

# On the identity of Mt. Fuji's deity: A study on the role of Benzai-ten in the development of the Fuji cult

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## Abstract

As with many other popular religions, in the history of the cult of Mt. Fuji since the early Edo period many deities were gradually incorporated in a vast and ever-changing pantheon, the subject of multiple scholarly studies. This paper traces how one very popular Japanese female deity, Benzai-ten, may have come to be incorporated into the Fuji cult in the late-Edo period, a fact usually neglected in other studies on this popular cult.

The conclusion of this study is that it is important to trace the history of the worship of individual deities within a single cult. At the same time, however, we ought to recognize that searching for a single hierarchy of deities within one cult may not be a significant approach. In fact, different communities of believers within the same cult may find different specific subsets of deities meaningful for their needs, and thus worship them. This paper therefore argues that we should look at any one popular religion as a mosaic of communities of believers devoted to such subsets of deities associated to that religion, rather than as a single system of beliefs.

Keywords : Benzai-ten, deity, Edo period, Fuji cult, popular cult, popular religion

## Introduction

This paper summarizes some of my research on the popular cult of Mt. Fuji in the Edo period, especially starting from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1)</sup> The topic at hand is on the surface a simple one: finding out just “what” is the object of worship at this site, in this cult. As with most simple topics, however, the task proves itself much more complex than expected, and it does lead us to some important conclusions.

I will develop this paper by drawing a rather “unorthodox” (academically speaking) parallel between the process of uncovering the identity of this deity and the process of self discovery of the protagonist of Luigi Pirandello's famous last novel of 1926 *Uno, nessuno, e centomila* (English: *One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand*). The reasons for the choice of this unconventional scheme and of the actual novel, will become apparent as the paper unfolds.

First of all, a brief synopsis of the novel is needed. Pirandello narrates the story of Vitangelo Moscarda, a rather ordinary man who one day is told by his wife that his nose is slightly crooked, something he had never noticed. This trivial observation triggers in him a deep crisis of identity, in which he first questions the unique individual he had always thought he was. He then realizes that everyone around him has a different image of him, and that he will never be able to obtain their stance and look at himself that way. This crisis of identity deepens until Vitangelo drifts into mental insanity (as defined by those around him who witness this crisis), as he struggles to come to terms with the fact that he really is “no one,” in ultimate analysis. The novel concludes with one final step: as his identity exists only in function of his interactions with others, and thus does not exist as one, by itself, Vitangelo rejects his own name, since it constrains the dynamic nature of his identity, giving it a falsely stable and crystallized appearance. That, Pirandello equates to death.

For the remainder of this paper, I will apply this Pirandellian analysis of personal identity to the search of the identity of the deity worshipped at Mt. Fuji.

## “One”

When we talk about the deity at Mt. Fuji we usually refer to Fuji Sengen Dainichi 富士仙元大日, the nomenclature that appears prominently in the writings attributed to Kakugyō Tōbutsu 角行藤仏 (1541–1646: the recognized founder of the popular Fuji cult) and the subsequent leaders of this popular religion.<sup>2)</sup> As the name explicitly states, the identity of this deity is that of a form of Dainichi nyorai 大日如来, the cosmic Buddha, specific to this mountain. Dainichi is prominently present all over the mountain: in many magical diagrams depicting Fuji in the Edo period, Dainichi is placed at the summit of the mountain;<sup>3)</sup> statues of Dainichi were enshrined at various of the ten stations of the ascent route to the mountain’s summit;<sup>4)</sup> a statue of Dainichi was enshrined in one of the most important caves at Mt. Fuji, the *Tainai* 胎内 or womb cave;<sup>5)</sup> similar statues were enshrined in the replicated womb caves in some of the Fuji mounds built in and around Edo;<sup>6)</sup> and finally Dainichi is often cited in many of the texts written by the Fuji leaders in the Edo period, describing the nature of the sacred mountain, its role as *axis mundi*, and its consequent access to Pure Lands and hell realms.<sup>7)</sup>

In other words, we could say that the deity of Mt. Fuji was one, the central deity of the Japanese Buddhist discourse after the introduction of esoteric Buddhism in the Heian Period. Iconographically, Sengen Dainichi is often easily recognizable as a “standard” (albeit simplified) Dainichi. Functionally too, Sengen Dainichi is clearly carrying out the role of the cosmic Buddha: Kakugyō, in the *Book of Great Practice* (御大行の巻, about 1620), states that Sengen is the source

of the sun and the moon, as well as the stars (according to the magic diagrams that accompany the text, these stars are often identified with the seven stars of the Big Dipper).<sup>8)</sup> Its role as cosmic generative force is therefore conserved.

Structurally, too, Dainichi is the familiar Dainichi: in many sacred diagrams (received by the Fuji leaders directly as instructions from Sengen Dainichi itself), Sengen at the summit of Mt. Fuji is surrounded by 8 other deities, sometimes explicitly depicted as each occupying a petal.<sup>9)</sup> The reference is obviously that of the central dais of the *Taizōkai mandara* 胎藏界曼荼羅, in which Dainichi is surrounded by four Buddhas and four bodhisattvas.<sup>10)</sup> Even in the Tainai cave, the fact that Dainichi is placed in the context of the “two” wombs, one the mother's womb and the other the father's womb, as they are labeled, may be interpreted as reminiscent of the dualism inherent in the *mikkyō* discourse of the Ryōkai mandara, with the female and male aspects taking up anatomical reality.<sup>11)</sup>

In Japanese religions, it is quite common to encounter a “double identity” for a Buddhist deity,<sup>12)</sup> and the situation at Mt. Fuji is no different. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, a new iconography starts appearing, with Dainichi being linked to a female kami, Konohanasakuyahime 木花咲耶姬.<sup>13)</sup> Already by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Dainichi nyorai had been associated to a local deity (Asama Ōkami 浅間大神) through the work of Matsudai Shōnin 末代上人, the Pure Land figure who “opened” the path of ascent to the summit. Matsudai Shōnin specifically referred to Dainichi as the male and Asama as the female forms.<sup>14)</sup>

Around the same period, the *Shintōshū* 神道集 includes a chapter on Fuji Sengen Daibosatsu, which follows the basic narrative of *Taketori monogatari* 竹取物語, but with a novel twist: Kaguyahime 輝夜姬 is revealed not to be from the moon, but to be the deity who lives on top of Mt. Fuji, and for that reason she cannot requite the local governor's love. Distraught, he throws himself in the cone of the volcano, and from that moment on both of them become the deity at Fuji, Sengen Daibosatsu.<sup>15)</sup> In other words, Sengen Dainichi was already prone to a doubly gendered identity at Mt. Fuji, something that was probably easily accommodated by the esoteric understanding of Dainichi of the two mandalas.

From the Kamakura period to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, different stories concerning Mt. Fuji as sacred space further contributed to this doubly gendered identity. Both in an entry of the *Azuma kagami* 吾妻鏡 and in the many different versions of the *Fuji no hitoana zōshi* 富士の人穴草紙, we read of a shogunal retainer, Nitta Shirō 仁田四郎, who inspects the Hitoana 人穴 cave for the shogun to determine what is the monster voiced to live therein. Fuji Sengen Daibosatsu appears to him first as a young girl, then as a dragon on an island in the middle of a river running through the cave, and finally as a young boy, who accompanies Nitta through a tour of hells and of the Pure Land at Mt. Fuji.<sup>16)</sup>

Both of these narratives were popular at that time, and especially the latter became a kind of sacred text for the believers of the Fuji cult that was coalescing around the figure of Kakugyō in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is thus possible to understand how the process of joining Dainichi to Konohanasakuyahime might have been facilitated at Mt. Fuji by these existing narratives. As for this female kami too, we can infer a potential route to this cult.

Konohanasakuyahime, in fact, is the *Kojiki* 古事記 beautiful female kami (sister of the ugly but long-lived Iwanagahime 岩永姫) who marries Ninigi 瓊瓊杵 and, after their first night announces her pregnancy to him.<sup>17)</sup> When Ninigi voices his doubts about the paternity of her pregnancy, she proves her truthfulness by an ordeal by fire: she builds a parturition hut and walls herself in it, proceeding to lit it on fire. If she has been truthful, then she and her newborn will be unscathed. She then gives birth to three healthy kami, Hoderi 火照, Hosuseri 火須勢理, and Hoori 火遠理, all of them deities of fire, and they are all untouched by the fire, thus finally proving her honesty to Ninigi. As Konohanasakuyahime's father is Ōyamatsumi (大山積 “mountain spirit”), and her three children are fire deities, that she became the deity of a volcano is perhaps not surprising.

Considering all this, we can somehow justify the unorthodox pairing of Dainichi with Konohanasakuyahime, especially at a site like Mt. Fuji, where religious institutions coexisted for centuries with more individual and popular (we could say unorthodox) forms of practice. In summary, therefore, we have a pairing of Buddhist and Shinto deities in a fashion that is not quite typical of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 theory, but that can be still interpreted by the dominant discourse of “doubles” of Buddhas and kami. However, it is with this Shinto deity that our identity crisis starts, and it starts with a little, rather insignificant detail, just like Vitangelo Moscarda's slightly crooked nose: in Fuji cult depictions of her, Konohanasakuyahime sports a red (sometimes golden) *torii* on her headdress.<sup>18)</sup>

### “One Hundred Thousand”

In the Japanese Buddhist pantheon, as well as amongst Japanese *kami*, only one deity is crowned with a *torii*: Benzai-ten 弁才天.<sup>19)</sup> After noticing the *torii* on the Fuji goddess, therefore, we cannot quite look at her as before again, as its otherwise quite stable identity as Konohanasakuyahime is irreversibly called into question. The potential relationship between Benzai-ten and Fuji needs thus to be explored. In the majority of secondary sources on the Fuji cult, Benzai-ten is very rarely mentioned, so we need to reconsider some primary sources, and look for traces of Benzai-ten interacting with Mt. Fuji. When we do so, the Fuji deity starts taking up a different shape.

The first direct mention (as far as I know) of a link between Benzai-ten and Mt. Fuji is in the

14<sup>th</sup> century *Keiranshūyōshū* 溪嵐拾葉集.<sup>20)</sup> In the chapter on Benzai-ten, under the heading of *Enoshima engi* 江島縁起, one short episode is included: Dōchi hōshi 道智法師 sees someone (a female dragon) in the shape of a Japanese woman coming to Enoshima every day. In order to understand where she goes back to from there every day, he places some wisteria on the hem of her robe and follows its trail, thus arriving at the Hitoana cave of Nitta Shirō (this detail is specified in the text). In other words, the dragon *qua* Benzai-ten that is commonly associated with Enoshima is actually going back and forth to the Hitoana cave at Mt. Fuji every day.<sup>21)</sup>

We recall that in the *Fuji no hitoana zōshi* Nitta Shirō encountered Fuji Sengen Dainichi in this cave, first as a mysterious young woman, who disappears only to reappear as an awesome dragon with fiery eyes sitting on a rock in the middle of the river. At that moment, the retinue who accompanied Nitta all died instantly. Nitta was spared, only to be suddenly struck down after his return to Kamakura, where he broke the oath he had made to Sengen not to reveal the contents of the Hitoana cave, which he had to do out of loyalty to the shogun. According to the *Keiranshūyōshū*, therefore, this dragon is none other than Benzai-ten, who shuttles daily between her abode at the Fuji cave and the one at the Enoshima cave.

Kuroda Hideo, in his research, discusses the importance of the legends of dragons inhabiting the chthonic space at Kumano, Hiei-zan, Enoshima, and Fuji, amongst other locations, and develops a view in which these underground dwellers symbolically linked Japan as a country, by moving from place to place, physically or as mythology.<sup>22)</sup> This example from the *Keiranshūyōshū* is pointing exactly at the same issue. Along these lines, we may mention one of the legends about the formation of Mt. Fuji: when the mountain was created, in the brief interval of a day, the whole land mass that makes up its perfect cone was lifted from another place in Japan: the void left there was to become Lake Biwa.<sup>23)</sup> In other words, one of the main sites of worship of Benzai-ten is linked to Mt. Fuji. If we were to read this story symbolically, we may be tempted to imagine that, together with the huge mass of land transported to Suruga province from Lake Biwa, the female, dragon-related deity Benzai-ten too was moved to Mt. Fuji. Both this legend, the *Keiranshūyōshū* story above, and Kuroda's work all point to the use of religion, in this case of the dragon-related chthonic deities, for the interpretation and understanding of geographical and national space that may have been going on in the Medieval and Edo periods.

There are other points of contact between Benzai-ten and Mt. Fuji. First of all, from the times of Kakugyō, ascetic practices at Mt. Fuji were not confined to climbing the mountain or descending into its cave. In fact, three separate sets of practices literally “around” Mt. Fuji were also important. One was the practice of water ablutions under the Shiraito waterfalls 白糸の滝, close to the Hitoana cave.<sup>24)</sup> The other two were practices at two sets of lakes around the mountain: one made up of the small lakes that still surround the mountain, the other of lakes that

span a much larger geographical area. The first lake mentioned in the “*Book of Great Practice*” is Lake Biwa, where Kakugyō practiced fasting for one hundred days and eventually received a secret utterance from Sengen Dainichi, to relieve people’s sufferings.<sup>25)</sup> What we have here, therefore, is the inverse journey by a deity through Japanese space: Sengen Dainichi (as Benzai-ten?) is now travelling from Mt. Fuji to Biwa lake, where he imparts his powerful utterances to the Fuji practitioner. Lake Biwa is famous for its island, Chikubushima, as one of the most important sites of worship of Benzai-ten.

This leads us to another important document, a version of the *Fujisan ryaku engi* 富士山略縁起 from 1831.<sup>26)</sup> This *engi* opens with a description of Japan as a land supported by five pillars: in the west Itsukushima 巖島, in the east Kinkazan 金華山, in the north Chikubushima 竹生島, in the south Enoshima, and in the middle the peak of Mt. Fuji. Allowing for an approximately 90 degree rotation, the four extremes of this rhombus are some of the main sites of worship of Benzai-ten, with the exception of Kinkazan that, though indeed dedicated to Benzai-ten, was not usually included in the “three” Benzai-ten sites (often the inclusion of Tenkawa 天河 was also an option).<sup>27)</sup> The striking element here is the center position of Mt. Fuji: not only is this central pillar the axis mundi on which the whole architecture of Japan stands (according to the Fuji cult), but it is the central site of worship of Benzai-ten, according to the implications of this *engi*.

In a later section of this same *engi*, after the Fuji deity is linked to Amaterasu Ōkami 天照大神 as *honji* and *suijaku*, it is concluded that, in the heavens that deity is the goddess of good fortune Benzai-ten. We are here quickly entering the full identity crisis that struck Vitangelo: another identity, that of Amaterasu, has been recognized for the Fuji deity. However, there are more elements on the Benzai-ten trail that we need to consider.

The *Fuji ho hitoana zōshi* briefly introduced before was really a widely circulated narrative, and many variants of it exist, both in handwritten form and in printed version.<sup>28)</sup> One of these versions includes a section that cannot be found in other variants, but is important to us.<sup>29)</sup> In it, while Nitta is being led through the various hells within the Hitoana cave by Sengen, at some point he is shown a group of people who are not suffering any longer, and are about to ascend to the Pure Land. Those, he is told, are people who were saved by the kindness of Benzai-ten. Though this small episode in this variant of the *Fuji no hitoana zōshi* does not shed light on the identity of the Fuji deity, it suggests that this one variant may have been a version circulated by some Fuji believers close to the cult of Benzai-ten. Again, this episode appears only in one variant, and the cult of Benzai-ten was popular by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so there may be nothing special about Mt. Fuji, but at least we can conclude that believers of these two cults were definitely overlapping at some point in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

One final possible point of contact between these two cults and particularly between these two

deities is that as Uga-Benzai-ten 宇賀弁才天 is linked to agriculture via the figure of Ugajin 宇賀神, Fuji itself is strongly linked to rice. In the “*Book of Great Practice*,” Kakugyō often coins new kanji to represent some of the messages given to him by Sengen. In many cases, these kanji include the radical for “rice,” and are often read as *bosatsu*. In the text, Kakugyō states that Fuji Sengen is the origin of the sun and the moon, but also of rice, and that is why the kanji for rice is so often found in these magical new kanji and diagrams.<sup>30)</sup> We should recall that Mt. Fuji was also often called 穀聚山 (*kokushūzan*, “mountain pile of rice”), both because of its shape and because of this belief in its relationship to grains.<sup>31)</sup> Together, the ten stations (named after the Japanese standard counter for rice 合) up to the summit make Mt. Fuji a full “measure” of rice.

Finally, there is the matter of the iconography itself. As we saw already, Konohanasakuyahime as Fuji deity was often shown with a *torii* in her headdress, a unique sign of Benzai-ten. However, it is interesting that, along the old ascent route, at what used to be the third station, one particular form of Benzai-ten was worshipped. This was called Sengen Benzai-ten 仙元弁才天, and its extant statue is from 1716.<sup>32)</sup> This is not in any of the usual forms of Benzai-ten, but is the representation in fact of a different Buddhist female deity altogether: Kishimojin 鬼子母神, the ogress that the Buddha turned into protector of children.<sup>33)</sup> Here, the famous protector of children in Buddhism (Kishimojin) seems to have been superimposed on a famous protector of children in Shinto (Konohanasakuyahime), though in the process its identity was lost to the other Buddhist deity that had already been associated with Mt. Fuji: Benzai-ten. In this case, a possible iconographical “mistake” may actually inform us on the deeper mechanisms that at the popular level are employed to create new religions meaning. Interestingly, in the contemporary route of ascent, at around the 7<sup>th</sup> station, there is a small shrine to a not-better identified “deity protector of safe childbirth” (安産守護神): iconographically, this is almost identical to the older Sengen Benzai-ten.<sup>34)</sup> Which of them it is may be an irrelevant question, as by this time even labeling the statue with a name to determine its identity seems to have been superfluous, having instead chosen to stress the child-protection function of the deity.

We could say that though they operate on different “fields of action” as Dumézil would say,<sup>35)</sup> Benzaiten and Kishimojin were at some point conflated at Mt. Fuji, partly because they each share one common field of action with the Fuji deity (protection of agriculture for Benzaiten, and protection of children for Kishimojin). To extend this analysis, we could say that, in the Hitoana narrative above, Benzai-ten and Fuji Sengen share additional fields of action, such as inhabiting a chthonic world focused on water as well as employing serpents and dragons as their messengers and avatars. At the same time, however, Benzai-ten and Fuji Sengen are distinct, because distinct are their “modes of action,” again borrowing from Dumézil: whereas Uga-Benzai-ten is a benevolent deity that would eventually make its way into the special pantheon of the Seven Gods

of Fortune 七福神, Fuji Sengen also possesses a fierce *modus operandi*. We may recall here that Sengen did not hesitate to kill Nitta's retinue and even Nitta himself, after he broke his promise. In the same way, we must remember the potentially destructive nature of the volcano this deity is supposed to embody.

In summary, we can see that straightforward *honji suijaku* theory is an element, but only one in the development and evolution of this popular form of religion. Many other ways to make deities “resonate,” either by field of action, or mode of action, or by iconographic detail, or by simple mistakes in the process of interpretation led the Fuji deity to acquire multiple identities. Behind each identity or each step in its development we could imagine communities of believers for whom these new functions were important, and thus persisted on the sacred landscape on this mountain. The result, in the end, is that of a whole pantheon of somehow related deities, each of which may be seen by different communities of believers as “the” deity of Mt. Fuji. The Pirandellian “one hundred thousand” may be too many, but one or even just two are certainly not sufficient.

Indeed, beyond the analysis introduced above, we can point to a number of other deities that are present at Mt. Fuji, some in more prominent positions, some in more “diffused” ones, but all actually at Mt. Fuji. In this sense, then, we could argue that any and all deities present there physically or in narratives about this place may be considered “the” deity of Mt. Fuji: extrapolating from the present to the past is never a good practice, but just as nowadays Fuji cult pilgrims to the mountain may be at a loss as to what exactly Sengen Dainichi may actually do as a deity,<sup>36)</sup> and instead may be more interested in some of the “minor” deities around the mountain (like the many *dōsojin* 道祖神, for example<sup>37)</sup>), so may many pilgrims in the Edo period too have focused at different times on different available deities, for their specific needs. All the more, then, we realize that Vitangelo Moscarda's identity crisis is fully applicable to the case of the deity at Mt. Fuji.

In fact, as we look back at Sengen Dainichi too, we see that he strikingly reminds us of the “classic” Dainichi, but is actually not him. In the diagram by Kakugyō described above, the 8 petals of the dais in the middle of which Sengen sits are (in the order): Jizō bosatsu, Amida nyorai, Kannon bosatsu, Shakya nyorai, Miroku bosatsu, Yakushi nyorai, Hōshū nyorai, and Monju bosatsu.<sup>38)</sup> In certain other similar diagrams, the order of the deities is slightly different, and in some cases Seishi replaces Miroku, and Fugen replaces Hōshū.<sup>39)</sup> First of all, we can see that there is flexibility in the listing of these deities, and this may mean that their identity need not be strictly conserved, or that by “minor” modifications, different communities of believers may create differentiating elements. In any case, these 8 deities, even considering the mistakes and/or changes, are not the actual Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the central dais of the Womb

Mandala.<sup>40</sup> In other words, this Fuji diagram borrows the structure of this esoteric mandala, but superimposes a novel register of deities.

A possibility for what this register may be, is that these eight Buddhist deities could be the *honji* of the Kings of Hell in Enma's 閻魔王 retinue.<sup>41</sup> The problem is of course that only 8 out of 10 are present here, and that these 8 are some of the most "common" Buddhist deities, so having them in a group may not be such an improbable case. However, we should consider a related but different alternative, as we do know that the Fuji cult was strongly linked to the protection of childbirth, as mentioned above. We know of a striking example of a 富士塚 Fuji mound in Saitama, built in about 1620 (a Kōshin year, dear to the Fuji cult) under which a tunnel develops for approximately 4 meters, from the entrance to a chamber called the "Sacred Womb" 御胎内, and therefore clearly representing the Tainai cave at Mt. Fuji.<sup>42</sup> The walls of the tunnel are covered with stone figures of the 10 Buddhist deities that protect gestation, themselves identical to the *honji* of the 10 Kings of Hell. This raises the possibility that the 8-petalled schema at the summit of Mt. Fuji may be structurally related to the *Taizokai mandara*, but functionally related to the belief in the protection of gestation, that became popular at the commoners' level particularly in the Edo Period. This, together with the connection between Mt. Fuji and childbirth may confer a function as protector of childbirth to Sengen Dainichi that further makes it a different type of deity.

Finally, we ought to recall that the Fuji no Tainai cave has two main corridor chambers, labeled as "mother's womb" and "father's womb." In a famous triptych by Sadahide (*Fujisan tainai meguri no zu* 富士山胎内巡之図, 1858) of the Tainai cave, we can see that one of the tunnels is hosting Dainichi, while the other Amida nyorai.<sup>43</sup> That Dainichi and Amida are presented as a pair paralleling the mother and father relationship of the tunnels is difficult to make sense of. Instead, we should remember that it was common, since the medieval period, to consider the summit of Mt. Fuji not only as the place where Dainichi resides, but also as the Pure Land of Amida. The *Fuji mandara* 富士曼荼羅 in fact shows an Amida triad at the summit.<sup>44</sup>

Since Amida is rarely mentioned as a main deity in seminal Fuji cult texts, it is difficult to consider Amida as the main deity of Fuji. However, in many mandalas and amulets the Amida triad is represented, showing that this interpretative key was valid well into the Edo period as well.<sup>45</sup>

This type of analysis could be conducted on a number of other deities that appear often associated with the cult of Mt. Fuji, including Fudō myōō 不動明王, Kōshin 庚申, Dōsōjin 道祖神, the Pole Star 北極星 and the Big Dipper 北斗七星, and others. All these deities can claim to be "the" deity at Mt. Fuji, since each is central for some narrative and/or iconography related to this sacred mountain. Many deities punctuate the ascent route, many the foot of the mountain or its

caves, many others the water sources around and atop Mt. Fuji. Altogether, the sacred geography of this mountain truly presents us a deity with “one hundred thousand” identities.

## “No One”

The main conclusion of this analysis is that a complex religious system like the one at Mt. Fuji does not have a single central deity, but rather a pantheon of constantly evolving deities that are being rearranged and combined according to the various communities of believers that “use” the mountain at any one time. Going back to Vitangelo’s final realization, we can say we have arrived at the same one: the deity at Mt. Fuji is one, no one, and one hundred thousand. Just as in Pirandello’s novel the identity of the protagonist is shown to depend on who is interacting with him at any one moment, so can we say that the identity of the deity of Mt. Fuji depends on who is “reading” the mountain as sacred text at any one time. That is, the specific community of believers who are worshipping a certain deity (or subset of deities) associated with Mt. Fuji because such worship is for some reason meaningful to their lives.

Here, we have been considering the various identities of divine beings projected onto the sacred landscape of Mt. Fuji, as well as onto the system of belief called Fuji cult. We have noted some of the mechanisms that generated this pantheon, a dynamic pantheon in constant evolution. Unlike Vitangelo Moscarda, we can afford to integrate the many views of Mt. Fuji as sacred space, remembering that this attempt at integration is itself a construct, one additional iteration in the evolution of this pantheon.

The emerging composite image of this mountain’s cult is that of a specific religious space that for centuries various believers have been using as a matrix to generate meaning. The mutations, permutations, and combinations that, especially at the popular level, generated such a complex and unstable system, have allowed various levels of reality to be interpreted and understood via Mt. Fuji. The reality of the individual (e.g. issues of gender; life and death; position in society), the geographical reality (e.g. how Japan is organized as a geographical entity; how bodies of water and land formations are given meaning), as well as that of the whole cosmos (the identity of the heavenly bodies; how they relate to our lives) find interpretative keys at this mountain. Or rather, people have found ways to interpret reality via the manipulation and re-creation of the sacred space of Mt. Fuji.

## Notes

- 1) By popular I mean not heavily organized and/or controlled by religious institutions.

- 2) For an extensive account of the development of this form of the Fuji deity, see Takaya (2006), pp. 93–111. See also Tyler (1993), pp. 264–265.
- 3) See for example Fujiyoshidashi (1994), p. 24.
- 4) See for example Fujiyoshidashi (2008), pp. 39, 41, 43.
- 5) See Endō (1983), p. 122.
- 6) For the example of the Fuji mound in the Meguro ward of Tokyo, the so-called *shin Fuji* 新富士, see Hirano 2004, pp. 287–289.
- 7) See for example Tyler (1993), pp. 288–292.
- 8) See Sakurai (1987), p. 291.
- 9) See for example Fujiyoshidashi (1994), pp. 14, 24.
- 10) See ten Grotenhuis (1999), pp. 60–61.
- 11) For a description of the “mother’s womb” (母の胎内) and the “father’s womb” (父の胎内) in this case, see Endō (1983), pp. 102–106.
- 12) A classic analysis of such deities’ “double” nature, though in a different but related context, is presented in Stein (1991), pp. 122–136.
- 13) For an example of the presence of this deity in a primary document, see Tyler (1993), p. 292. For an in-depth analysis of the role of this deity in the history of the Fuji cult, see Takaya (2006), pp. 241–258.
- 14) For a concise account of his seminal role in the development of the identity of the Fuji deity, see Earhart (1989), pp. 209–210.
- 15) Kishi (1967), pp. 165–177.
- 16) These two narratives differ significantly in their depiction of this episode, but for the purpose of this paper we can consider them together. I will present a more detailed analysis of the various versions of this narrative of Nitta Shirō in a forthcoming publication. For the former passage, see Hayakawa (1915), pp. 514–515, and Tyler (1993), p. 271. For an example of the latter text, see Yokoyama and Matsumoto (1983).
- 17) For a translation of the story of this female kami from the Kojiki, see Philippi (1968), pp. 144–147.
- 18) Fujiyoshidashi (1996), pp. 4, 5.
- 19) See for example Frank (1991), p. 203.
- 20) This text is included in the Buddhist canon: see Takakusu (1924–32).
- 21) Takakusu (1924–32), p. 626.
- 22) Kuroda (2003), chapter 4, especially p. 165.
- 23) This story is reported for example in Endō (1988), p. 12, but it can be found in the *Fujisan no honji* 富士山の本地: see Yokoyama and Ōta (1938), p. 299.
- 24) Iwashina (1983), pp. 72–75.
- 25) Tyler (1993), p. 294.
- 26) For this study, I followed the version in Fujinomiya (2005), pp. 72–74.
- 27) See Sasama (1991), pp. 67–107.
- 28) For an account of the many extant versions and their genealogy, see Kuramoto (2000).
- 29) This version was written in 1603, and is available in printed characters in Yokoyama and Matsumoto (1983), pp. 429–451. The section under scrutiny here, on Benzai-ten, is on p. 442.
- 30) See Tyler (1993), p. 291, 292.
- 31) See Fujiyoshidashi (1996), p. 3.
- 32) See Fujiyoshidashi (2008), p. 29.
- 33) For example, see Frank (1991), p. 219.
- 34) Personal observation.

- 35) Georges Dumézil developed his scheme to understand deities' identities and roles within their pantheons according to their "modes of action" and "fields of action" (rather than simply on their names) in two seminal works: Dumézil (1949) and Dumézil (1966).
- 36) Personal conversations with contemporary Fuji cult believers on their yearly pilgrimage, 2007–2009.
- 37) To obtain a sense of the spread and omnipresence of such "minor" deities throughout the religious landscape at Mt. Fuji, see the survey of the presence of the cult of *dōsojin* in the city of Fuji no Miya: Fujinomiya (2002).
- 38) Fujiyoshidashi (1994), p. 24.
- 39) See for example Fujiyoshidashi (1994), p. 14.
- 40) Those in fact are (starting from the east and going clockwise around Dainichi nyorai): Hōdō nyorai, Fugen bosatsu, Kaifukeō nyorai, Monju bosatsu, Amida nyorai, Kannon bosatsu, Tenkuraion nyorai, Miroku bosatsu. See ten Grotenhuis (1999), pp. 60–61.
- 41) The 10 Buddhist deities corresponding to the 10 Kings of Hell are: Fudō, Shakya, Monju, Fugen, Jizō, Miroku, Yakushi, Kannon, Seishi, and Amida.
- 42) The report on the survey of this Fuji mound is available in Aoki (2004).
- 43) A reproduction of this triptych, together with an in-depth analysis of the discourse on rebirth associated with the believers' practice of entering that cave, can be found in Stein (1988), pp. 57–77 and 101–103.
- 44) Fujiyoshidashi (1994), p. 12.
- 45) Fujiyoshidashi (1994), pp. 17 and 18.

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(ゴッタルド, マルコ)

## 富士山の聖なる者のアイデンティティ —富士信仰の発展に関する弁才天の役割についての検討—

Marco GOTTARDO

### 要 約

多くの他の民間宗教と同じく、富士信仰の歴史の中でも、多くの聖なる者（ディーティー）が徐々に無数の絶え間なく変化するパネオンに組み込まれた。このプロセスは数々の研究の対象となっている。本研究では、人気のあった女神弁才天が、江戸後期の富士信仰にどのように組み込まれたのかを調べている。

この研究の結論は、単一のカルトの中で個々の聖なる者の信仰の歴史を追跡することが重要であるということである。しかし同時に、ある宗教の中で聖なる者の唯一のヒエラルキーを探することは重要なアプローチではないのではないかと認めるべきである。実際、同じ宗教の中でも異なるコミュニティの信者は、自分たちが抱えている問題に意味のある聖なる者のサブセットをそれぞれ選んで、崇拝している。本論文は、ある民衆宗教を、信仰の単一のシステムとしてではなく、その宗教に関連する聖なる者のサブセットを信仰する信者のコミュニティのモザイクとして見るべきであると主張する。

キーワード：弁才天、ディーティー・聖なる者、江戸時代、富士信仰、民間信仰、民間宗教