝院) of Daigoji (醍醐寺), a major esoteric Buddhist temple complex near the capital city of Kyoto.[51]

The majority of ritual texts belonging to the tradition of Mt. Asama, such as the aforementioned *Ryaku engi* (1662, republished in 1750) as well as the earlier

50 As specified earlier by Kubota (1980); see n. 28. The hand-painted image known as *Ise sankei mandala*, discussed in 2006 by Peter Knecht, also attests to the fact that during the late Muromachi period, Mt. Asama was inseparable from Ise iconography; see n. 18.

51 In his early assessment of this text, Kubota Osamu described *Asamayama engi* as an example of the medieval Ryōbu Shintō (両部神道) tradition that proliferated at Ise during the medieval period. He also linked the production of this text to the Sanbōin; see Kubota (1980, 147).

Asama dake giki (朝熊岳儀軌, *Ritual Procedures of Mt. Asama*, 1511)[52] and *Asamayama engi* (1511), refer to these religious figures who traditionally practised austerity on the mountain as ancient "sages of immortality" (*tokoyo no seisen* 常世之聖仙). Often encountered in early Japanese Buddhist literature, these sages were involved in mixed esoteric and Daoist-like practices of self-cultivation. Japanese Buddhist tales, such as *Nihon ryōiki* (日本霊異記, *The Records of Miracles from Japan*, 823) and *Konjaku monogatari shū* (今昔物語集, *Collection of Tales Past and Present*, early twelfth century) relate that their self-cultivation practices entailed surviving on a diet of pine needles, herbs, and morning dew, acquiring the skill of walking on air, and performing miracles. These ascetics and mountain practitioners, some of whom were also known as *shōnin* (聖人, lit. "holy men"), roamed around sacred sites and mountains, moving from one seasonal training or retreat to another. Many were skilled in the recitation of *dhāraṇī* spells, contemplation techniques, and apotropaic rituals of healing, rainmaking, and the pacification of malevolent spirits (Andreeva 2017, 78–82 and 105–25). The agency of such practitioners played a significant part in Mt. Asama's premodern history as well as in the production of *engi* texts associated with the site.

Taken as a whole, the *Asamayama engi* (hereafter, *Engi*) explains the origins of the Buddhist temple atop the mountain as well as how deities – including the divinity of Ise (Amaterasu) and the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha (Kokūzō) – came to be attached with this sacred habitat. The text also seeks to clarify the religious identity of Mt. Asama and legitimacy of the aforementioned ritual for perfect memory, the Gumonji-hō, through the figure of Kūkai, Japan's "only legitimate" holder of esoteric knowledge and the alleged founder of Kongōshōji. The *Engi*'s implicit argument starts from the point at which Kūkai is invited to come to Mt. Asama by local deities, who wish to see him perform the appellations to Bodhisattva Kokūzō. Although the old temple, the Buddhist deities, and local divinities – including Amaterasu – are all present on the mountain, the ancient ascetics who used to be in charge of ritual practice have all but disappeared, and the rite of Gumonji-hō had been discontinued, leaving the symbolic order of the mountain in complete abandon and disarray.

As seen in the previous discussion of this ritual in Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, its main purpose was to construct perfect memory through

52 *Asama dake giki*, in Nishikawa (1979, 30–52). Recorded in the same year, this text is far more extensive than the aforementioned *Asamayama engi* and includes its main motifs. From the contents, it is evident that through the figure of Kūkai, *Asama dake giki* claims Kongōshōji's direct link to the main imperial temple of the Shingon tradition, Tōji. This will be discussed below.

contemplation of divinities, endless repetition of mantras, and the acquisition of a lucid mind. However, in the *Asamayama engi*, the Gumonji-hō transmitted by Kūkai is presented as a "trademark" practice native to Mt. Asama, a rite that must be re-established in order to ensure the future proliferation of its performers, the ascetics, as well as the continuous well-being of Amaterasu, Japan's imperial lineage, and the state, all of which depend on the ritual pacification of Japan's realm.

Throughout this *Engi*, the imperial deity Amaterasu laments the tyranny of time. It talks to Kūkai endlessly about how to preserve the past of Mt. Asama and ensure its future, so that myriads of its "seed-children," resting unborn within the womb of this sacred mountain, can continue to emerge in the physical world to live as ascetics and Gumonji-hō practitioners and to protect the divine land of Japan by worshipping Venus and generating merit by performing the Gumonji-hō. Here is how the deity explains its view of Mt. Asama's history in a lengthy, opera-like speech to Kūkai:

> At that time the Bright Star (明星) [Venus] came out, its light rotating [like] the [Cakravartin King's] Wheel-Treasure (*rinpō* 輪宝). This Wheel-Treasure transformed into the buddha image (*buttai* 仏躰). It dwells now as this [bodhisattva] Kokūzō. [53]
>
> [In the beginning,] the [primordial] deity Omodaru[54] kicked off its shoes, they floated as if on milk. Our parents, Izanagi and Izanami, descended from heaven into these shoes, collected the dust and made a mountain. That was the province of Awaji. Having established this land, the two deities gave birth to the earth deities (*kunitsukami* 地神). The divine priest (*negi* 禰宜) Ōhirume no Mikoto (大日霊尊)[55] and other deities are 10,900,708,000 years old.
>
> The divine priest [Amaterasu], for the sake of all sentient beings, gave birth to the benevolent king [human emperor]. This was Jinmu (神武).[56] Since then, the descendants of Amaterasu stand high for fifty-two generations.[57] The Buddha protecting the future of its

53 Implied here is the principal temple image (*honzon*) of Kongōshōji, the statue of Kokūzō.

54 Omodaru is one of the divinities which constituted the "seven generations of heavenly deities" (*amatsu kami no nanayo*, or *tenshin shichidai* 天神七代) and included Izanagi and Izanami. Along with the "five generations of earthly deities" (*chijin godai* 地神五代), these cosmogonic deities were well known from Japan's earliest mytho-histories, as recorded in the *Nihon shoki* (日本書紀, *The Chronicles of Japan*, 712). Early cosmogonic myths were revitalised during the medieval period, under the influence of Ryōbu Shinto (両部神道), a combinatory worship of *kami* and esoteric buddhas, another by-product of esoteric Buddhist activities in Japan; see n. 51. For a detailed discussion and illustrations of these deities, see Andreeva (2017: 280–90).

55 This is an older appellation for Amaterasu, a name under which it often figures in the *Nihon shoki*.

56 That is, the first mythological ruler of Japan and alleged founder of Japan's royal lineage, *tennō* 天皇.

57 The modern translators (Sakurai et al. 1975, 79–80) note that this would imply Saga (嵯峨, 785–842) or Junna (淳和, 785–840), the early Heian-period rulers. Emperor Saga was a

> descendants resides in the Three-Vajra Cavern [on Mt. Asama]. Amaterasu, together with Amatsu Koyane no Mikoto,[58] manifests itself there daily without fail. The Buddhist temple had become dilapidated and is waiting for karmic bonds with the roots that lead to enlightenment. Now, Patriarch [Kūkai], take your chance.
>
> It is the place that spreads good fortune [. . .]. The manifestations of different *kami* and buddhas are attached to this mountain; they procure good fortune and wisdom and nourish the country. However, if the Buddhist Law ceased [here], it would be difficult to save [people] widely from confusion of the Latter Days of the Dharma. Patriarch, take this land, preach Shingon and continue the [generations of] Seed-Children who inherit this lineage into the infinite future (*mirai eiei ni oite uji wo tsugi, taneko wo tsuzuke* 未来永々において氏を継ぎ種子を続け). Make it a place [where] good fortune and prosperity are [forever] increasing.[59]

This passage shows how the Buddhist deity Ākāśagarbha was appropriated and used as a symbol of authority and legitimacy by the religious practitioners on Mt. Asama. Presented as a vehicle for and embodiment of an uninterrupted tradition, this deity is fused seamlessly with Japanese cosmogonic myths, local cultic practice, and the imperial ideology represented by Amaterasu. These medieval myths were part of the foundation of Mt. Asama's own religious identity in premodern times; their very purpose was to demonstrate a longstanding relationship with both the Ise shrines and esoteric lineages of Shingon, the major legacy of the ninth-century Buddhist patriarch Kūkai.

To manifest its significance in Japan's mythological past, Mt. Asama is presented in the *Engi* as a primordial mountain that houses Japan's most important divinity, Amaterasu, also known under her older name, Ōhirume no Muchi (大日靈貴), used in the *Nihon shoki* (日本書紀, *The Chronicles of Japan*, 712). Mt.Asama thus literally becomes a site of creation: if it is not quite *the* Mt. Sumeru of Indian Buddhist cosmology, then it is the "Cloud-Sea Peak" (*kumomi no mine* 雲海峰), intrinsically connected with the workings of Yin and Yang and Japan's earliest cosmogonies, and a primordial womb where the scores of future "seed-children" (*sue musubi taneko* 末むすび種子) are implanted.

The *Engi* uses these metaphors of procreation in order to induce a sense of urgency regarding the continuous, uninterrupted emergence of new generations of rightful Buddhist practitioners, *kami* priests, and mountain ascetics. The imperial deity Amaterasu repeatedly voices its concerns, trying to convince

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contemporary of Kūkai, instrumental in facilitating the construction of Tōji, the first Shingon temple in the Heian capital, and supportive of Kūkai's advancement in the religious world.

58 The *kami* of Kasuga, a tutelary deity of the Fujiwara family of court regents.

59 The translation is abbreviated for convenience. Sakurai et al. (1975, 78–80). For the full text in Japanese, see *Asamayama engi* in Sakurai et al. (1975, 77–87).

Kūkai of the necessity of carrying on the Gumonji-hō practice for the sake of the future of Japan's imperial family, who are Amaterasu's descendants as well as those of its divine child, Ninigi. The deity invokes some impressive numerical calculations that roughly correspond to notions of Indic calendrical time, punctuated by the oscillations of stars and celestial bodies:

> At that time Daishi [Kūkai], as if his finger- and toe-nails were being pulled, began to perform incantations, raising his voice to the full and throwing his body[60] on the ground, fervently proclaiming his devotion to the deities. Amaterasu again pulled him over and said: "About this high peak... When the last one of the thousand latter buddhas appears in the world, this will be the time to preach the Dharma and bring benefit to the sentient beings [as the bodhisattvas do]."[61]

Having received Amaterasu's order, Daishi immediately built the *argha* well.[62]

> He performed rituals springing good fortune inside the Three-Vajra Cavern and praised the magnificent hall. He transferred the *honzon* deity [Kokūzō], and to dedicate the new image, he carved out a manifestation of Amaterasu,[63] sprinkled it with water from the amber tiles, and washed the head of this new Buddha. When he performed this *abhiṣeka* consecration (*kanjō* 灌頂の供養), the previous *honzon* [Kokūzō] transferred its light [to the new one] and returned to the Three-Vajra Cavern. The new *honzon* (*shinbutsu* 新仏) moved its head and uttered the *gāthā* verse:
>
> "A vast compassion emerges from the power of faith,
> It is inherent in the minds of sentient beings.
> Those who have the great power of divine cognition
> Will appear in true reality and deliver [sentient beings] from suffering."
>
> Suddenly, Tenshō Daijin [Amaterasu] tilted her golden honour-cap, rejoiced and paid homage to the supreme *honzon* of the "morning clan" (*chōke daiichi no gohonzon* 朝家第一の御本尊).[64] Then she proceeded to the palace of Bodhisattva Maitreya. Daishi moved to the main hall and performed the rite of Gumonji. At that time, the jewel [drops of] water trickled on the rock [and formed the Sanskrit] syllable *vāṃ*.[65] Daishi said: "Ah, how delightful. Now, in the middle of human existence, due to the power of Gumonji, I have

60 Literally "five limbs," Jp. *gotai* 五躰.
61 Sakurai et al. (1975, 81).
62 Jp. *akai* (閼伽井), a well from which to draw sacred water for the consecration of deities for newly constructed Buddhist temples. This is the scene of "reconstruction" in Kongōshōji.
63 Although the *Engi* passage does not specify, its next chapter explains the manifestation of Amaterasu as the deity Uhō Dōji. This arrangement will be discussed below.
64 The meaning of this sentence is obscure, but it could imply that Amaterasu pays homage either to the temple *honzon*, the image of Kokūzō, or, more likely, to the image of Uhō Dōji, newly consecrated by Kūkai. It further implies that this image is the one venerated by Japan's august "morning" lineage, that is, the imperial family.
65 The Sanskrit syllable representing wisdom and Buddha Dainichi of the Diamond Realm.

> personally met Daijin [Amaterasu] and was be able to see the Space-Womb [Kokūzō]." The tears of joy swelled [in his eyes] and dampened the sleeves of his robe. Daishi made a vow and said: "In the Latter Days of the Dharma, the Gumonji practitioners will trickle the water from this *argha* well in the shape of syllable *vāṃ*, and bathe in the Bright-Star [Venus] water. If they come to Mt. Asama, the 'Morning-Bear Peak,' and serve this august *honzon*, I will emerge from my nirvana cell (*waga nyūjō no muro wo dete* 我入定の室を出て)[66] and be inseparable [from them] like a shadow. The divine elixir of immortality and rituals of compassion [of Future Buddha Maitreya] will be revealed to them."[67]

For the duration of Amaterasu's emotive pleas to Kūkai, various divinities – such as local *kami* and the esoteric deities Kokūzō, Benzaiten (弁財天), Fudō (不動), and Future Buddha Maitreya (Miroku 弥勒) constantly appear in front of him, making appeals and pronouncing oracles. These deities are invoked as parts of a mandalic vision of Mt. Asama that represents it as a manifestation of Pure Land (Sk. *sukhāvatī*, Ch. *jingtu*, 浄土, Jp. *jōdo*). This abundance of voices, characters, and figures is what makes one think of the *Asamayama engi* as a "polyphonic" text in a Bakhtinian sense. The divine beasts, such as the Golden Bear (*kinshoku no kuma* 金色の熊),[68] the Buddhist wish-fulfilling gems (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠), the three imperial regalia (*sanshu jingi* 三種神器), flying relics, magic red jewels to ensure longevity, and substances described as "Bright-Star Water" (*myōjōsui* 明星水) and the elixir of immortality[69] also appear in the *Engi* and join in this divine, carnivalesque dance of solicitation around Kūkai. Given the time period and historical circumstances of this text's appearance, the mood of appeal and solicitation must have been broadly directed at powerful Shingon temple complexes, such as Sanbōin or Tōji, as well as both local and remote patrons – the primary economic and political powers in medieval Japan that need to be considered in this context.

Among the various agencies appealed to in this text, bodhisattva Kokūzō plays one of the major roles, because it is described by Amaterasu as a deity representing memory, history, and time, the divinity "protecting [Amaterasu's] future" (*waga sue mamori no hotoke* 吾が末守りの仏). Bodhisattva Kokūzō,

66 By the medieval period, Kūkai was an object of popular cults himself. It was believed that he entered nirvana in his cell on Mt. Kōya in Kii province. This passage of the *Asamayama engi* presents a vivid image of him, fervently performing incantations and crying; this image may in part have been inspired by the appearance and actions of mountain ascetics at Mt. Asama, rather than by the real, historical figure of Kūkai.

67 *Asamayama engi*, Sakurai et al. (1975, 81–82). The translation is abbreviated for convenience.

68 The golden bear, representing the sun rotating around the earth, appears to be a much older mythological figure, for which *Asamayama engi* provides no further explanation. Apart from scarce references to similar types of divinities appearing occasionally in the Tibetan, Ainu, and Tuvan local traditions, I have been unable to verify it further.

69 *Asama dake giki*, Nishikawa (1979, 35).

a representation of the star Venus, truly luminous and bright, epitomises the all-penetrating solar light and appears as a manifestation of the five wisdoms of esoteric Buddhism (*gochi* 五智), which is an implied reference to the supreme deity of esoteric Buddhism, the cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana (Dainichi 大日). In Japan, the conceptual parallels between Dainichi, whose Japanese name literally means "Great Light," and the solar deity Amaterasu have been known in esoteric Buddhist circles at least since the eleventh century.[70] However, it is only at Mt. Asama that these multiple deities are all merged together in this particular combination, via the worship of celestial bodies and their respective conceptual make-up, based on allusions to light.

6.5 Mt. Asama as a Mandala

The second chapter of *Asamayama engi*, entitled "On the Protective Deities [of Mt. Asama]" (*Chinju no daiji* 鎮守の大事), builds upon the relationships discussed in the previous sequence, while also providing more details about the mandalic layout of Mt. Asama and describing the *honji suijaku* correlations between *kami* and the buddhas who inhabit this sacred mountain. It is the deity Amaterasu itself 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 the 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* – 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 people who want to experience the true faith will come on pilgrimage and will be reborn after meeting Amaterasu and obtaining the Seven Treasures.[71]

As is often the case with texts closely connected to *shugen* traditions, Mt. Asama is described as a Lotus – a symbolic sacred site, the sacrality of which is validated by certain Buddhist deities and *kami*. At first glance, this particular collection of deities appears to be chaotic. But as in many other Japanese *engi* texts, these relationships might actually provide vital clues as to what kinds of places and cults the people who practised at Mt. Asama were interested in or felt an

70 Itō (2011, 27–90).

71 *Asamayama engi*, Sakurai et al. (1975, 83–84).

affinity with. The passage quoted above demonstrates that, for late fifteenth-century Asama ascetics, it was surely important to construct some sort of link to (and, possibly, actual networks with) other prominent sites of *kami* and Buddhist worship, such as Shinto shrines and large Buddhist complexes. In this case, the Kasuga Shrine near Kōfukuji Temple in Nara, Mt. Kōya in the northern part of Kii peninsula, Mt. Hakusan in the northern Hokuriku region, and Mt. Miwa and the Daigoji Temple in the vicinity of the metropolitan centres of Nara and Kyoto in central Japan would certainly have fit the bill. Other ritual texts from the Mt. Asama tradition partially support this view.[72]

But what was the reason for constructing this particular pattern? The above theory of the seven deities is mirrored in another, far more extensive text from the Mt. Asama tradition, written at the same time – *Asama dake giki* (1511). This text refers to the secret transmission of the seven shrines (*nanamiya* 七宮), which represent the seven secret fields of merit of the seven buddhas (*shichi-butsu himitsu shichi fukuden* 七仏秘密七福田), which are all somehow connected to the Hindu god Deva Mahākāla (摩訶迦羅).[73] Although the *Asama dake giki* does not explicitly refer to it, this construct implies a very direct allusion to a similar ritual system found at Mt. Hiei (比叡山), to the northeast of Kyoto (in modern Shiga prefecture).[74] In the early medieval period, the divinities of the seven Hie shrines, located at the foot of this mountain, were associated with the worship of the seven stars of Ursa Major, a notion that was well documented in medieval religious literature – for example, in the *Keiranshūyōshū* (渓嵐拾葉集), a fourteenth-century collection penned by the Tendai monk Kōshū (Grapard 1987 and 1998; Arichi 2006). Thus, the Asama *engi* texts reference both the worship of Ursa Major and their desire to mirror the powerful Buddhist complex of Mt. Hiei, the outpost of Tiantai (天台) and Japanese Tendai doctrine, in terms of religious efficacy.

As far as Buddhist transcultural connections are concerned, it is precisely this *Asama dake giki* that refers explicitly to the historical connections between Kongōshōji and the Shingon school – namely, the Tōji Temple – and firmly

72 For example, the aforementioned *Ise Asama dake ryaku engi* and the late medieval Asama texts hint at its connections with other important centres of mountain asceticism, such as Mt. Hiko in Kyushu, Mt. Sengen in Mino province (modern Gifu), and many others. The significance of shrines and temples mentioned in the main body of this text has already been well documented in contemporary Japanese and Western scholarship, so I shall omit the numerous references here.

73 *Asama dake giki*, Nishikawa (1979, 35 and 40).

74 Similarly to Mt. Asama's location with respect to the Ise shrines, according to the early notions of geomantic divination, Mt. Hiei and its Tendai Buddhist complex, Enryakuji (延暦寺), occupied the position to the northeast of the capital city of Heian, thus acting as a symbolic, ritual protector against malevolent spirits; see n. 23.

establishes the temple of Mt. Asama as the direct inheritor of the teachings of esoteric Buddhism, transmitted to Kūkai at different times and localities by Buddhist translators and scholars, such as Vajrabodhi, Śubhākarasiṃha, Amoghavajra, Yixing, and Huiguo.[75] One may question the extent to which medieval and early modern practitioners and residents at Mt. Asama's temple were aware of these transcultural connections (and one would be hard pressed to further analyse the postmodern dimensions of this term). The exact historical evidence for such awareness may indeed prove elusive. However, there is no question that within Japan's esoteric schools, there was a strong historic conviction that esoteric teachings had indeed arrived in Japan as a result of Buddhism's "transmission via the three countries" (*sangoku den* 三國傳) – that is, "from India and China to Japan" – and were therefore legitimate.[76] Although the *Asamayama engi* does not make any direct claims revealing such particular transcultural connections, its focus on the figure of Kūkai, the rite of Gumonjihō, and bodhisattva Kokūzō essentially underscores the same intention. Moreover, based on our earlier discussion of the transcultural histories and itineraries of these persons, rites, and deities, the reasons why Mt. Asama's ritual texts should seek legitimacy in broader Buddhist cultural memory are clear. This provides a powerful narrative into which Mt. Asama, with its scores of heterogeneous and itinerant ascetics, could easily fit. Moreover, such a narrative portrayed Mt. Asama in a new light and afforded it more significance within a much broader Buddhist world, spanning from India to Tang China, and Japan. As a result of these medieval constructions, it should not be at all surprising that the eighteenth-century Kongōshōji exercised the right to display its own historicity in whatever way its clergy deemed necessary.

The third and final chapter of the *Asamayama engi* is entitled "On the Red-Spirit Child" (*Shakushō dōji no koto* 赤精童子の事). In this chapter, we finally find an explanation for the provenance of the image that the eighteenth-century Ise shrine clergy felt compelled to act against. In this part of the *Engi*, Amaterasu manifests itself as a divine Rain-Treasure Child (Uhō Dōji 雨宝童子), holding a red jewel and making a vow to protect Mt. Asama.[77] In this more esoteric form, the imperial deity immediately reveals its connections to the elementary needs of premodern societies – such as procuring rain and ensuring a timely rotation of the sun, moon, and stars – and presents a solution to more complex religious issues: constructing memorial sites, worshipping transcultural esoteric

75 *Asama dake giki*, Nishikawa (1979, 45).

76 On *sangoku den*, see Toby (1994, 323–47 and 2001, 15–45); Blum (2001, 31–51).

77 For the premodern images of Uhō Dōji, see again Faure (2016, 276–79).

deities arriving from overseas, and finding new, effective techniques for Buddhist salvation in the critical conditions of degenerate dharma. The conceptual background of the Uhō Dōji remains unexplained, but the satellite text *Asama dake giki*, discussed above, connects the worship of this medieval figure to an allegedly similar arrangement on Mt. Tiantai (天台) in China, perhaps invoking Mt. Asama's own forgotten or underplayed connection to the aforementioned Japanese Tendai temple at Mt. Hiei. This narrative possibility is achieved via the figure of the tenth-century monk Ryōgen (良源, 912–985), known as Jikaku Daishi (慈覚大師) (Groner 2002). *Asama dake giki* also makes a case for the practice of the esoteric Fudō Myōō (不動明王) ritual as a means of protecting the Ise shrines from demons.[78]

In the light of the aforementioned statements – which particularly highlight the desire to build connections to important religious sites, both in central Japan and overseas – even a preliminary assessment of *Asamayama engi* suggests the possibility that Mt. Asama's status in the history and development of cultic movements in the Ise and Shima areas should not be underestimated. An investigation of other texts associated with Mt. Asama – such as the already mentioned *Asama dake giki* and *Shō Asamayama sha jinkyō satabumi* (小朝熊社神鏡沙汰文)[79] – and their cross-reading with comparable ritual texts from Ise, Miwa, Hakusan, and other traditions could help us map the precise span of its medieval networks and religious *imaginaire* even further.

The celestial associations continue to play a pivotal role. For example, a 1614 version of *Asama dake engi* draws explicit parallels with the previously existing star cults (referred to as the "twelve divine generals"), geomantic knowledge (the "twelve branches"), esoteric divinities, and local *kami*, including the imperial ancestor deities. This latter version equates Amaterasu's divine child, Ninigi (the ancestor of Japan's imperial lineage), with Jupiter or Venus, while the two main deities of Ise are, respectively, the sun and the moon. From these texts, it is clear that Mt. Asama's sacred topography was not perfectly unified but was nevertheless based on medieval interpretations of *kami* worship merging with the teachings of esoteric Buddhism, star cults, and Yin-Yang correlative thinking. These theories were employed and transported by local ascetics, some of whom evidently specialised in divination techniques and astral calculations. This kind of dense, symbolic association underpinned the production of a religious vision supported and developed by the diverse religious

78 *Asama dake giki*, Nishikawa (1979, 49); see also n. 23 and n. 74 above.
79 Hanawa (1928, 356–85).

practitioners at Mt. Asama, which caused much controversy and legal conflict with the Ise shrines centuries later.

6.6 Conclusion

There are multiple reasons why local cultic sites might adopt transcultural ideas, concepts, teachings, or deities. The case of Mt. Asama, one of many similar cases in Japan, amply demonstrates that such sites must construct and constantly augment and replenish their own mythology and assemblage of ritual practices. They must maintain links with influential institutions, groups of practitioners, and donors to ensure their continuous survival. In part, such motivations are fulfilled by constantly updated sacred topographies and ritual performances, which depend on their origins in the vast, transcultural Buddhist topoi. Such topographies – combining the worship of stars, imperial deities, and celestial buddhas with mountain austerities and ritual practices of Buddhist contemplation – came to be transmitted as a major part of the Kongōshōji religious economy by the early modern period. Noteworthy here is the foundational mythological narrative that portrayed Ise in a light that did not reflect the view of Amaterasu's history perpetuated at the imperial shrines. As a consequence, the Ise shrine priesthood actively sought to suppress this narrative in 1750. Through the medieval *engi* texts that documented its tradition, Mt. Asama emerged as a site where perfect memory was essentially within the grasp of a physical, bodily experience of a star-gazing practitioner, and where the construction of the future urgently depended on maintaining the transculturally mediated Buddhist practice of venerating celestial bodies.

Seen from this perspective, the traditions of medieval cultic worship inherited by Mt. Asama's Kongōshōji Temple before 1750 were already complex Buddhist productions resting in part on the confluences of the many strands of ritual and astronomic knowledge that were absorbed into Buddhist scholarship and practice in Central Asia, India, China, Korea, and Japan in different forms by the end of the first millennium. The notions of sacrality, as understood by the medieval "holders of memory" at Mt. Asama, arrived there via complex processes of transmission, exemplified by literal, material, visual, and cultural translation that belied long-distance and long-term exchanges in the premodern Buddhist world. In this regard, the cult of the deity Ākāśagarbha and the ritual of perfect memory (Gumonji-hō) – transmitted to Japan by, among others, Kūkai, the founder of Shingon – were adopted as defining features of the ascetic Buddhist practice of Ise at Mt. Asama and can be understood as a good example of such long-term exchange.

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