

Star Rituals and Nikkō Shugendō

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Abstract

Star rituals in Japan are offerings made to the stars and constellations to increase fortune and ensure long life. They are highly influenced both by Chinese models and Esoteric Buddhism. State ritual tended to focus on the Pole Star, especially in its Buddhist deified form, Myōken Bosatsu. Today, *hoshi matsuri* (star festivals) are widely performed as annual ritual events held particularly at the beginning of spring. This paper takes as its starting point the unusual prevalence of shrines known as star shrines (Hoshi no Miya) in the vicinity of Nikkō, and examines the significance of stars in the traditions of medieval Nikkō Shugendō, its role in the proliferation of Hoshi no Miya in the region, and the existence today of a star rite dedicated to Myōken in the form of the ‘Honoured Star Monarch’ (Sonjōō), as a major ritual within the revived Nikkō Shugendō.

Star rituals, or *hoshiku* 星供, are offerings made to the stars and constellations to increase fortune and ensure long life. They exhibit a strong Onmyōdō (the ‘Way of Yin and Yang’) influence,¹ and indeed it has been stated that ‘Japanese worship of the [stars and constellations] is traceable to Chinese models in all cases, starting from sources of the Han period which speak of the celestial rulers in the North Culmen and

I would like to take the opportunity here to express my deep gratitude to Iyano Bihō of Sannōin, Kanuma, Tochigi prefecture, for his permission to photograph the Hoshi Matsuri and for his unstinting help in explaining the ritual.

¹ Onmyōdō is a system developed in Japan based on Chinese theories of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements, and magical practices associated with them. The seventh-century Board of Yin and Yang within the Japanese government apparatus studied the stars, made the calendar and foretold events in the future. It expanded throughout Japanese society through the efforts of *onmyōji*, Yin-Yang masters. Rituals directed at the Pole Star include the *Gengū hokkyokusai* 玄宮北極祭, the *Chintaku reifujinsai* 鎮宅靈符神祭, and the *Taizan fukunsai* 泰山府君祭. They highly influenced Buddhist rituals devoted to Myōken and rituals performed by shugenja. Space restrictions prohibit detailed discussion here.

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Northern Dipper.² Nevertheless, in terms of ritual structure, the influence of esoteric Buddhism and its own tradition of star veneration and divination (Sukuyōdō 宿曜道³) remains of central importance. While state ritual tended to focus on the Pole Star (*Hokushin* 北辰, literally ‘northern dragon’), regarded as imperial symbol, and its Buddhist deified form, Myōken Bosatsu, private rituals to deal with, and avert, misfortune were focused on the birth star (*honmyōshō* 本命星) and year star (*tōnenshō* 当年星) of the individual concerned. Today, rituals devoted to the Big Dipper (*hokuto-hō* 北斗法) and to Myōken (*Myōken-hō* 妙見法) are generally performed when adverse weather or natural disasters threaten local society, and rituals to the birth and year stars (*honmyōshō-ku* 本命星供, *tōnenshō-ku* 当年星供) when the individual faces misfortune. *Hoshi matsuri* (star festivals) in general are widely performed as annual ritual events at the winter solstice, the New Year or Setsubun (the eve of the first day of spring in the traditional calendar). They are seen as prayer petitions to exorcise baleful stars so that they do not cause harm in the coming year.

The area around Nikkō is dotted with shrines called Hoshi no Miya Jinja 星宮神社 (‘Star Shrine’). There are 170 shrines by this name in Tochigi prefecture as a whole, and this number rises to around 260 when shrines formerly called Hoshi no Miya are included.⁴ This represents ‘the largest concentration of Hoshi no Miya shrines in the country.’⁵ Further, a number of such shrines in the area around Nikkō are associated with Shugendō mountain-entry rituals. This paper, taking as its starting point the prevalence of Hoshi no Miya in the vicinity of Nikkō, addresses the role of star rituals and beliefs within Shugendō. In particular, it looks at the significance of stars in the traditions of medieval Nikkō Shugendō, the possible role that Nikkō Shugendō played in the proliferation of Hoshi no Miya in the region, and the existence today of a star rite called

2 Masuo Shin’ichirō, ‘Daoism in Japan’, in *Handbook of Daoism*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden, 2000), p. 827.

3 Based on the *Sukuyōkyō*, a sutra brought back from China by Kūkai, 806.

4 Maehara Mihiko, ‘Hoshi no miya jinja to Nikkō Shugen’, *Minkan shinkō no shosō*, ed. Ojima Toshio (Tokyo, 1983), pp. 168, 169; Sano Kenji, *Hoshi no shinkō* (Tokyo, 1994), pp. 26-31.

5 Sano Kenji, *Hoshi no shinkō*, p. 26.

the *Sonjōō no hō* (lit. rite of the ‘Monarch of the Venerable Star’ 尊星王法) as a major ritual within the revived *Nikkō Shugendō*. The over-riding theme that this paper illustrates is that of religious combination, accommodation and manipulation.

Star rituals and Shugendō

Shugendō practitioners (*shugenja*) perform star rituals both to the Buddhist divinity *Myōken* and to the stars that are determined by the time of birth and which govern a particular year. In *Myōken* rituals, the *shugenja* overcomes baleful stars and invites the influence of good stars by becoming one with *Myōken*, who, as a deification of the Pole Star, is considered to govern all the movements of the heavens, and therefore able to protect the country, expel all malign influences, and increase the wealth and happiness of the people.⁶ This understanding is set out in the *Hokushin bosatsu daranikyō* 北辰菩薩陀羅尼經,⁷ a scripture that identifies the Pole Star as the bodhisattva *Myōken*, and as the greatest of all the stars of *Jambudvīpa*, the greatest wonder worker (*sennin* 仙人) and the greatest bodhisattva. A person who intones the Pole Star’s mantra will ensure that the land is protected by all the stars and the bodhisattvas, will eliminate all harmful influences, and will bring about the destruction of evil. An *Onmyōdō*-influenced commentary on this sutra written in the Edo period extends the combinatory identification:

The Pole Star *Myōken* dwells in the heavens and is named ‘*Taiitsu Hokushin Sonjō*’ 太一北辰尊星 (The Ruler of Heaven, the Pole Star, the Venerable Star). It is chief of all the stars. Also named *Ame no minakanushi no mikoto* 天御中主尊 and *Kunitokotachi no mikoto* 国常立尊, it is the ancestral deity in Japan. Also named *Shinmu Taiitsu Jōtei Reiō Tenson* 真武太一靈応天尊, it is the patriarch of the wonder-working hermits (*shinsen* 神仙). Named *Myōken Daibosatsu* 妙見大菩薩, it is the greatest of all the bodhisattvas. Called *Taiitsu Jōtei* 太一上帝, it is revered in

⁶ This understanding has its roots in Chinese thought. For example, the *Analects* 2:1 states: ‘The rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place.’ (D.C. Lau trans., London, 1979, p. 63).

⁷ *Shugen seiten* (Daigomura, 1927), pp. 50-51.

Confucianism. Called Taikyoku Genshin 太極元神, it receives the faith of diviners.⁸

The Pole Star is thus identified with Chinese deifications of the cosmic principle as well as with the Buddhist divinity Myōken. Of particular interest is the identification with primal Japanese deities from the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*; indeed, the nativist scholar Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 described Ame no minakanushi as the chief kami of the Big Dipper constellation, with the result that in the process of kami-buddha separation in the early Meiji period (1868-1875), this kami was enshrined in place of Myōken in many places.

During the medieval period, Myōken and Dipper rituals were performed by priests of the Shōgoin *monzeki* temple (the administrative temple of Honzan Shugendō) at imperial or shogunal order, particularly in the form of the special ritual to Myōken known as the Sonjō no hō (尊星王法), which will be the focus of my discussion below. During the Edo period, Shugendō actively constructed connections with the Pole Star/Myōken/Dipper cult. For example, the *Enkō chōgōroku* 役公徵業録 (Yūsei Genmyō, ca 1760) states:

In that year (700) unseasonal weather affected the growth of the five grains, and large numbers of people and horses died from pestilence. The emperor (Monmu) was distressed over this. He had a dream. A young boy with hair like clouds and a face like a flower suddenly appeared in front of the palace, and asked, ‘Why did you exile the sage (En no Gyōja)?’ The emperor asked him who he was. ‘I am the Dipper constellation (*hokutosei* 北斗星).’ The emperor was astonished. He immediately issued an order and sent a messenger to Ōshima to bring the venerable person back [to the capital].⁹

According to the *Shoku Nihongi*, En no Gyōja, the legendary founder of Shugendō, had been exiled in the third year of Monmu’s reign (699),

⁸ *Hokushin Myōken Bosatsu reiōhen, Shinkō sōsho* (Tokyo, 1915, Reprint Tokyo, 1993), p. 433.

⁹ *Enkō chōgōroku, Shugendō shōso* (Tokyo, 2000 [1921]), Vol. 3, p. 297. For details of this text, see *Shugendō jiten* (Tokyo, 1986), p. 28.

accused of deceiving people through his magical powers.¹⁰ Here the power of the Pole Star to control the weather (with harmful as well as beneficial consequences) is linked to the court's adverse treatment of En.

Shugenja associated the Pole Star with Fudō, because both were understood to be unmoving, and some texts, such as the *Chintaku reifu engi shusetsu* (1628), associate it with the Buddha Yakushi and the deities of Kumano.

According to the writings of En no Gyōja, there are four deities who protect the world. The first dwells in the centre of Magadha; this is Amida Nyorai, who appears in our land as Chōjō Daibosatsu (the deity of the Hongū Shrine at Kumano). The second, Hokushin (the Pole Star) dwells in the north and is Yakushi, manifested in our land as Kumano Gongen. The third is Tayū and the fourth is Hakuta; they are brothers and are Kannon, dwelling at Mount Potalaka. In our land they are called Nachi Gongen.¹¹

The second type of star ritual associated with Shugendō, the veneration of stars related to individual destiny, is far the more popular today. Every person is associated with one of the seven stars of the Big Dipper, one of the Nine Luminaries, and one of the twenty-eight 'constellations' according to the year of birth. An unlucky star might be obstructing the birth star, or the star governing that particular year itself might have become baleful; rituals are then necessary. For example, the year-star ritual *Tōnenshō-ku* 当年星供 venerates the protector star of the individual and is a version of the standard fire ritual (*goma*), used widely in Shugendō for exorcism.¹² The layout of the *goma* platform represents the various stars.¹³ Seven sticks of gold folded paper symbolize the seven stars of the Big Dipper constellation, behind which is placed a large red *hei* (a wand topped with zig-zag shaped cut paper) representing Myōken

10 *Shoku Nihongi* I, Monmu 3.5.24 (*Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, Tokyo, 1989).

11 *Chintaku reifu engi shusetsu* (*Shinkō sōsho*, p. 46).

12 *Shugen seiten*, pp. 502-12.

13 This description is based upon ritual manuals belonging to, and oral communication from, Ōto Yoshiharu of Tsuruoka, Yamagata prefecture, a Shingon priest and *shugenja*.

(Fig. 1). Nine offerings in three sets of three stand before them, while candles placed in rice stand in the four corners as an offering to the birth star of the individual. In front of the ritualist are seven more candles, which represent the planets, sun and moon. A Star Mandala is hung on the wall behind the goma altar, and the ritualist invokes the deities depicted in it. A typical mandala would contain the central deity Kinrin Butchō 金輪仏頂 (Golden Wheel Buddha's Head), the seven planets, the nine luminaries, the twelve Celestial Mansions (the signs of the western zodiac), and the twenty-eight constellations. For example, the star mandala held at Rinnōji in Nikkō shows the Buddha Dainichi as Kinrin Butchō seated on a lotus flower with hands in what appears to be the mudra of the Dipper constellation, and surrounded by the seven stars of the Dipper and the nine luminaries in the central rectangular enclosure, and by the twelve signs of the zodiac (celestial mansions) in the second enclosure.¹⁴ The seven Dipper stars are portrayed as wrathful forms (Vidyarajas) of the Buddha, sitting on green stems, and generally follow the iconographical forms set out in the above-mentioned *Hokushin bosatsu daranikyō* (Table 1). The small figure in the form of a male kami placed over the highest Dipper figure on the right represents Tenpōsei 天補星, the 'eighth' Dipper star, which is closely associated with the Pole Star.¹⁵ The Rinnōji Mandala, however, omits the twenty-eight constellations.

The ritualist takes refuge in the Dipper stars through the visualization of the seed letter RO that is associated with them, and contemplates the

14 Description based on the Star Mandala (Edo period) included in the catalogue *Nikkōzan Rinnōji no butsuga* (Tochigi Prefectural Museum, 1996), p. 22. The rectangular layout is in the Shingon tradition of Kanjo of Ninnaji (d. 1125), though Rinnōji in the Edo period was a Tendai shrine-temple complex. For a comprehensive introduction to the iconography of star mandalas, see Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas, Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu, 1999), pp. 116-121, and the essay by Tsuda Tetsuei in this volume.

15 According to Takafuji Harutoshi this can be identified with the *hosei* 補星 of Sannō Shinto, which regards it as the kami Matarajin 摩多羅神. Takafuji Harutoshi, 'Nikkōzan ni okeru hokushin shinkō ni tsuite no oboegaki,' *Sangaku Shugen* 28 (2001.10), pp. 33-34. Matarajin is enshrined in a subsidiary altar in the Jōgyōdō at Rinnōji. For a full discussion of Matarajin and its connection with the stars of the Dipper, see Yamamoto Hiroko, *Ijin* Vol. 1 (Tokyo, 2003), pp. 158-441, in particular, pp. 341-350. For a depiction of Matarajin with the Dipper constellation in the upper frame, see *Nikkōzan Rinnōji no butsuga*, p. 79.

virtues of Dainichi. He calls upon all the protector deities to descend, including Amaterasu and Hachiman and all the kami of Japan, both great and small. The year star and Dainichi are called upon to lead all to the Buddha Way, to ensure peace in the land, to avert personal misfortune and ensure long life, to protect the temple and allow Buddhism to flourish, and to prevent unseasonable weather and allow a good harvest. The ritualist then visualizes the year star emerging out of a jewel, from which in turn the seed letter of the year star emerges. This character then takes the form of the star itself, in the iconographical shape associated with it. For example, if the star is the planet Venus (Kinyōshō), the seed letter changes into a star shape and then takes the iconographic form of a figure with a red body and four arms, with one hand making the sword mudra, and the others holding a jewel, a staff and a pike. This symbolizes the deity which is invited to the altar, where it is given offerings and praise. Then the ritualist, making the mudra of the particular star and intoning its mantra, becomes one with it, including its baleful elements, and invokes the power of Dainichi and Myōken to rid it of its malign influences and turn it into a ‘good’ star. Here the ritual ‘converts’ the star, in contrast to the first type of ritual described, where Myōken’s power is invoked to bring forth a good star.

Shugendō star rituals invariably involve the writing of protective talismans (*ofuda* お札, *reifu* 靈符) (Fig. 2). For example, the ritual called *Myōken hiju donpō* 妙見秘呪頓法 invokes a deity called Hokushin Myōken Taijō chintaku shichijūnido no reifujin; Hokushin Myōken refers to the Pole Star in esoteric Buddhist terms and Chintaku reifujin is the Daoist deification of the Pole Star, represented by seventy-two talismanic symbols (*shichijūnido no reifu*)¹⁶ (Fig. 1). The ritualist invites the deity (Myōken) to descend to the altar, and then enters into complete identification with it. He offers incense and intones one hundred times the spell ‘All good stars descend to this place, and all bad stars go away.’ Specific prayer requests are reinforced by grinding the teeth three times, symbolizing the crushing of evil stars. This follows closely the format of an Onmyōdō rite for the same purpose, called *Juhō refu gyōhō* 儒法靈符行法.¹⁷ Some forms of the ritual also show an amalgamation of

16 The scrolls of the seventy-two talismans are placed on either side of the scroll depicting Fudō Myōō. Illustrations of the diagrams and explanations of their effectiveness can be found in *Chintaku reifu engi shusetsu* (*Shinkō sōsho*, pp. 354-363).

kami ideas, with the ritualist carrying a *sakaki* (species of camellia) branch, visualizing the kami, offering sake, and dispatching the kami after formal bows and handclaps. Here the ritualist invites the kami to descend into his purified body as well as visualizing it as one with himself.¹⁸

Nikkō Shugendō

The mountains around Nikkō have been centres of cult since the early eighth century, as archaeological finds attest.¹⁹ In the course of the ninth century the kami of Mt Futara was raised gradually in rank by the central government (as were the kami of other mountains on the lines of the northern Yamato advance, including Gassan and Chōkaisen in the northern province of Dewa), and kami priests were appointed to serve the shrine of Mt Futara in 860. In the tenth century it appears in the *Engishiki* as a *myōjin taisha*, 明神大社, the highest shrine ranking defined by law. It emerged in the early Kamakura period as a shrine-temple complex under Minamoto patronage, when a *shugenja* from Kumano called Benkaku was appointed administrator (*bettō*). Under him the complex assumed the tripartite form familiar from another major Shugendō centre, Kumano, of Hongū (Shihonryūji), Shingū (Futarasan Jinja) and the waterfall, Takinoo Gongen. Shugendō practitioners at first comprised only one component of the temple organization, but they rose in status as Nikkō Shugendō grew in influence in the course of the fifteenth century. Its main practice was the mountain-entry rituals which took place north of Lake Chūzenji, around Nantaisan, called Summer and Autumn Peaks, and those which took place south of the lake, in the lower mountains of the Ashio range, called Winter and Flower-Offering Peaks, which were said to retrace in part the route that legend ascribed to the founder of Nikkō Shugendō, Shōdō. Together the north and south entry rituals symbolized, as in the Ōmine tradition, the unity of the Diamond and Womb mandalas. Practice sites called *shuku* were built in the mountains. Two of the most important, Jinsen no shuku and Hoshi no shuku, were used during both the Winter and Flower-Offering Peaks for long periods

17 *Chintaku reifu engi shusetsu* (*Shinkō sōsho*, pp. 346-349).

18 Miyake Hitoshi, *Shugendō girei no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1999), p. 203.

19 Sugawara Shinkai, *Nihonjin no kami to hotoke, Nikkōzan no shinkō to rekishi* (Kyoto, 2001), pp. 146-47; Hashimoto Sumio, 'Shōdō hibun to Nikkō Nantaisanchō iseki,' *Sangaku Shugen* 28 (2001.10): 15-26.

of confinement.

There is a complete rift in the history of Nikkō Shugendō at the end of the sixteenth century, when Nikkō was deprived of most of its military and economic power by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Tokugawa Ieyasu had the mountain restored by Tenkai 天海 (1536-1643) out of respect for Minamoto no Yoritomo, whom Ieyasu revered, and Shugendō was also revived at that time (1613). With the erection of the Tōshōgū as Ieyasu's mausoleum,²⁰ however, the organization of the whole mountain, including eighty surviving Shugendō subtemples, became centred on it, and Tenkai converted the remaining Shingon-affiliated subtemples to Tendai. Thus all Nikkō *shugenja* became fully ordained Tendai priests, supported solely through shogunal stipends. Not surprisingly, the original character of Nikkō Shugendō was not retained, especially as large numbers of records had been lost. When mountain-entry rituals were revived around 1650, they were made part of the annual observances of the shrine-temple complex of Nikkō, and it was the duty of Nikkō *shugenja* to take part in them. Many changes occurred in the practices, and new ones were introduced, such as a Hieizan-style 1000-day circuit of temples and shrines around Nikkō called Daisendō, in which a visit to the Star Shrine (Hoshi no miya) was included. All the traditional practice sites were rebuilt or renovated in the course of the seventeenth century. Descriptions of the Haru no mine (Flower Offering Peak) say that *shugenja* went to the Hoshi no miya before setting off by horse for Kobugahara, and that they made retreat at the Hoshi no shuku adjacent to it at the end of the Winter Peak.

Nikkō Shugendō again disappeared after kami-buddha separation took effect in Nikkō in 1871, but it has been revived in recent years through the efforts of Nakagawa Kōki of Kōunritsuin in Nikkō, Iyano Bihō of Sannōin in Kanuma, and others, and with the support of Rinnōji. Like their seventeenth century predecessors, though, they remain hampered by

20 Though 'star' connections have been posited for the locating and placement of this shrine (for example, a series of articles by Takafuji Harutoshi: 'Tōshōgū sōken ni himemareta mayoi,' *Dai Nikkō* 62 [1990], 'Ieyasukō to Tendō shisō,' *Dai Nikkō* 68 [1997], 'Nikkōzan ni okeru hokushin shinkō ni tsuite no oboegaki,' *Sangaku Shugen* 28 [2001]), space does not allow detailed discussion of that theme here. By associating Ieyasu with Nikkō, identified with the Pole Star by being located due north of Edo Castle, the deified Ieyasu could be thought of as an avatar of that star who would protect Edo. This parallels Chinese ideas of the emperor (Pole Star) as the unmoving centre around whom society (the constellations) revolved.

a lack of documents from the medieval period transmitting the authentic traditions of Nikkō Shugendō. Nikkō Shugendō is centred at Sannōin in Kanuma (Illustration 5), which sponsors the Flower-Offering and Autumn Peaks, has revived the former lay practices of Nantai zenjō (summer ascent of Mt Nantai) and Funazenjō (pilgrimage by boat to sacred sites around Lake Chūzenji), holds a regular Daisendō practice (through Kōunritsuin), and conducts a Hoshi no Matsuri (star festival) in February, at Setsubun. It is this latter ritual that I would like now to discuss.

Nikkō and Star Shrines

Despite the large number of shrines around Nikkō that are known as Hoshi no Miya, very few of them seem to have a direct connection with stars, either in terms of legends or in terms of cult, although their deity is related to a celestial body. Today most enshrine the deities Iwasaku 磐裂神 (Rock-splitting deity) and Nesaku 根裂神 (Root-splitting deity), said, according to the *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, to have been born out of the droplets of blood shed by the fire deity Kagutsuchi when Izanagi cut him with his sword.²¹ The image of fire and rock suggests lightning and perhaps meteorites falling to earth, and it can also be related to metal-crafting, sword-making and using iron tools to open the land for agriculture. Certainly the association with mountains and minerals is strong, but there is little obvious connection to stars.

An analysis of the character of the Hoshi no Miya shows that in a large number of cases their deities were in pre-Meiji times considered to be manifestations of the bodhisattva Kokūzō 虚空藏 [Ākāśagarbha]), which in turn is generally identified with the planet Venus. Many such shrines are in fact still known locally as Kokūtsama. Because its name is a homophone with *kokuzō*, or *kunitsukuri* 国造 (land formation), this bodhisattva has long been associated with agriculture and the breaking up of the land for tilling.²² Large numbers of Hoshi no Miya shrines are located near rivers and have taboos against eating eels.²³ The eel was

21 *Kojiki* 8:2 (trans. Donald L. Philippi, Tokyo, 1968, p. 59); *Nihon shoki* 1:17 (trans. W.G. Aston, Tokyo, 1972, p. 23), also 1:23 (Aston p. 29).

22 This connection is made explicit in the establishment of the Hoshi no Miya in Ōzo (Utsunomiya) in 1796, where three villagers enshrined Kokuzō (国造) here as an agricultural deity. Maehara Mihiko, 'Hoshi no miya jinja to Nikkō Shugen', p. 171 .

itself originally a water deity, but in the process of kami-buddha combination became the messenger of a deity (specifically Kokūzō) or its vehicle. Thus Kokūzō appears as an agricultural deity and a water deity to whom prayers for rain may be addressed, rather than specifically as a star deity. The question must be asked, therefore: was Kokūzō imposed on the existing land-formation deities, Iwasaku and Nesaku, or were the Hoshi no Miya originally established to enshrine Kokūzō? I will return to this question below.

While the majority of Hoshi no Miya are (or were) associated with Kokūzō, scholars have identified seven that have links with Myōken Bosatsu and that are centred on the mountains around Nikkō. A medieval legend recounted in the *Nikkōsan Takinoo konryū sōsō nikki* 日光山滝尾建立草創日記 (Record of the Origins and Establishment of Nikkōsan Takinoo)²⁴ says that Kūkai 空海 (774-835), the putative father of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan, visited Nikkō in 820 and performed rites to contain strong winds. He set up an altar before the Takinoo waterfall, and performed the Butsugen 佛眼 (Buddha Eye) and Kinrin 金輪 (Golden Wheel) rites for seven days each. At the conclusion of the rites, two jewels appeared in the basin beneath the waterfall, the smaller embodying Tenpōsei (the eighth, separate star of the Dipper seven, see note 17) and the larger Myōken Sonjōō 妙見尊星王. Kūkai enshrined the former on a nearby hill, and the latter on the shores of Lake Chūzenji. This appears to be an attempt by medieval Nikkō Shugendō to attach Kūkai's prestige to itself through Myōken, although this deity was adopted in the form particularly associated with Miidera and the Honzan lineage of Shugendō, a point to which I will return below.

Sites associated with star names also featured prominently among the places visited by *shugenja* during their annual mountain-entry rituals. Even today, during the above-mentioned Flower Offering Peak,²⁵ *shugenja* perform *kenmitsu goma* 権密護摩 at Hoshi no shuku 星宿.

23 The Hoshi no Miya Jinja at Murakami (Sano) formerly enshrined Kokūzō, but this was removed to the shrine's administrative temple Ryūsenji in the early 1870s. Parishioners were forbidden to eat eels. Sano Kenji, *Hoshi no shinkō*, p. 27.

24 *Shintō taikai Jinja-hen* (Tokyo: 1985), vol. 31, pp. 37-50.

25 Revived in condensed form in 1985 and held over two days in early June. The following description is based on my participation in the Hanaku no mine in June 2004.

Situated on the hill above Hoshi no miya, and now directly adjacent to the Kanaya Hotel, Hoshi no shuku, which legend says was the site of a hermitage of Nikkō's founder Shōdō 勝道 (b. 735), was the final stage of both the medieval Winter and Flower-Offering Peaks. Its well-preserved stone *goma* altar dating from 1704 is constructed in a form unique to Nikkō Shugendō and faces a stone statue of Fudō Myōō (Fig. 3). The *kenmitsu goma*, also unique to Nikkō Shugendō, is a meditation on the mandala and the Buddha already within the practitioner's mind, rather than a fire ritual which employs sutra-readings and mantras to bring the deities down through fire. Although a small *mukaebi* [a 'welcome' fire for the deities] is lit, it does not depend on actual fire, nor is there ritual narrative: it simply calls the deities down to the ritual site.²⁶ After this, *shugenja* visit the Hoshi no miya at Okorogawa, which formerly enshrined Kokūzō as the *honjibutsu* 本地仏 (the 'original form' of the manifested kami). On the second day they go to Kobugahara, the Edo period entry-point for the Flower-Offering Peak. Located at the entrance to Jinzen no shuku, an important Nikkō Shugendō ritual site, it is now the location of Kobu Jinja, where Myōken used to be enshrined at a subsidiary shrine, Reifu Jinja. Such a concentration of sites associated with Kokūzō and Myōken (even in today's abbreviated practice) attests to the significance of these divinities for Nikkō Shugendō.

The Hoshi no Miya considered the prototype of all the Star Shrines in Tochigi Prefecture²⁷ is that located on the southern bank of the Daiya river in Nikkō, near the sacred bridge (Mihashi 御橋) (Fig. 4). Its establishment, as described in extant medieval and early modern documents, is closely linked to Shōdō, and it is through Shōdō that we can trace a connection with stars. According to a medieval biography of Shōdō, the *Fudarakusan konryū shugyō nikki* 補陀洛山建立修行日記 (A Record of Practice and the Establishment of Fudarakusan, ca 1300), Myōjō Tenshi 明星天子 (Heavenly Child of the Bright Star) appeared before the seven-year-old Shōdō in a dream and, bestowing the Triple Refuge and the Bodhisattva's Vow on him, told him he would be given the wisdom to spread Buddhism throughout Japan.²⁸ Myōjō Tenshi was

26 Personal communication from Iyano Bihō.

27 *Shintō taikai, Jinja-hen* (Tokyo: 1992), vol. 25, p. 18.

28 *Shintō taikai, Jinja-hen* 31, 9-36. This legendary history probably dates from the early medieval period (despite a colophon dated 818).

traditionally regarded as the personification of the planet Venus, as well as an avatar of the bodhisattva Kokūzō. When Shōdō went to Nikkō in 767, he established the temple Shihonryūji, after receiving assistance, it is said, to cross the Daiya river from the local deity Shinsha Daiō at the place where Hoshi no Miya now stands. Unable to broach the steep cliffs and raging waters by his own power, he recited the Triple Refuge and the *monji* 聞持 spell (see below). A deity in the form of a *yaksha*, dark-blue in colour and wearing a skull around its neck, appeared on the northern bank. It held two snakes in its right hand, one red and one blue, which it flung across the river to make a bridge. This text later describes the subsequent establishment of the Hoshi no Miya as follows:

There is a hill on the south bank of the river. . . and its kami is called Hoshi Gozen. The Master said to his followers: ‘That I have been able to establish this temple (Shihonryūji) and have Buddhist training prosper here is due to the power of Myōjō Tenshi. When I was seven years old, and offered flowers and incense to Heaven, the Bright Star appeared before me and taught me the Triple Refuge and other Buddhist teachings.’ Shinsha Daiō is venerated on the northern bank. This temple is protected by both deities. Therefore you should take refuge in them both.

Thus Shōdō established the Hoshi no Miya in gratitude to Myōjō Tenshi at the place he had stood and recited the mantra. Like Kokūzō, this deity is depicted as wearing heavenly robes and a crown, and carries a sword in the right hand and a jewel in the left. In Nikkō, Myōjō Tenshi is also known as Sankō Tenshi, referring to the ‘three lights’ of the sun, moon and stars (based on a deconstruction of the two characters *akarui* 明 and *hoshi* 星), an apt description of Venus, the brightest of all the planets, the morning star in the east and the evening star in the west.²⁹

Since the *Fudarakusan konryū shugyō nikki* mentions this Hoshi no Miya, it was certainly in existence by 1300, regardless of the veracity of the legend ascribing its foundation to Shōdō.³⁰ Though mentioned only

29 Personal communication, Iyano Bihō. Since Tendai traditionally has considered the three heavenly bodies to be distinct, this understanding represents a conflation that enhances the symbolic power of what is a central Nikkō deity. For the orthodox interpretation, see Lucia Dolce, *Esoteric Patterns in Nichiren's Interpretation of the Lotus Sutra* (Leiden University, 2002), pp. 116-118. I am indebted to Dr Dolce for making this interpretation known to me.

spasmodically in extant medieval documents, it became widely revered during the Edo period as the tutelary deity of the local area, and the shrine building, considered part of the Tōshōgū shrine-temple complex, was periodically renovated at Shogunal expense. Services were held there three times a month by priests from Hongū (as Shihonryūji was then known) in the form of sutras chanted before the kami, and offerings were made daily, to pray for the nation and the shrine-temple complex in the name of Shōdō. It was probably at this time that branch shrines began to be established in the area; certainly one was set up in the vicinity at the request of local people during the Kan'ei era (1624-1643), and this is still known as the Kokūzō Hall.³¹ A clue to the proliferation is the presence of Nikkō *shugenja* who conducted services in local Hoshi no Miya, as in the case of that in the grounds of Nyoraiji in Imaichi.³²

The name of the Hoshi no Miya was formally changed to Iwasaku Jinja in 1871, when kami-buddha separation was put into effect in Nikkō. However this identification was already widely known in the Edo period. For example, the *Shimotsuke no kuni Nikkōzan Hachiishi Hoshi no Miya gochinza denki* 下野国日光山鉢石星宮御鎮座伝記 (ca 17th century?),³³ an account of the legendary history of the Hoshi no Miya, states 'The kami of the Hachiishi Hoshi no Miya is Iwasaku no kami; the *honji* form is Kokūzō Bosatsu, that is, Myōjō.' This work underplays (but does not deny) the Buddhist elements, creating a version of the founding of Nikkō by Shōdō that is highly coloured by Onmyōdō and Yoshida Shinto-influenced interpretations, and as such denotes a stage in the representation of the Hoshi no Miya as a 'standard' kami (i.e. one mentioned in the *Kojiki* or *Nihon shoki*). It does not employ the term Myōjō for the deity that visited the young Shōdō, but rather Taihaku (太白, literally 'Great White'), the Chinese word for the planet Venus. The legend of the crossing of the Daiya river too is subtly altered:

30 Takafuji Harutoshi, 'Nikkōzan Hachiishi Hoshi no Miya kō,' *Ohira daishisō* 7, 1988, p. 60.

31 Takafuji lists five shrines that began as branches of the Hachiishi Hoshi no Miya, called Iwasaku Jinja and formerly having Kokūzō as the *honjibutsu*. 'Nikkōzan Hachiishi Hoshi no Miya kō,' p. 64.

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Shintō taikai Jinja-hen* 25, pp. 170-173.

because he could not cross the river, Shōdō built a hermitage on the bank and there recited the *Lotus Sutra* for a number of days. Eventually a bright light filled the room and a kami appeared, announcing himself as Iwasaku. After relating the circumstances of his birth, he told Shōdō that he was one of five kami born at this time (the *Nihon shoki* variations mention only three). These kami changed into stars, and he was one of them – Taihaku (Venus), governing the western direction, which was associated with the colour white. The five stars were also associated with the five organs of the human body; he himself was associated with the lungs, and by extension with breath, so he governed physical movement. Thus Venus could predict military action, and also restore the country to peace. In India he appeared as Kokūzō Bosatsu. It was he, too, who had visited Shōdō when he was a young boy. Shōdō made a representation of the kami, and it is this, says the text, in the form of Kokūzō as a heavenly youth, that is venerated at the Hoshi no Miya today. The text further suggests that Shōdō practised the ‘teachings of Kokūzō’ here. It goes on to give what seems to be the earliest identification of the *suijaku* (kami) forms of the three sacred mountains of Nikkō and their *honjibutsu* as three deities from the *Kojiki*, Ōnamuchi (Ōkuninishi), Tagorihime and Ajisukitakahikone, and it states categorically that ‘the basis of the establishment of Nikkō was the reponse of Iwasaku no kami of the Hoshi no Miya [to Shōdō’s prayers].’ Further it links by implication the Warrior Festival, which was the chief event associated with the Hoshi no Miya in the Edo period, celebrated on the tenth of the first month, with the power of the planet Venus to affect military outcomes.

This very interesting document possibly reflects the interest of a shrine sacerdotal lineage that is attempting to assert its shrine’s importance in the foundation of Nikkō and its role in the new order following the establishment of the Tōshōgū. It is also noteworthy as reflecting a concern to emphasize the kami; this is done through Chinese cosmological understanding (the group of five representing the five elements [*wuxing* 五行] central to it), and, though underplaying Buddhism, neither excluding nor denigrating it. That this understanding had reached popular consciousness before the Meiji period is evidenced from a description of the Hoshi no Miya in the gazetteer *Nikkō sanshi* (1830).³⁴

. . . Though the shrine is small, it is important to both the clergy

34 *Nikkō sanshi*. *Shintō taikai Jinja-hen* 31, pp.191-278.

and laypeople of Nikkō. . . . When the revered founder of this mountain was a child. . . . Myōjō Tenshi descended and announced to him that Nikkō had been from the Age of the Kami a sacred place of the manifested forms (*suijaku*), Ōnamuchi, Tagorihime and Ajisukitakahikone. . . . ‘You are a vessel of the law with strong [karmic] links with these three kami. . . . Go to that place and open it up in order to bring future generations to salvation. I am the manifestation of Kokūzō; in the heavens I appear as the star Taihaku, and at this place I have descended as Iwasaku no Kōjin 荒神. . . .

The revered master, when he was at Shihonryūji, told his disciples, ‘That I was able to open this sacred mountain and build a temple here is due to the divine edict of Myōjō Tenshi and the protection of Shinsha Daiō. Therefore you must never forget the debt of gratitude you owe them, and you should always venerate them.’³⁵

The text then quotes the passage from the *Fudarakusan konryū shugyō nikki* concerning the Hoshi Gozen and its location. It continues:

The Hoshi no Miya is the foundation of this mountain’s opening; the benefits that come from the Revered master extend from the past to today. The unseen help given by the two deities (i.e. Myōjō Tenshi and Shinsha Daiō) is just like that of the Sannō kami at Hiei[zan] and of the kami Sekizan. Though this is a small shrine, it cannot be overlooked. Because of it, even now in districts to the east and the west, tutelary kami are revered both as Hoshi no Miya and as Kokūzō.³⁶

When the Hoshi no miya was placed under the jurisdiction of the newly constituted Futarasan Jinja (the former Shingū), its ritual calendar, like those of other shrines, was gradually made to conform to the national pattern. A survey in 1885 indicates that the former major festival on the tenth day of the first month survives, but by 1917 the festivals celebrated consisted of the New Year, the Toshigoji matsuri (Kinensai) on February 4, the annual festival (April 2) and the Niinamesai in autumn. All local

35 *Nikkō sanshi*, pp. 193-194.

36 *Nikkō sanshi*, p. 194.

individuality had been subsumed by the state-ordained calendar.

A second strand in the Kokūzō connection is related to the tradition that Shōdō practised the *gumonjihō* after his ordination. This is a ritual associated with Kokūzō and promised the practitioner the ability to perform prodigious feats of memory.³⁷ It was the central practice in what is known as the Jinenchi 自然智 (Natural Wisdom) movement, which flourished in the eighth and early ninth centuries and was made up of priests from the great Nara temples, who spent part of the month at the mountain temple of Hisodera (Yoshino). Kūkai wrote that when he was eighteen he had been shown a sutra called *Kokūzō gumonji no hō*,³⁸ which ‘stated that if one recites the [Kokūzō] mantra one million times according to the proper method, one will be able to memorize passages and understand the meaning of any sutra.’ ‘[I] recited the mantra incessantly, as if I were rubbing one piece of wood against another to make fire, all the while earnestly hoping to achieve the desired result. I climbed Mount Tairyū in Awa Province and meditated at Muroto Cape in Tosa. The valley reverberated to the sound of my voice as I recited, and the Bright Star [Venus] appeared in the sky.’³⁹ Shinzei (780-860), whose name is attached to the earliest biography of Kūkai, describes this event as follows:

Once when Kūkai was meditating atop Mount Tairyū in Awa, the great sword of Kokūzō came flying towards him. Thus the bodhisattva showed his own mystical powers in response to him. Another time, when he was meditating with closed eyes, the Bright Star entered his mouth, thus revealing the bodhisattva’s power.⁴⁰

This image of the planet Venus entering Kūkai’s mouth on the completion

37 Also known as Morning Star Meditation. See for example Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon, Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston and London, 1988), pp. 182-190.

38 *Xukongzang qiuwen chi fa, Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 20, no. 1145.

39 *Sangō shiki* (Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings). *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*. Tokyo, 1909-1911. Reprint Kōyachō, 1966. Vol. III, p. 324. Quoted in Yoshito H. Hakeda, *Kūkai, Major Works* (New York, 1972), p. 102 (translation slightly amended).

40 *Kūkai sōzuden, Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, Shukan, 1-2. Quoted in Yoshito H. Hakeda, *Kūkai, Major Works*, pp 15-16.

of the practice became a compelling image closely associated with the *gumonjihō* practice in later centuries, and so the link was made between the central image of the practice, Kokūzō, and Venus (Myōjō). In addition, the ‘great sword of Kokūzō’ suggests a connection with the deities Iwasaku and Nesaku, who were created when Izanagi cut Kagutsuchi with his sword (see above).

The *Fudarakusan konryū shugyō nikki* reports that Shōdō too practised the *Kokūzō gumonjihō* at Yakushiji, a year after receiving ordination there (762), and, as we have seen, he recited a spell called *monji* which together with the Triple Refuge presumably gave him control over Shinsha Daiō. The same text mentions that he was later ordered by a provincial official to climb Futarasan and perform rain-making prayers there. This portrait of Shōdō as a *gumonjihō* practitioner, a powerful magico-religious specialist, and a mountain ascetic presents the medieval image that Nikkō Shugendō had of itself. It is by no means coincidental that by around 1300 Shugendō centres in many places, including Yoshino and Hagurosan, were constructing images of their founders that served to define them as independent from one another, and that veneration of the founder became an essential part of their cult.

The *gumonjihō* was practised in medieval times at two temples in the Nikkō area, Jakkōji and Daikokusan. Reference to the site of a hall called the Gumonjidō in the grounds of the shrine-temple complex Jakkō Gongen is made in the *Nikkō sanshi*:

The main image is Kokūzō Bosatsu, made by Jikaku Daishi. The name-board of this hall was written by the Cloistered Prince Kōben. This hall existed in the past but fell into ruin. In Genroku 6 (1693) it was rebuilt, but because it was not within the area of [shogunally-sponsored] repair, it again fell into ruin. The name-board is now kept at the Bessho.⁴¹

The popularity of the *gumonjihō* as a practice associated with Nikkō Shugendō, and the possibility that Nikkō *shugenja* practised rain-making rites, where Kokūzō was believed to be a powerful deity, may also account for the proliferation of Hoshi no Miya.

The Star festival of Sannōin

Sannōin has introduced as its star festival, not the usual year-star ritual

⁴¹ *Nikkō sanshi*, p.247.

(*tōnen hoshiku*) so widely performed in modern Shugendō temples, but a form of Myōken ritual closely associated with Miidera, called Sonjōō no hō. It is today transmitted only by Fukuie Eimei, a priest of Hōmyōin at Miidera (Onjōji), Shiga prefecture, and it is performed by Iyano Bihō, one of the few people in Japan to have received its transmission⁴² (Fig. 6). Iyano states explicitly that he has introduced the Sonjōō ritual for its rarity value, although it was not traditionally performed within Nikkō Shugendō. This indicates how rituals can be introduced for arbitrary reasons, and that the perceived impact on followers and believers is an important point in the decision to introduce new forms.

This ritual, which calls upon the Pole Star as Sonjōō (‘Monarch of the Venerable Star’) to prevent calamities, was one of the four imperial rites traditionally performed at Miidera and its *monzeki* temples. Both the *Asabashō* 阿娑縛抄(1242-79) and the *Byakuhōshō* 白寶抄 (1284) state explicitly that the Sonjōō ritual was a secret transmission of the Miidera lineage. The author of the latter, the Kōyasan priest Chōen 澄円, wrote:

Why was the Sonjōō rite a secret rite of the Miidera lineage? Why was it a rite superior to those of other schools? It was brought from China by Chishō Daishi (Enchin, 814-891) and was not known among other schools. Sonjōō refers to Myōken. Myōken is enshrined in the four directions from the palace. Myōken is manifested in the heavenly realm as Sonjōō, and in the earthly realm as Myōken Bosatsu. Though other schools and lineages learn the Myōken rite they know nothing of the Sonjōō rite. Chishō Daishi learned it in China and made it a secret rite. Sonjōō combines all the divinities of the planets and constellations, as which it appears in the heavens; on earth it exists in the five elements. The four directional deities, and the deities of the sexagenary cycle are all Sonjōō. During rituals, if these deities are visualized, they all become Sonjōō. Kōjin and the good and evil deities that reside in the body are the retinue of the sixty deities.⁴³

The ritual thus differs from other Myōken-directed rituals in that it is not simply an invocation for the power of the Pole Star deity; rather Sonjōō is

⁴² The description of the process of the ritual is based upon oral communication from Iyano Bihō and observation of it at Sannōin in February 2004 and 2005.

⁴³ Quoted in Misaki Ryōshū, ‘Onjōji to Sonjōō’ in *Mikkyō to jingi shisō* (Tokyo 1992), pp. 226-227.

considered be a condensation of the whole cosmos; oral transmissions say that Sonjōō is a form of the Buddha Dainichi called Nyogen zanmai 如幻三昧 (samadhi for realizing the nonsubstantiality of all things). The *Jitokushū* 寺徳集(1344), a two-volume history of Jimon-ha, also states that the ‘great ritual of Sonjōō’ is ‘a secret ritual for protecting the state,’ and that ‘the secret image of Sonjōō’ had been handed down through the lineage of Fachuan (the Chinese teacher of Enchin). The association of Enchin’s visit to China and the Sonjōō ritual took root at Miidera in the medieval period. It was no accident that it was developed at Miidera at a time when it needed to assert its own ritual supremacy *vis-a-vis* Hieizan.⁴⁴

Of particular interest in this ritual is the unique Sonjōō mandala.⁴⁵ A copy of a Heian-period mandala (the original of which is kept at Miidera) is used at Sannōin as its central image for the Sonjōō ritual (Fig. 7). Sonjōō and its iconography are considered to have originated in Japan, rather than on the continent, since no trace of it has been found there. The twelfth-century *Kakuzenshō* states:

Sonjōō rides on the back of a dragon standing on a five-coloured cloud... It has four arms. On the palms of the upper left and right hands are mountains, on which are placed the moon and sun respectively. The other left hand holds a *shakujō* (staff with metal rings) and the other right hand holds a trident. There are six suns and moons (three red and three white). There are six animals (deer, tiger, dog, etc.).⁴⁶

The origin of the iconography has exercised scholarly minds for centuries. The *Kakuzenshō* suggests an iconographic relationship with the

44 Descriptions of the historical development of the ritual are contained in Misaki Ryōshū ‘Onjōji to Sonjōōhō,’ Kanesashi Shōzō, *Hoshi uranai, hoshi matsuri* (Tokyo, 1974), pp. 163-167, and Tsuda Tetsuei ‘Jimon no sonjōō o megutte’ *Museum* 581 (2002), pp. 17-37.

45 Oral communication regarding the symbolism of the mandala was received from Iyano Bihō of Sannōin and Haneda Shukai of Kamakura, both of whom have received the transmission of the ritual from Onjōji. Tsuda Tetsuei of the Tokyo bunkazai kenkyūjo gave me valuable suggestions from an art historian’s point of view. My gratitude is extended to all three informants. For further details on the iconography of the mandala see Tsuda’s essay in this volume.

46 *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, Zuzō 5, p. 398c.

water star (Mercury) in the mandala devoted to Butsugen, and associations have also been made with two other deities of the north, Kichijōten and Bishamonten.

The Miidera painting portrays Sonjōō as a four-armed bodhisattva standing on a green dragon with one foot raised behind the opposite knee. It is closely related to one of the three standard Myōken iconographical depictions, but differs in that the second set of hands holds, not pen and paper, but a *shakujō* and trident. It has been suggested that the leg position represents the magical step called the Pace of Yu (*henbai, uho*) used in contemporary Shugendō to create sacred boundaries.⁴⁷ The dragon represents the Pole Star and the Dipper constellation.⁴⁸ The image stands on the moon, associated with night and so the Pole Star. The eight sun and moon discs (probably the eight basic hexagrams representing cosmic balance) contain the three-legged crow and a rabbit and frog respectively. Both are originally Chinese representations associated with the sun and the moon. The vase in the centre of the moon represents the container of the medicine of immortality, and the frog is associated with the moon because of its bumpy skin.

The provenance of the animals on the outer rim has been described as an ‘eternal riddle’ but there are indications to suggest their reference. First, a horned deer appears both on the head of Sonjōō and above the upper sun and moon. One explanation is that it is there to suggest a connection with Kasuga Shrine; certainly the Fujiwara, whose clan shrine Kasuga was, were major patrons of Miidera, and the Sonjōō rite was performed to protect Fujiwara empresses in childbirth. Another explanation is that the deer was associated with Chinese immortals. Yet another connection is offered in tales collected in the *Nihon ryōiki*: here Myōken was regarded as a deity who could return stolen property. In one tale (I:34) people who had silk robes stolen prayed to Myōken. A week later there was a gale and the robes were returned to the owner on the back of a deer, which then disappeared into the heavens. Another tells how a confraternity to offer lights to Myōken held a celebration and made offerings of money to the priest of the temple. His disciple stole some of the money and hid it; when he went to retrieve it he found a dead deer

47 Tsuda Tetsuei, ‘Uho, henbai to Sonjōō, Rokuji Myōō no zuzō,’ *Nihon shūkyō bunkashi kenkyū* 2:2 (1998.11): 75-83.

48 A representation of the dragon with the seven Dipper stars dated 1752 is held by Rinnōji. See *Nikkōzan Rinnōji no butsuga* p. 63.

with an arrow in it. He got some people to help him bring down the deer, but when they returned the money was there and not the deer.⁴⁹ The deer may thus represent the vehicle or messenger of Myōken.

Interestingly, a drawing of the mandala in the mid-12th century ritual anthology *Besson zakki* shows in the same position not a deer but what appear to be four crocodiles (*makatsugo*). The Miidera painting has in addition, a tiger and a panther (or leopard), and shares an elephant and a white fox with the drawing. The panther (Kisuihyō), tiger (Bikakō) and fox (Shingekkō) are associated with three constellations that protect the north-east (Kishuku, Bishuku and Shinshuku), and so may be regarded as guardians of the direction from which the most baleful influences come. The elephant may represent the bodhisattva Fugen as the deity of long life, and indeed the mantra of Fugen of Long Life (Enmei) is recited during the Sonjōō ritual. The concentric circles are stylizations of what appears in the *Kakuzenshō* drawing and in standard star mandalas as the Nine luminaries, the Twelve Celestial Mansions and the Twenty-eight constellations.

The Sonjōō ritual is performed at Sannōin seven times over four days, culminating on the first Sunday in February. In addition, a ritual dedicated to the elephant-headed Kangiten is performed early each morning, while an offering of grains and sutras is made each evening at a special ritual site set up in the corridor outside the ritual area to the wild kami (*kijin* 鬼神) who need to be appeased. (Ordinarily these are not venerated, as the Founder is supposed to mediate between the good and the wild kami.) (Fig. 8) On the last day a fire ceremony (*goma*) is also performed on a subsidiary altar. On the first day only five candles are lit on the *goma* platform, but on the final day sixty-four are lit. Some consider these represent the sixty-four hexagrams of the *Yijing* while others regard them as the sum total of the seven Dipper stars in both their birth and year forms, the Nine luminaries, the Twelve Celestial Mansions and the Twenty-eight constellations, plus the central deity. Eight sets of offerings are made in four sets of bowls (Fig. 9).

The ritual follows the standard format of an esoteric ritual, such as the Eighteen Path ritual. The declaration of intent is addressed to Dainichi and all the deities of the Dual mandala, especially Ichiji kinrin, Myōken, Sonjō Taishi, the birth and year stars, the luminaries, celestial palaces and

49 *Nihon ryōiki* Tales I: 34 and III: 5. Kyoko Motomochi Nakamura, *Miraculous Tales from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973, pp. 149, 229.

constellations, so that the heavens and the individual may be as one, and good fortune, long life and protection from illness can be ensured. The ritualist visualizes the transformation of the seed letter into a star shape and then into the central image, Sonjōō, surrounded by the Dipper constellation, the Nine Luminaries, the Twelve Celestial Palaces and the Twenty-eight constellations. After this the sixty-four candles are lit (Fig. 10) At this point the ritualist visualizes all the stars descending to the ritual area. Special mantras are intoned to the Pole Star (*Namu hokushin hokuto sandai nikusei hokuto shichisei bosatsu makasatsu*) and all the stars (*Namu shimyō tensō gohō hachihō shihō issai seishuku shotenjin*), and also to Enmei Fugen. The mudra of Myōken (and Sonjōō) is a raised right hand, the fingers slightly splayed, with the thumb tucked against the base of the index finger. The hand represents the five stars and the five elements; the thumb is moved slightly inwards in a beckoning fashion to call upon the deities.⁵⁰ Finally the ritualist reads out a declaration of all the mantras and sutras that have been recited over the past four days. A fire service takes place on a side altar (Fig. 11) and talismans (*ofuda*) are passed over the candles to purify them. (Fig. 12) The talismans are written in red ink containing cinnabar and incorporate the star sign (*hoshi kuji*), which is associated with assuring physical and spiritual health.

A distinctive feature of the ritual as performed originally was that priests should create a sacred boundary (*kekkaï*) around the ritual area using the Pace of Yu steps. This is a magical device to destroy the power of evil stars, used in Onmyōdō, and still found in Shugendō rituals today. This step is no longer performed in the Sonjōō ritual, however. Another distinctive feature was the offering of a mirror and musk (a deer product) to the deity, which may be seen as a sign that Sonjōō was considered an aspect of Kichijōten within the Miidera tradition.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a description of star rituals as they are performed within Shugendō, and of various aspects of star beliefs that occur within Nikkō Shugendō. Kokūzō beliefs seem closely related to mountain-entry practices and perhaps to the performance of the *gumonjihō*, but there is no positive documentary evidence for this. There seems however to be a clear link between Hoshi no miya and Myōjō Tenshi. Since Myōjō Tenshi was identified with Kokūzō, shrines with

⁵⁰ Communication from Haneda Shukai.

Kokūzō as their *honjibutsu* (whether or not Kokūzō was a star deity or a land-formation deity) ended up being designated Hoshi no miya. The star ritual performed by Sannōin today has no historical connection with Nikkō Shugendō, but has been introduced for its rarity value. This tells us that we can sometimes perhaps over-analyse paths of ritual contact, looking for connections which may not be as formal or as tightly motivated as we might assume. Sometimes it is the individual priest or shugenja who brings new forms into a temple merely because he happens to know them. With this in mind, perhaps we should look at the introduction of new religious forms (and the permeation of Onmyōdō ideas among the populace in the Edo period is a case in point) as the infiltration of individual knowledge and techniques, rather than as a concerted, organized, conscious transmission.

Table 1 Seven stars of the Dipper constellation

Star	Direction	Colour	Implement
Tonrōshō	SW	red	sun in left hand
Komonshō	W	pale yellow	moon in right hand
Rokuzonshō	NW	red-blue	flame in left hand
Mongokushō	N	dark blue	throwing water outwards from left hand
Renjōshō	NE	yellow	jewel in right hand
Mugokushō	E	blue	willow branch in left hand
Hagunshō	SE	pale red	sword in right hand

Fig. 1. A goma altar decorated for the *tōnenshō-ku*. Scrolls denoting the seventy-two talismanic symbols flank a scroll of Daishō Fudō Myōō. Ritual space belonging to Ōto Yoshiharu, Tsuruoka, Yamagata prefecture. September 2004.

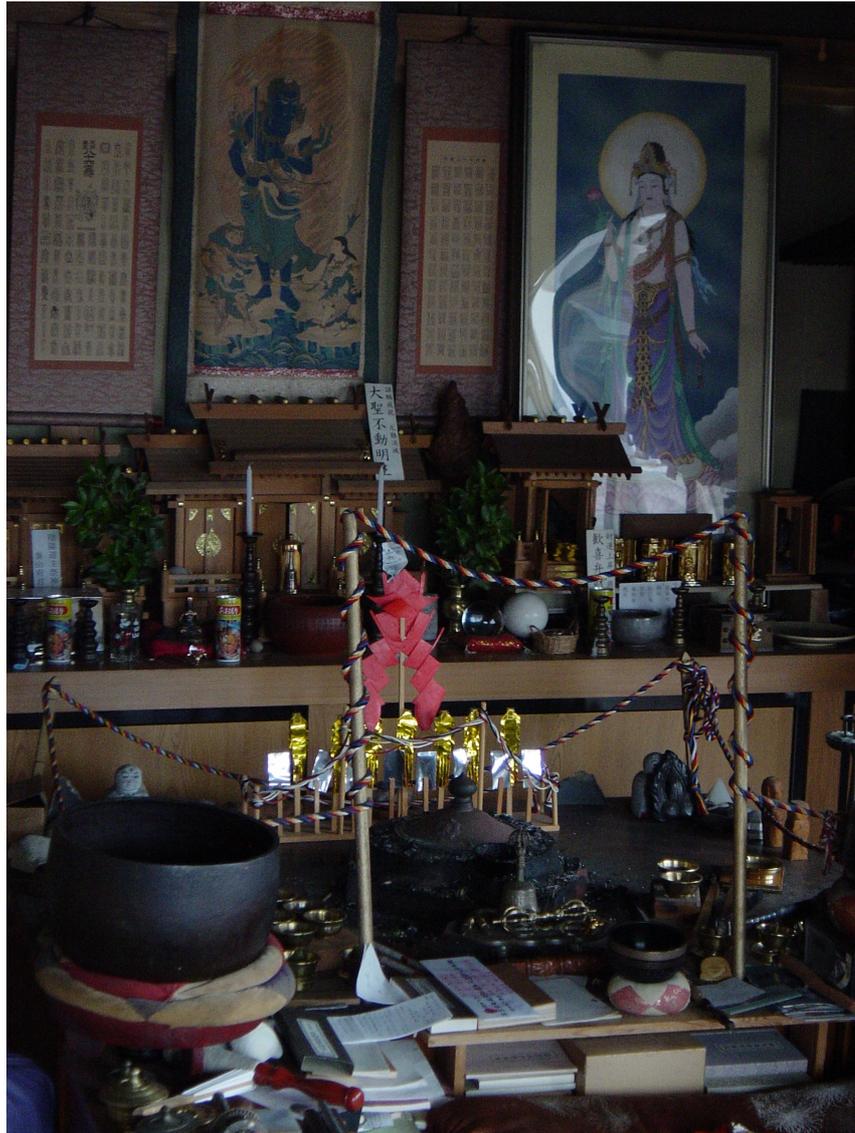


Fig 2. Protective talismans (*ofuda*) issued by Sannōin, Kanuma, Tochigi prefecture on the occasion of its Hoshi-matsuri. The use of red ink recalls the magical Chinese alchemical ingredient, cinnabar. February 6, 2005.



Fig 3. The stone goma altar at the Hoshi no Shuku, Nikkō (1704).



Fig. 4. Hoshi no Miya, Hachiishi, Nikkō



Fig. 5. Sannōin, Kanuma, Tochigi prefecture



Fig. 6. Fukuie Eimei of Hōmyōin, Onjōji (Shiga prefecture) and Iyano Bihō of Sannōin (Kanuma, Tochigi prefecture). Iyano wears the shugen dress associated with Rinnōji. Onjōji, April 18, 2005.



Fig. 6. The Sonjōō Mandala (original in possession of Honmyōin, Onjōji, Shiga prefecture) is the *honzon* of the Sonjōō ritual, Sannōin, Kanuma, Tochigi prefecture. The five white paper offerings include coins, and this is said to show Daoist influence. February 6, 2005.



Fig. 7. The ritual area. The Kangiten altar is on the left, the *goma* altar on the right, and the main altar in the middle. February 6, 2005.



Fig. 8. The Sonjōō altar with offerings. February 6, 2005.



Fig. 9. The lighting of the candles. February 6, 2005.



Fig. 10. Calling down the deities. February 6, 2005.



Fig. 11. The *goma* service. February 6, 2005.



Fig. 12. Passing the talismans over the candles. February 6, 2005.

