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From Bodhidharma to Daruma: The Hidden Life of a Zen Patriarch

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The monk Bodhidharma (Jap. Daruma) is usually presented as the founding patriarch of the Chan/Zen tradition and he has become a favorite theme of Zen ink-paintings. In early modern Japan, however, another image of Bodhidharma became immensely popular: that of the tumbling Daruma dolls, which were initially used as charms to protect children against smallpox. Daruma thus became a protector of children and bringer of good luck, and his image was also fraught with sexual connotations (as attested by the widespread motif of “Daruma with a courtesan”) and embryological symbolism. This paper is an attempt to understand the evolution that led from the orthodox Zen patriarch to the smallpox deity and fortune god of the Edo period. A clue is found in the Chan tradition according to which Bodhidharma had been poisoned by his rivals. From the likelihood that the circumstances of his death led to the belief that he became a malevolent spirit that needed to be propitiated, the image develops into that of a crossroad deity, an epidemic deity, and a god of fortune. Other legends and myths like those of Shōtoku Taishi and Shinra Myōjin may have contributed to this development. By removing Daruma from his habitual context (that of the Zen tradition) to place him in another context (that of popular religion and folklore), we are better able to understand his emergence as a “fashionable god” (*hayarigami*) in Edo culture. The heuristic interpretation suggested here also allows us to reconsider one widespread artistic motif, that of “Bodhidharma crossing the Yangzi River on a reed.”

Key words: Bodhidharma 達磨, Daruma 達磨, Daruma dolls 達磨人形, Chan/Zen 禪, Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子, Shinra Myōjin 新羅明神, Jūzenji 十禪師, smallpox deity (*hōsōgami*) 疱瘡神, crossroad deity (*dōsojin*) 道祖神, epidemics (*ekibyō*) 疫病, smallpox (*hōsō*) 疱瘡

The patriarch Bodhidharma is a well-known figure of Chan/Zen, and one of the favorite themes of the so-called “ink-painting” (*suibokuga* 水墨画). His stern face is supposed to represent the Zen practitioner’s determination to reach awakening through the practice of seated meditation. Yet, as we will see, it may have another, darker meaning. By making Bodhidharma its founding father, the new Chan school that emerged in China around the

seventh century defined itself as a distinct religious current, keen on its orthodoxy. It is this “will to orthodoxy” that led this school, even as it multiplied the iconographic variants of the image of its founding patriarch, to maintain it within a strict framework defined by Zen practice. But the image of Bodhidharma, or rather of Daruma 達磨 (Ch. Damo), as he came to be called in Japan, very early on overflowed that framework and went through strange reincarnations (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Daruma dolls. (Photo: B. Faure)

I will therefore not deal here with the Bodhidharma of the Zen tradition, but with his elusive double, as it developed in the popular culture of the Edo period. The question that we have to answer is twofold: “How did the Bodhidharma of Zen give birth to the popular Daruma?” and “What explains the latter’s popularity in the Edo period?” After all, the Daruma appears most notably under the unexpected form of a smallpox deity and eventually became a popular icon of culture and politics: one adds pupils to the eyes of the blind Daruma doll to ensure the success of enterprises (for instance, in contemporary Japan, on the evening of an electoral victory).¹

This latter image seems to have appeared, as if from nowhere, after a long period of incubation. The lack of documentation in this domain—which is that of the history of symbols and of *mentalités*—condemns us to speculations and to a heuristic method that may seem frustrating to the traditional historian in search of textual evidence. Even if I seem to proceed chronologically in my attempt to bridge the gap between the Tang and the Edo periods, between the Chan patriarch and the “deity in vogue” (*hayarigami* 流行神), my aim is not to trace a genealogy—as one could do in the case of the Chan/Zen patriarch—but rather to suggest the sinuous and shifting contours of a network, of what one could call, to borrow a term from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a “rhizome.”² One can of course, whenever possible, emphasize the role of certain individuals, institutions, or groups that have contributed to this evolution. But their hinterland must remain anonymous, and the methodological individualism of traditional scholarship is potentially misleading in this case. As in any emergence, the true logic is elsewhere; it is a form of “swarm thinking” that requires a different approach.

What is the relationship between the Bodhidharma legend, as it develops initially in Chan during the Tang period, and Daruma, the popular deity of the Edo period? In other words, how did the austere Chan patriarch ever become a tumbler doll? It is a complicated, and obscure story. To understand it, we have to unravel many strands that were woven together into one figure. Daruma will thus appear to us successively as:

- 1 This practice goes back to “dotting” the eyes of Buddhist statues to animate them. On this question, see Faure 1991 and Strickmann 1996.
- 2 Deleuze and Guattari 1987.

- a malevolent spirit (*onryō* 怨霊)
- a crossroad deity (*dōsojin* 道祖神) associated with sexuality
- a placenta god (*ena kōjin* 衣那荒神)
- an astral god of destiny controlling human destiny (*shukujin* 宿神)
- a “foreign” epidemic deity (*ekijin* 役神): god of Mt. Song related to Shinra Myōjin 新羅明神
- a smallpox deity (*hōsōgami* or *hōsōshin* 疱瘡神)
- a god of fortune (*fukujin* 福神)

Other elements contributed to his posthumous success, among which, somewhat at random are:

- sexual symbolism
- the symbolism of *komori* 籠, incubation, reclusion, gestation, and its relation with easy childbirth on the one hand, silkworms and sericulture on the other
- the color code (red) and the spatial code (south): fire, exorcism, yang, smallpox
- the tumbling doll device (with its sexual connotations and its symbolism of rebirth or recovery)

This gradual intertwining of motifs was essentially realized during the medieval period. We will examine the main ones, following an approximately chronological order. There are only a few clues, revealing symbolic associations that may never have come to the forefront—or, if they did, were eventually overshadowed by the “official” Zen interpretation. This interpretation prevailed even within Tendai, which transmitted the “one mind precepts of Bodhidharma” (Daruma *isshinkai* 達磨一心戒) and from which emerged the first Zen school called, precisely, the “Daruma school” (Darumashū 達磨宗).³ Because the “other side” of Bodhidharma—the dark side—was always submerged, the following reconstruction is perhaps more an exercise in heuristic imagination than an accurate description of historical reality. But at least, it raises a legitimate question, and may indicate the direction in which we look for an answer. Let us therefore start at the beginning, if there ever is such a thing in the realm of myth and legend.

The Legend of Bodhidharma

The Buddhist monk Bodhidharma, an Indian missionary to China whom Christian missionaries long mistook for the apostle Thomas, was seen as an arhat and an avatar of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.⁴ As the founding patriarch of the Chan/Zen school, he came to be revered eventually as an equal (and almost a double) of the Buddha himself. According to the Golden Legend of Chan, Bodhidharma was the son of a southern Indian king. Having obtained enlightenment, he left for China in order to convert the Chinese, and arrived in Canton at the beginning of the sixth century. His encounter with Emperor Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (r. 502–49), a ruler who prided himself on being a pious Buddhist, was a short and

³ On this school, see Faure 1987.

⁴ See Faure 1993, pp. 45–50.

inauspicious one. Bodhidharma, showing what some would consider a certain lack of tactfulness, declared that the emperor's pious works were of no value whatsoever. The latter, not surprisingly, was not pleased, and Bodhidharma deemed it prudent to leave right away for North China. He is said to have crossed the Yangzi River on a reed, an element that made its way into Zen iconography. He eventually settled on Mt. Song, where he practiced meditation during nine years facing a wall. His uncompromising teaching won him a few disciples, but also some powerful enemies, and we are told that he was eventually poisoned by two rivals. Soon after his death, however, a Chinese emissary returning from India claimed to have met him on the Pamir plateau. When Bodhidharma's grave was opened, it was found to be empty—with the exception of one of his shoes. This episode led to the belief that he was a sort of Immortal, and that his death had been a feigned death.

Such, in its outline, is the image of Bodhidharma as it had developed in the Chan tradition toward the eighth century.⁵ The legend of the Indian patriarch, however, continued to develop outside of Buddhism, as shown by the attribution to this master of several Daoist works, as well as his promotion to the rank of founder of martial arts.⁶ If the Bodhidharma worshiped as the first patriarch of Chan in China has little to do with the Indian monk of the same name, mentioned as admiring the pagoda of the Yongning 永寧 monastery in Luoyang 洛陽 at the beginning of the sixth century, the distance between the Japanese Daruma and his Chinese prototype seems even greater.

According to a later Japanese tradition, Bodhidharma did not return to India but traveled on to Japan. This version, propagated by the Tendai school, associates Bodhidharma with Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (574–622), who came himself to be considered an avatar of the Tiantai master, Nanyue Huisi 南岳慧思 (517–77). We are told that Shōtoku Taishi one day met a starving beggar at the foot of Mt. Kataoka (in Nara), and exchanged a poem with him. The strange literate beggar was first identified as an immortal in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀. His further identification with Bodhidharma rested upon another widespread legend, according to which Huisi had once been Bodhidharma's disciple. When the two first met on Mount Tiantai 天台, Bodhidharma predicted that they would both meet again in a next life in Japan. This legend grew with the cult of Shōtoku Taishi in the medieval period, and there is still a Daruma temple 達磨寺 at Kataoka, not far from Hōryūji 法隆寺—a monastery associated with Shōtoku Taishi.⁷



Figure 2. Bodhidharma by Kitsusan Minchō 吉山明兆 (1352–1431). Collection of Tōfukuji. (Reproduced with permission)

5 On this legend, see Faure 1986a and 1986b.

6 On the development of the legend in China, see Durant-Dastès 2000. On Bodhidharma and the martial tradition of Shaolin monastery, see Shahar 2008.

7 Nishimura 1985, pp. 299–310.

Let us leap ten centuries forward. Daruma became an extremely popular deity during the Edo period as a protector of children and bringer of good luck. In this folkloric version, the Indian patriarch of Chan/Zen has come a long way. He has been represented since that time as a legless, tumbling talisman doll which, as the saying goes, “falls seven times and rises eight times” (*nana korobi ya oki* 七転八起).⁸ This popular representation of Daruma traces its origin back to the belief according to which Bodhidharma, after sitting in meditation for nine years in a cave on Song shan 嵩山, came to lose his legs.

This representation lent itself to sexual symbolism: thus, until the Meiji period, phallic representations of Daruma in stone or papier maché were sold.⁹ The name “Daruma” was also a nickname given in the Edo period to prostitutes, perhaps because, like the doll, these specialists of tumble could raise the energy of their customers.¹⁰ Daruma is indeed often represented in comical fashion in the company of a prostitute—sometimes even as a transvestite or as a woman. He is also sometimes part of a more or less legitimate couple called “Mr. and Mrs. Daruma.” In some cases his partner is no other than the chubby Okame おかめ (a.k.a. Otafuku お多福, the popular representation of the goddess Ame no Uzume no Mikoto 天鈿命). These Daruma dolls protected children against illnesses such as smallpox and were supposed, among other things, to facilitate childbirth, bring good harvests, and more generally bring prosperity to their owners. There is also in Zen iconography a representation of the “erect Bodhidharma.” The sexual symbolism is played out in ukiyo-e, where Daruma appears



Figure 3. Daruma doll—pointing the way. (Photo: B. Faure)



Figure 4. *Onna Daruma* 女達磨 (Courtesan impersonating Daruma) by Kitagawa Utamaro 喜多川歌麿 (1753? – 1806). Collection of Tochigi City. (Reproduced with permission)

- 8 According to a variant, “Daruma grows every time he falls.” See also the variant provided by the childrens’ song, whose syllables—“Da.ru.ma.sa.n.ga.ko.ro.n.da” (“Daruma has fallen down”)—were used by children to count from one to ten in games of hide and seek.
- 9 See Richie and Itō 1967, p. 226.
- 10 McFarland 1986, p. 171.



Figure 5. Daruma cross-dressing as a courtesan by Takeda Harunobu 竹田春信 (mid-Edo period). Color on silk; hanging scroll. 62.5 x 31.6 cm. Joe and Etsuko Price collection, Los Angeles. (Reproduced with permission)



Figure 6. *Daruma ga te o dasu* 達磨が手を出す (Giving Daruma a Smoke), 1765 by Suzuki Harunobu 鈴木春信 (1725–1770). 27.6 x 19.3 cm. Woodblock print (*nishiki-e*); ink and color on paper. Collection of Tabacco & Salt Museum. (Reproduced with permission) From Chiba City Museum of Art and Hagi Urugami Museum, eds. and pub., *Seishun no ukiyo-e shi Suzuki Harunobu* 青春の浮世絵師 鈴木春信, 2002, p. 65.

as a woman—a courtesan—or a transvestite (Figures 4, 5 and 6). A representation in which one sees him in the company of two prostitutes—male and female—on a boat made from a reed-leaf associates the sexual motif with that of the crossing of the Yangzi River.

As Hartmut Rothermund has pointed out, the image of Daruma standing up (*okiagari* Daruma 起上達磨) connotes metaphorically the fact of recovering from an illness, of overcoming it rapidly and lightly.¹¹ Before becoming mere toys, Daruma dolls seem to have been initially good luck objects (*engimono*) placed on domestic altars (*kamidana*). The *okiagari* Daruma also became a popular symbol of perseverance (*okiagari*) and new beginnings. Another association, at first glance surprising, is that which, in the Kantō region, connects Daruma with silkworms, and transforms him into a talisman for sericulture: the white cocoons have the form of a Daruma, or perhaps one should say that Daruma is cocoon-like.¹² *Engimono* cocoons called *mayu* Daruma, on which Daruma features are painted, are still sold today; and this is perhaps related to the fact that, as we will see, both Daruma and the silkworm were symbols of gestation. However, this embryological symbolism, which connects Daruma with the silkworm, refers also perhaps to the practice of *mushi okuri* 虫送り or “insect dispatching”: it may be a kind of funerary ritual for these creatures, which are sacrificed in large numbers during the spinning process, and which

11 Rothermund 1991, p. 196.

12 By contrast, in the Kansai region, Daruma was above all related to the merchant class, and apparently unrelated to the agricultural cycle (in particular to the New Year Festival).

one may fear lest they become “resentful spirits.”

The images used in the symbolic fight against smallpox during the Edo period often show a Daruma doll and a puppy dog, symbol of good health. In one example, one child stands on his hands on Daruma’s head, another rides on the dog. They are accompanied by poems such as: “Near the sick child, struck by smallpox/playing a light game, a paper Daruma and the lucky charm dog.” Or: “The fellow Daruma, with his gentle face, does not stay lying in bed.” Behind the notion of game, one finds the magical invocation of health for children. The image of Daruma rising again also suggested a rapid recovery.

There were also children’s illustrated books against smallpox. In one of them, Daruma and his friends, the toys, organize a bazaar in conjunction with the festival of the smallpox deities; in another, Daruma and his fellows, among which is an owl, are scolded by the warrior Minamoto no Tametomo 源為朝 for giving free rein to the smallpox demons, thereby provoking ravages among the infantile population.¹³

These stories, studied in detail by Rotermund, show that, by the beginning of the Edo period, Daruma had become a protector against smallpox, and his role consisted in watching the smallpox demons so that they would not harm children. This suggests, however, that Daruma himself was initially perceived as a kind of god of smallpox (*hōsōgami* 疱瘡神). We recall that the same spiritual entities—here the *hōsōgami*—who were seen as the cause of epidemic diseases were eventually transformed into protectors against these same diseases. Like them, Daruma was enrolled in the fight against evil, but he retains some aspects from his past. For instance, while appearing to follow the orders of Tametomo, he is shown playing a double game and implicitly siding with the demons.

At any rate, in Edo Japan a Daruma doll was usually offered with other auspicious toys to sick children. We must note in this context the importance of the color red which symbolizes, among other things, measles. The altar to the smallpox god was decorated with red paper strips (*gohei*), a daruma doll, and an owl; sometime also with a doll called *shōjō* (orang-outan). Furthermore, the sick child had to wear a red hood (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Detail of *Hōsōgami* 疱瘡神 (1843–47) by Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳. *Nishiki-e*, Color prints of infections. 32 x 42 cm. Collection of Katagiri Seiryūdō 片桐棲龍堂. (Reproduced with permission) From *Hayari-yamai to nishiki-e* はやり病と錦絵, p. 19. Naito Museum of Pharmaceutical Science and Industry, 2001.

A Malevolent Spirit

Even before encountering the Japanese materials, I have suspected that the choice, at first glance rather arbitrary, of the Indian monk Bodhidharma as the first patriarch of the Chan school may be the result of a scapegoat mechanism of the type described by René

¹³ Rotermund 1991, pp. 162–78.

Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*.¹⁴ Whatever happened to the real Bodhidharma, the belief that he had been poisoned by rivals spread very early on, and it was in a way the logical conclusion of the series of hardships met by the foreign monk. The rumor about this tragic figure may be echoed centuries later in Edo Japan by the scholar Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基 (1715–46), who saw him as a pitiful figure. His attempt to convert the Chinese was doomed from the start, and resulted in his murder “Pitiful Bodhidharma!”¹⁵ Thus, it seems plausible that some of Bodhidharma’s contemporaries considered him to be a potentially dangerous spirit, intent on revenge.

The Japanese tradition abounds in stories about charismatic monks who, because of the resentment they felt at the time of death for some injustice suffered, return as malevolent spirits (*onryō* or *goryō*), or succumb to evil destinies, in particular that of *tengu* 天狗, those demoniac beings represented with a beak or a long phallic nose. Although Bodhidharma is never described as a *tengu* as such, the association was suggested to me by a very beautiful *netsuke* kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum (signed Masakazu, 19th century). This *netsuke* represents a bird-like *tengu* hatching from an egg, yet this egg-shaped figure strikingly resembles the popular representations of Daruma. However, the affinities between Bodhidharma and the *tengu* may not matter so much: what is essential is that Bodhidharma’s death, in as much as it was not simply denied by its presumed immortality, gave him the aura of a vengeful spirit. The importance of these spirits, divinized under the name of *goryō*, grew considerably during the Nara and Heian periods. The most famous case is that of the statesman Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845–903), whose spirit was placated after he was elevated to the rank of Heavenly Deity (*tenjin* 天神) and the Kitano shrine was consecrated to him (Figure 8).¹⁶ Bodhidharma was to take a different path, more obscure and tortuous.



Figure 8. *Totō Tenjin zō* 渡唐天神像 (Sugawara no Michizane). Collection of Kyoto City University of Arts.

Daruma at the Crossroads

We have seen how the figure of Bodhidharma inserted itself into the legend of Shōtoku Taishi through the intermediary of the Kataoka beggar. According to Rotermund, Shōtoku Taishi’s gift of a poem was perhaps aimed at revivifying the vital spirits (*tama*) of the starving man. Shōtoku Taishi also allegedly gave his coat to the beggar. This act, which calls to mind Saint Martin’s gift, has given rise to all kinds of interpretations into which I cannot enter here. Rotermund notes that cloth offerings were made in places deemed dangerous, such as crossroads and passes, and he suggests that we may be dealing here with

14 See Girard 1979.
15 Ibid.
16 On this question, see Como 2008, pp. 107–108.

an act destined to placate the dead.¹⁷

According to Michael Como, this episode of Shōtoku's legend may have been intended to coopt preexisting rites of purification at the crossroad (*chimata* 岐).¹⁸ At the intersection of roads connecting Naniwa with the Asuka region, where the court was located at the time, Kataoka was an important ritual space. Scholars have often argued that the Shōtoku Taishi cult itself may have intended to placate the vengeful spirit of the regent, whose entire family had been decimated by his political opponents. However, Shōtoku himself was by no means an innocent ruler, and it is plausible that he took preexisting purification rites at Kataoka, in order to placate the vengeful spirits of his defeated enemies, like Mononobe no Moriya 物部守屋. Kataoka was a site where rituals of spirit quelling were regularly undertaken by the Yamato court. These purification rites, centering upon the fire god (a red deity), were designed to purify the land by sending evil spirits to the netherworld known as Ne no kuni 根の国. They involved the use of ritual dolls (*hitogata* 人形), substitute bodies that were dressed in the ruler's clothes before being sent off, like scapegoats, as bearers of collective defilement. In this context, Shōtoku Taishi offering his robe to the beggar on the roadside is no longer a sublime act of charity, it is a rite of purification and of world renewal, connected to the New Year. If Bodhidharma was perceived as a victim of untimely death, a potentially dangerous "foreign" spirit or god, it is not surprising that, after various symbolic drifts, he came to be identified with the Kataoka beggar, a threatening figure who had to be propitiated.¹⁹

The fact that the Kataoka rituals were performed at a crossroad connects them to those of the crossroad deities (*dōsojin*). As we have seen, these gods, also called *sae no kami* 塞神 ("road-blocking deities"), were believed to protect villages and towns against calamities such as epidemics, insects, and drought. Often represented by a man and a woman, engaged in implicit or explicit sexual behavior, they served to ensure fecundity in women and sexual potency in men. We recall that they were sometimes "personalized" as Ame no Uzume no Mikoto 天鈿女命 and Sarutahiko no Mikoto 猿田彦命. Uzume is famous for the lascivious dance she performed in front of the heavenly cave where the sun goddess Amaterasu had withdrawn. Another famous episode, however, which led to her ulterior transformation into a crossroad deity, is her encounter with Sarutahiko. When Amaterasu decided to send her grandson Ninigi no Mikoto down to the earth to rule Japan, she heard that a strange and potentially threatening, simian-looking deity was standing at the eightfold crossroad between heaven and earth. Uzume was sent to check out his intention, and the two eventually became husband and wife.²⁰ In Japanese folklore, Sarutahiko is usually described as a kind of *tengu*, with a long, eminently phallic red nose.²¹

17 Rotermund 1998, pp. 19–20. The offering to the deity usually consisted in strips of cloth (*nusa*), hence the idea expressed in the legend to cut a part of one's robe to offer it. This is the origin of the idea that the deity to which such offerings were made was "one who strips away the sleeves" (*sodemogi sama* 袖挽様), who required from the traveler a part of his robe, lest the traveler be thrown to earth and the sleeves of his robe be torn away. (See Rotermund, *ibid.*, p. 39.) This deity also calls to mind Datsueba, the "old hag who snatched the clothes" of the recently dead. In one source at least, these clothes are described as the counterpart of the placenta that Datsueba gave to the fetus in the womb, and she therefore belongs to the category of deities that I describe below as "placenta deities."

18 On this question, see Como 2008, pp. 107–108.

19 See Como 2008.

20 Aston 1972, pp. 77–79.

21 In Edo slang, the penis was indeed called "Tengu nose" (*tengu no hana* 天狗の鼻). We also find a *tengu* who falls down and rises up again (*okiagari tengu* 起上天狗).

We find Uzume again in the Edo period, under the name of Okame, in the role of “Mrs. Daruma.” Thus, one can think of Bodhidharma, once identified with the Kataoka beggar—a crossroad deity—becoming in turn a *dōsojin*, and in some contexts displacing Sarutahiko as partner of Uzume. It is no wonder that Daruma dolls became symbols of sexuality and fecundity, and in particular of easy childbirth. The figure of the tumbler Daruma, or *okiagari* Daruma, also has a clear sexual meaning: that which falls and soon rises again is the penis. The sexual symbolism is quite obvious in the phallic form of some Daruma dolls. With the prohibition in Meiji of Konsei Myōjin 金精明神 (a phallic-shaped deity popular in brothels), all kinds of symbolic substitutes were found, including mushrooms and *okiagari daruma*. Small papier maché phalloi sold at temple festivals were replaced, after the prohibition, by papier maché representations of Ebisu 夷 and Daikoku 大黒. Some representations of Daruma are strongly reminiscent of the so-called yin yang stones, symbolizing the male and female sexual organs. The image of a dragon coiling around Daruma (*tatsumaki* Daruma 龍巻達磨) calls to mind the Tantric *kundalini*, the female energy represented as a snake rising and coiling around the central artery. (This is a symbol also represented by the dragon Kurikara 俱利伽羅 coiled around Fudō’s sword). While the above interpretation may seem far fetched, a representation of this *tatsumaki* Daruma motif preserved in a chapel said to be that of the “Daruma of easy childbirth” (in the village of Sonoda in Hirazawa, present day Miyagi prefecture) is strongly reminiscent of the representations of the god Ugajin 宇賀神, a snake deity associated with the dragon-goddess Benzaiten 弁才天.²² Behind that chapel is a stele, at the back of which are engraved these suggestive words: “Daruma! Daruma! Ah, Daruma! Ah, Daruma, Daruma!”²³

Daruma as Placenta Deity

The fecundity symbolism leads us to consider the figure of Daruma in embryonic gestation. In the Zen school, the famous mythical episode of Bodhidharma spending nine years immersed in “wall contemplation” in a cave on Mt. Song is interpreted as an embryological allegory. This embryological aspect is already suggested in Kitsusan Minchō’s portrait of Bodhidharma (see above, Figure 2), but it appears explicitly in esoteric documents (*kirigami* 切紙) like the following:

- [Question:] “What about Bodhidharma’s nine years facing the wall?”
- [Answer:] “They are, in fact, the nine months spent in the womb.”
- [Question:] “Tell me about Bodhidharma with the caul, about Bodhidharma prior to all distinctions, about Bodhidharma’s nine years facing the wall.”²⁴
- [Answer:] “During the nine months spent in the mother’s womb, the caul is put on. During his nine years in seated meditation, Bodhidharma put on a skin cap—to ward off the three poisons, to strengthen the roots of life.”²⁵

22 Kido 1932, p. 573.

23 Ibid.

24 In French, “to be born with a caul” (*être né coiffé*) means to be born under a lucky star. However, as I will argue shortly, Bodhidharma was not born particularly lucky.

25 Suzuki 1968, p. 293.

A variant reads as follows: “Question: What about ‘For nine years Bodhidharma faced the wall and said nothing’? Answer: Bodhidharma’s nine years facing the wall are the nine months in the womb. This is the donning of the caul. The red hood that Bodhidharma wears as he sits before the wall is that caul. Bodhidharma within the womb has something to teach us.” The above text is found at the end of an embryological *missanchō* 密参帳, a secret interview notebook providing ready made answers to Zen *kōans*.²⁶ Its source is a Rinzai commentary entitled “Xiangyan’s Man up a Tree,” based on *Wumen guan*’s 無門関 case. “The monk Xiangyan 香嚴 said: Suppose there were a man up a tree. He holds onto a tree branch with his teeth. His hands grasp no branch and his feet do not reach the trunk of the tree. Beneath the tree is someone who asks him: What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West? If the man does not respond at all, he will fail the questioner’s need. But if he does answer, he will fall to his death. In this situation how should one respond?”²⁷ The text glosses all the core words in the above dialogue in embryological terms: the tree becomes the mother’s body, the man in the tree the embryo within the womb. To “hold onto the branch with his teeth” is to suck at “the root of milk” while still in the womb, and so forth.

In one of his essays on Zen, Suzuki Daisetsu quotes this dialogue, and gives a series of traditional glosses, among which several are clearly inspired from “oral traditions” of esoteric Buddhism—and clearly not to his taste. One of them, in a text dated from the seventeenth century, is attributed to the Zen master Kohan Shūshin 古帆周信, and gives another example of embryological symbolism:

Main case: The Chan master Xiangyan..., addressing the community, said: “How about the man up a tree?”

Xuetou replied: “Up the tree, easy to say; below the tree, hard to say.”

The master asked: “The tree, what is it?” Explanation: “The tree is the mother’s body.” Commentary: “A rootless tree on a rock.”

“What does ‘up a tree’ mean?” Explanation: “It is the place where the child dwells in the mother’s womb.”

“What about the above passage?” Explanation: “*He hangs to the branch with his teeth*’ means that he sucks the roots of milk in the womb. *His hands cannot grasp the branch*’ means that his hands are placed against his chest. *His feet cannot touch the trunk*’ means that his legs are folded when he faces his mother.”

Commentary: “During nine years facing the wall, his mouth is like that of a dumb person. During these nine years facing the wall, not a breath of wind has passed, yet the five petals have opened, flowers have scattered, and outside spring has come.”

Explanation: “The nine years spent facing the wall are the nine months within the womb, with the placenta. The fact that Bodhidharma, while facing the wall, wears his red robe over his head symbolizes the placenta.”²⁸

Several *kirigami* of Sōtō Zen connect Bodhidharma’s reclusion in the Songshan cave to the myth of the solar goddess Amaterasu withdrawing into the heavenly cave when she felt

26 The term *missanchō* is an abbreviation for *shitchū himitsu sanzen* (“secret *sanzen* within the chamber”). I am indebted to James Sanford for introducing me to this material.

27 See *Wumenguan* 13. Quoted in Suzuki 1968, pp. 293–94.

28 Suzuki 1968, p. 293.

threatened by her brother Susano'o. As a syncretistic Zen text of the Edo period, the *Sangai isshinki* 三界一心記, by the Zen monk Dairyū 大龍 puts it:

Amaterasu's withdrawal into the heavenly cave can be compared to the dwelling of the child in the womb. The maternal womb corresponds to the Great Shrine [of Ise], the child to the kami that is enshrined in it, and the mother's vulva to the *torii* that marks the sacred limit.²⁹

As noted earlier, the medieval embryological theory of the five stages of gestation, together with specific beliefs concerning the placenta, gave birth to the cult of the placenta deity (*ena kōjin*). A Sōtō *kirigami* entitled *Ehatsu ketsumyaku denju sahō* 衣鉢血脈伝授作法 (Rite of Transmission of the Robe, Bowl, and Lineage Chart), declares for instance:

Donning the Robe: Having spent ninety days in the father's body, one spends another ninety days in the mother's body. The sequence of practice during that period is called "Rite of Reception of the Robe." In the last analysis, the monastic robe symbolizes the placenta; one also calls it *ena kōjin*, a name that designates the spirit of corporeal vitality. It is also called "clan deity" (*ujigami* 氏神). It is a kami that constantly protects human life.³⁰

As an envelop protecting and nourishing the fetus, the placenta was often compared to the monastic robe (Jp. *Kesa* 袈裟, Sk. *ka āya*), and sometimes also to the cocoon of the silkworm. The notion that this placenta is the twin of the fetus, and consequently its protector, is found in many traditional cultures, and it explains the precautions taken to dispose of it after the child's delivery.³¹ The burial of the placenta was in Japan the object of a simplified funerary rite. Even after that, however, the placenta's spirit (*enagami*, or *ena kōjin*) remained linked to the child.³² My hypothesis is that Daruma came to be perceived, in circumstances that remain obscure, as such a placenta deity—a god which was often described as "the warp and woof of heaven and earth."³³

Gods of Destiny

Two other examples of such deities are Jūzenji 十禪師 and Ugajin. Jūzenji was until the Meiji Restoration one of the gods of the Hie shrine (known today as Hiyoshi Taisha) in Sakamoto, at the foot of Mt. Hiei. Jūzenji is usually represented as a young child (*chigo*) or a Buddhist novice (Figure 9). According to the *Sannō hiyōki* 山王秘要記, "He is the god [who protects] the longevity and happiness of the placenta of all beings. From the outset, since the five revolutions in the maternal womb, and till the quietude of the last thought at the end of life, all beings are protected by this god."³⁴ The demiurgic nature of Jūzenji appears in

29 *Sangai isshinki* 三界一心記 (variant: *Sanken itchi sho* 三賢一致書, ca. 1644) in Washio 1930, p. 530.

30 See Ishikawa 1985, p. 109. For more details, see Faure 1995.

31 See, for instance, the Javanese case described by C. G. Seligman (Seligman 1938).

32 On this point, see Nakamura 1999.

33 See *Sannō hiyōki* 山王秘要記, p. 539.

34 Ibid.

various texts that state that he is the god of the “warp and woof of heaven and earth.”

A similar expression is used in the case of Ugajin, a god often represented as a coiled snake with the head of an old man.³⁵ Both protect human life from the moment of its conception to the moment of death. As such, they are identified with the astral deity of “Fundamental Destiny” (*honmyō* 本命), that is, with the god of the Pole Star. Such is also the case with Matarajin which, as Suzuki Masataka has shown, was a typical “god of destiny” (*shukujin*), an astral and embryological deity that governed life on both the macrocosmic and microcosmic, astral and uterine planes.³⁶

The prevalence of Zen orthodoxy probably explains why we do not possess similarly explicit documents concerning Bodhidharma. We have to seek elsewhere, in less controlled sources like popular iconography or legend. For instance, a representation at the Darumaji representing him at the center of the twelve animals or spatio-temporal signs of the Chinese cycle (Rat, Ox, Tiger, etc.) seems to suggest that, like Ugajin and Jūzenji, he was also seen by some as a ruler of “fundamental destiny.” Indeed, in another of his main cultic centers, the Shōrinzan Darumaji, he is openly associated with Chintaku Reifujin 鎮宅靈符神, in other words, Myōken Bosatsu 妙見菩薩, the god of the Pole Star or of the Northern Asterism (*hokushin* 北辰).

The perception of Daruma as *shukujin* is suggested by other sources, like the *Meishukushū* 明宿集 by Konparu Zenchiku 金春禪竹.³⁷ This work confers on the figure of the old man, Okina 翁, the character of a primordial deity, and claims that the main Japanese gods and Buddhist patriarchs are so many manifestations of Okina. One of these patriarchs is precisely Bodhidharma, whose relationships with Shōtoku Taishi are duly reported by Zenchiku. The latter also tells the strange tradition according to which, during a ritual recitation of the *Shōmankyō* 勝鬘經 (Sk. *Śrīmālādevīśi hanāda-sūtra*), one of the priests, having lost the rhythm, was threatening the order of the ceremony, when a frog in the pond in front of the temple leapt on a rock, and began to croak rhythmically: the frog was able to impose the right cadence again. Interrogated about the incident, Shōtoku Taishi allegedly declared that this frog was a manifestation of Bodhidharma, who had come to his rescue. Despite the apocryphal nature of that remark, it suggests a conception of Bodhidharma quite different from that of the Zen patriarch. Yet Zenchiku was very aware of the Zen tradition, and at one point he describes Okina in terms borrowed from it. Not only was Bodhidharma a manifestation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Kannon), as the Chinese tradition has it;



Figure 9. *Jūzenji zō*. Muromachi period, 15th century. Hanging scroll, color on silk. 57.2 x 25.3 cm. Collection of Hieizan Enryakuji. (Reproduced with permission) From catalog *Saichō to Tendai no kokuhō* 最澄と天台の国宝, ill. 180. Kyoto National Museum, 2005.

35 See Yamamoto 1998, pp. 348–55.

36 Suzuki 2001.

37 See Pinnington 1998, pp. 492–518.

according to Japanese tradition, he is also said to have been reincarnated in the person of eminent monks like Gyōki 行基 and Eisai 榮西.³⁸

However, the relations between Bodhidharma and Okina as primordial deity in his role of *shukujin*, that is, astral deity and god of destiny as well as of stations and limits—so many associations suggested by the term *shuku* 宿—are still more complex than suggested by Zenchiku. Two manifestations of the *shukujin* were Hata no Kawakatsu 秦河勝 and Nichira 日羅 (Kr. Illa), two men described as supernatural allies of Shōtoku Taishi in his fight against the powers of evil represented by Mononobe no Moriya.³⁹ However, like Moriya, Kawakatsu has a distinctly demonic aspect. His legend tells that this man, who had been discovered as a child in a boat stranded on the bank, went back to sea at the end of his life. His boat eventually landed in Shakushi bay in Harima, and when fishermen found it, Kawakatsu no longer looked like a human being. Because of the calamities he began to cause, he was finally worshiped as a god called Taikō (var. Ōsake) Daimyōjin 大荒大明神, “Great Wild Bright Deity.” The same god came to be worshiped later at Kōryūji 広隆寺 in Uzumasa 太秦 (Kyoto), a monastery originally founded for Kawakatsu and his clan, the Hata. The cult of Matarajin, another foreign deity linked to epidemics and a manifestation of the *shukujin*, is still performed in this monastery, in particular during the famous “Ox Festival” (*ushi matsuri* 牛祭) of the tenth month.

After becoming the preceptor of Shōtoku Taishi and helping him to defeat Moriya, the Korean general Nichira (Illa), withdrew to Mt. Atago 愛宕山, where he became deified as a manifestation of Shōgun Jizō 將軍地藏 (General Jizō), the leader of that mountain’s *tengu*. As Yanagida Kunio has shown, the term “shōgun” also refers to the ambulatory astral deity Daishōgun 大將軍 and to the “Shōgun tumuli” (*shōgunzuka* 將軍塚) that were said to protect, like Mount Atago itself, the capital from demonic attacks and epidemics.⁴⁰ In other words, the deified form of Nichira seems to share with that of Kawakatsu and with the *sae no kami* (or *dōsojin*) the characteristics of gods of the limits.

The same is true of Bodhidharma. We just saw him intervene on two accounts, as protector of a strategic point (Kataoka) under the form of crossroad deity, and as the officiating priest of a rite for the protection of the state under the form of a batrachian. According to a *jōruri* play by Chikamatsu 近松, he is also said to have blinded Moriya, under the form of a malevolent spirit.⁴¹ Thus Bodhidharma, Hata no Kawakatsu and Nichira seem functionally related as protectors and/or preceptors of Shōtoku Taishi, and it is tempting to follow Zenchiku when he considers them as three aspects of the same primordial deity: Okina under his form as *shukujin*, an ambivalent god of destiny, worshiped among other things as a pestilence god. The term *shukujin* is sometimes written *sukujin* 守宮神 (palace-protecting deity), and it seems that this god was indeed worshiped as protector of the imperial palace. When one considers, however, that the term “palace” 宮 also designates the mother’s womb, the appellation *sukujin* (*shukujin*) seems also appropriate for a placenta deity.

38 The *Keiran shūyōshū* 溪嵐拾葉集 notes in passing this biographical detail after reporting how, during Eisai’s return trip from China, his boat was followed for a while by a floating island. Afterwards, Eisai reveals that it was actually a priest by the name of Hosshōbō, reincarnated as one of the dragons of the submarine dragon-palace and assimilated here implicitly to the goddess Benzaiten (T. 76, p. 627b). On Gyōki as an avatar of Bodhidharma, see Kido 1932.

39 See Zenchiku, *Meishuku shū*, in Omote and Katō 1974, p. 407.

40 Yanagida 1990, vol. 15, pp. 23, 76.

41 See *Shōtoku Taishi e den* 聖德太子絵伝, quoted in Kido 1932, pp. 389–99.

A Demon Come from Afar

Like the Korean general Illa, Bodhidharma is a foreigner. He may also be related to another Korean, Shinra Myōjin 新羅明神, the tutelary deity of Miidera 三井寺 (Onjōji 園城寺) (Figure 10). In documents of the Miidera, this mysterious god is traced back to the mountain god of Song shan 嵩山, who dwelt (like Bodhidharma) in a cave of that mountain, and who became an epidemic god. Although the Chan tradition has not recorded this, Bodhidharma could well have been identified with this mountain god.⁴²

Shinra Myōjin came to Japan at the time of Enchin's 円珍 (ca. 814–891) return from China, and he established himself as a protector of Miidera. While his name refers to the Korean kingdom of Silla, it essentially means that this god was perceived as an “alien” god. As it turns out, it seems to be originally a god of mixed origins, part Chinese and part Korean. In some versions, he is given other names, one of which is King of Mt. Song (Songshan wang) 嵩山王, and he is said to have manifested himself a number of times in China to expel pestilence demons.⁴³ Thus, this god is none other than a mountain god, the tutelary deity of Mt. Song—a god who, in the Chan tradition, is said to have received the Chan precepts (also called “Bodhidharma’s Mind Precepts” 達摩一心戒) from Chan masters of the so-called Northern School (Ch. Beizong 北宗). His main temple was a cave on Mt. Song, perhaps the same cave where Bodhidharma is said to have sat in meditation for nine years. It seems thus quite possible that, in popular imagination, the figure of the fierce Indian ascetic eventually merged with that of the mountain god. Indeed, the mountain god can drive off pestilence because he was himself perceived initially as a pestilence god—at least until he was converted to Buddhism. In any case, this seems to provide the missing link between the early legend of Bodhidharma on Mt. Song and his later redefinition as smallpox deity.⁴⁴

Another link connects Shinra Myōjin with the “raging god,” Susano’o no Mikoto 素盞鳴尊. Interestingly, one of the names of that god is read in Japanese Sūsan-ō (King of Mt. Song), a name



Figure 10. *Shinra Myōjin zō*. Kamakura period, 13th Century. Color on silk. 86.7 x 39.4 cm. Collection of Onjōji (Miidera). (Reproduced with permission)

42 The relation between *goryō* and Shinra Myōjin is implicit in the identification between the malevolent spirit of the priest Raigō and the god. The posthumous anger of Raigō is said to have killed the emperor Go Sanjō who, fearing the reaction of Hieizan monks, had refused to let Raigō build an ordination platform at Miidera. See Yamamoto 1998, p. 53.

43 Yamamoto 1998, pp. 86–98.

44 Note also that, in the Sōtō Zen tradition, Bodhidharma is usually represented in the main Hall as a counterpart of Daigen shuri, another Chinese mountain god (like the god of Mt. Song). On Daigen shuri, see Durt 1983.

strongly reminiscent of the kami Susano'o.⁴⁵ In some sources, the latter, after being exiled from Japan for having threatened his sister Amatarasu, is said to have emigrated to Korea. Susano'o was also assimilated to Gozu Tennō 牛頭天王, the most powerful epidemic god of medieval Japan. Like Shinra Myōjin, Susano'o is a fundamentally ambivalent deity, who could protect from epidemics when worshipped properly, but could as well destroy the unbelievers through the same epidemics. Thus, the priests of Miidera or of Gion shrine held this veiled threat over the heads of the ruler and his people. Thus did the emperor die for having brought on himself the anger of Raigō, a Miidera priest whose resentful spirit (*onryō*) was related to Shinra Myōjin.

Susano'o is said to have manifested himself in China as the god of Mt. Song.⁴⁶ He first appeared to the Japanese priest Enchin (the monk who founded Miidera and introduced Shinra Myōjin) as a theriomorphic figure, with a man's head and a snake's body. As such, he calls to mind the snake god Ugajin. We recall that at least one representation of Bodhidharma, the so-called Ryūmaki Daruma whose head emerges from the coils of a snake, seemed linked to that of Ugajin. But, as mentioned earlier, there are some other symbolic associations between Bodhidharma and Ugajin—one of them being the figure of Jūzenji.

Let us mention a Daruma doll with a beard and long eyebrows forming the Chinese character "eight," and therefore called "Hachiōji no Daruma" (the "Character Eight Daruma"). The term "hachiōji" immediately evokes the "Eight Princes" (hachiōji 八王子), children or emissaries of the pestilence god Gozu Tennō, mentioned above. Another form of Daruma, called "Tama Daruma" 多摩達磨, was widespread in sericultural regions where the cult of the Hachiōji flourished. Incidentally, the representation of Gozu Tennō standing on a reed boat may shed some light on the strange legendary episode of Bodhidharma crossing the Yangzi river. Epidemic deities were related to water, and often came from the West, crossing large bodies of water. They were also expelled on reed boats.

The Red Threat

The red robe is obviously one of the elements that, together with his nature as *shukujin*, contributed to the metamorphosis of Daruma into a deity of epidemics. In particular, the prevalence of smallpox in early modern Japan explains the popularity of the *okiagari* Daruma doll. As the disease became endemic, people were resigned to succumbing to it once in their life, and only prayed that it would be light. "Treatment by the red" (*beni ryōhō* 紅療法) was found in Europe as well. The god of smallpox is said to like the red color, so one tries to please him in the hope of being cured quickly. It is difficult to say whether Daruma was connected to smallpox deities because he is red—or the other way around. At any rate, the red color of Daruma's robe is highly significant.⁴⁷

The symbolism of Daruma has recently been studied by Yoshino Hiroko in her book *Daruma no minzokugaku*.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Yoshino tends to reduce all mythological elements to complicated speculations on the symbolism of yin yang and the five phases (*wuxing* 五行) of Chinese cosmology. If, in Daruma's case, her theory has the merit of drawing our attention to the symbolic importance of the "red man," she goes too far when she reduces

45 See *Onjōji denki* 圓城寺伝記, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書, p. 59.

46 Yamamoto 1998, pp. 96–97.

47 Indeed, while Bodhidharma is often represented in Korean paintings, he never wears a red robe.

48 See Yoshino 1995.

him to a mere symbol of the fire element. She even omits to mention that Daruma was a smallpox deity, and she focuses on the New Year Festival, during which Daruma dolls were sold, interpreting it as a fire festival.

One should also mention in this epidemic context the relation (or affinities) between Daruma and a figure called “orang outan” (*shōjō*). In Chinese and Japanese imagination, the orang outan was a monkey with human features, who was very fond of wine (hence his crimson face). The term *shōjō* is used figuratively to designate a drunkard, and the “orang outan fever” (*shōkō netsu* 猩紅熱) designates scarlet fever.⁴⁹ This animal was also famous for its stupidity. According to Kida Sadakichi, the image of the *shōjō* transformed around the Muromachi period, for obscure reasons, from that of dull, anthropoid ape into that of a god of fortune living in the sea (and more precisely in the *nāga* palace), and which could give immortality to men.⁵⁰ It was even for a while included into the group of the “Seven Gods of Fortune” (*shichifukujin* 七福神). In the noh play *Shōjō*, a *shōjō* appears under the form of a child to an inn-keeper to buy some wine, while another gets trapped in the net of a fisherman, whom he will later reward for having released him. The *shōjō* was also believed to possess a wine flask that never emptied—a sign that he was a god of wealth and immortality. He was also, however, perceived as a malevolent spirit (*goryō*), that of individuals who had died in exile. Finally, he came to be perceived as a god of epidemics, and in particular of smallpox—here again, probably because of his red color. His image is sometimes associated to that of Shuten Dōji 酒吞童子, the youthful demon of Ōeyama 大枝山, a wine-lover and an epidemic deity.⁵¹ Thus, the *hōsōgami* festival that took place in 1836 was called *shōjō matsuri*.⁵²

A *shōjō* doll, sometimes resembling the Daruma doll, was worshiped in houses struck by smallpox. The cult of the *shōjō* is said to go back to the founder of the Ōbaku 黄檗 sect of Zen, the Chinese priest Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (Jp. Ingen Ryūki, 1592–1673), who established a rite centered on this figure in order to alleviate a smallpox epidemic.⁵³ According to this tradition, the same Ingen served as model for the dolls of the “little monk who bounces back” (*okiagari koboshi* 起き上がり小法師). That is, in order to thank Ingen for placating the *shōjō* and alleviated the epidemics, his followers fabricated an image of him resembling that of the Chinese “old man who never falls” (*budaowen*, J. *futōō* 不倒翁), and the two images (of the *shōjō* and the priest) came to be worshiped side by side. One finds some representations of the *shōjō* under the form of two dolls, looking like Daruma (only a little taller), holding a ladle, accompanied by two *okiagari koboshi* 起き上がり小法師 (Daruma dolls of both sexes). It is therefore not through a mere coincidence that the Daruma doll can be found near the *shōjō* on the domestic altar to the smallpox deities.

To these “epidemic” affinities suggested by the redness of the complexion or of the robe, one could add others less epidermal, like the elusive relations of Daruma with monkeys in general, and perhaps also with the simian Sarutahiko. For somewhat obscure

49 The term *shōjō* also designates “a nō mask, representing the ghost of a young man with similar colors, as well as a red scarf with which—in a magico-therapeutic gesture—one covered the head of the sick individual.” See Rotermund 1991, p. 274.

50 See Kida 1976; see also Casal 1956, pp. 48–49. Casal thinks that the figure of the *shōjō* may have been influenced by that of the Greek satyr, another great drinker.

51 Takahashi 1992, pp. 102–104.

52 See “Fude makase,” in *Nihon shomin seikatsu shiryō shūsei* 日本庶民生活史料集成, vol. 2, s.v. 1836/12/2; quoted in Rotermund 1991, p. 274.

53 See *Jūshū honzō kōmoku keimō* 重修本草綱目啓蒙 (1844), quoted in Rotermund 1991, pp. 96–97.

reasons, Daruma is said to be a protector of horses and monkeys. A rather unusual motif is that of his relation with the “Prince of the stable” (*umayado no ôji* 馬屋戸王子), that is, Shōtoku Taishi, whose legend has him born in a stable. On that occasion, Bodhidharma, who had been reincarnated as a horse, is said to have neighed three times.⁵⁴ His presence at the side of the newborn baby may have to do with the notion of Daruma as “placenta deity.” Daruma was also the patron of horse veterinaries, and appears himself in the Satsuma region as a veterinary. The function of protector of horses also calls to mind Buddhist deities such as the bodhisattvas Kokūzō 虚空蔵, Memyō 馬鳴, and Batō Kannon 馬頭観音, and legends about the origins of silkworms and sericulture.⁵⁵

Monkeys were apparently used in some rites against smallpox. They were perceived as the messengers of the god Shōzenshin, a deity of Indian origin whose rite was allegedly transmitted to Japan by Bodhidharma. It is worth noting that the name of that god recalls that of Jūzenji, the Hieizan deity whose role we have discussed, and who also had monkeys as emissaries. In rites against smallpox, one made a monkey dance (*saru mawashi* 猿回し) to determine whether the illness would be light or not. According to the *Saru mawashi no ki*, “The main deity (*honzon* 本尊) of the *saru mawashi* is the first patriarch (Bodhidharma), its protecting deity is Sarutahiko.”⁵⁶ The apotropaic function of this rite is underscored by the *Saruya denki*, which mentions a legend according to which Sarutahiko made monkeys dance in order to rout the demons’ army.⁵⁷

Daruma was therefore one of the “fashionable gods,” which have been described as characteristic of the Edo period.⁵⁸ A classic case of *hayarigami* is the *namazu* 鯰, a catfish-like deity held responsible for earthquakes, and which one tried to placate by a cult. Cornelius Ouwehand has described the resurgence of the *namazu* cult after the great Edo earthquake in 1855.⁵⁹ The affinity this deity shares with Daruma as “god of calamities” (*yakujin* 厄神) is suggested by an ukiyo-e representing Daruma as *namazu*. It is a kind of visual game, in which the monster’s mouth becomes the head of Daruma, as he looks through a breach in a wall.⁶⁰ According to W. L. Hildburgh, Daruma was indeed still worshiped at the beginning of this century as a protector against earthquakes.⁶¹ But he also had threatening aspects, as one could expect. Another drawing represents him as a monster with long teeth (*kikai no Daruma* 奇怪の達磨).⁶² He was for instance the patron of beggars and consequently, like the *namazu*, a figure of the chaos that constantly threatened the established order.⁶³ The “red” aspect of Daruma takes a darker connotation with the motif of the “bloody Daruma” (*chi*

54 Kido 1932, p. 526.

55 It may be worth mentioning here that Hata no Kawakatsu, the contemporary of Bodhidharma in Shōtoku Taishi’s legend, is recorded in the *Nihon shoki* as putting an end to a millenarian cult whose deity was a “worm.” On the cult of that strange deity, see *Nihon shoki*, *NKBT*, and Aston 1972, pp. 188–89. See also Como 2009, pp. 142–45. In the Uzumasa district of the capital, the ancient fief of the Hata, not far from Kōryūji (where every year the Matarajin festival or Ox festival still takes place), there is a shrine dedicated to the deity of silkworms, the Kogai Jinja 養蚕神社.

56 Kido 1932, p. 527.

57 Ibid., p. 528.

58 The best work on this question remains Miyata 1993.

59 See Ouwehand 1964.

60 Kido 1932, p. 510.

61 See Hildburgh 1918, p. 57. Hildburgh omits mentioning the relationship between Daruma and the *namazu*, and emphasizes rather the image of the “unmovable” Daruma.

62 Kido 1932, pp. 511, 523.

63 Ibid., p. 523.

Daruma 血達磨), found in various melodramatic plays of the Edo theatrical repertory, in which the image of Daruma is maculated with blood.⁶⁴ This kind of association shows that he was not always, nor everywhere, the innocent companion of children's play, but often the witness of darker scenes.

Bodhidharma against the Stream

After examining the many-stranded nature of the popular Daruma, let us see how our interpretation may shed retrospective light on a representation well known to historians of Sino-Japanese art, that of "Bodhidharma crossing the Yangzi on a reed-leaf."

The oldest treatment of the theme dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century, and it contains an inscription by Rujing 如淨 (1163–1228), the master of the founder of the Sōto school of Zen, Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253). A second painting, preserved in the Tokugawa Art Museum, shows an inscription by the Chan master, Wuzhun Shifan 無準師範 (1177–1249).⁶⁵ There is also an inscription on stone dated to the mid eleventh century, from the Shaolin monastery 少林寺.⁶⁶ Li Chu-ting made a first study of the theme. Li focuses on a painting by Ding Yunpeng, preserved in the Charles A. Drenowatz Collection in Zürich, and finds it to be atypical of Chan paintings on the same theme. He sees in it merely "an interesting interlude in the development of Chan painting." His interpretation is that of Chan orthodoxy, and his methodology that of classical art history.⁶⁷

A more recent and interesting attempt is that of Charles Lachman. Lachman notes that the first "biography" of Bodhidharma to mention the strange crossing dates from 1108, and that the theme does not become widespread before the thirteenth century.⁶⁸ Wondering why this episode, represented on stone and in painting, was omitted from written records, he remarks: "Unless, of course, the representation of Bodhidharma on a reed had at the time a meaning different from the one it was to acquire later." He seems to be onto something here, even if in the end he is unable to free himself from the interpretive constraints of traditional Chan. Thus, while claiming rightly that the motif of the rush leaf has been on the whole ignored by both art historians and Buddhologists, Lachman himself eludes the problem—not without noticing that, to cross a river as large as the Yangzi, "the rush leaf would not appear to be the obvious solution."⁶⁹

According to Lachman, who takes up a suggestion from Helmut Brinker, this image combines (or resonates with) various themes and sources, in particular those of "Śākyamuni emerging from the Mountain" (Ch. *chushan* Shijia; Jp. *shussen* Shaka 出山釈迦) and of "Guanyin with a Willow Branch" (Ch. Yangliu Guanyin; Jp. *Yōryū* Kannon 楊柳觀音). The Rush leaf motif, however, "is not in essence a biographical narrative, as heretofore believed," Lachman tells us,

64 See for instance *Asakusa reigenki*, quoted in Kido 1932, pp. 403–411.

65 See Lachman 1993, p. 253.

66 Ibid., p. 258.

67 See Li 1971.

68 Lachman 1993, p. 257.

69 Ibid., p. 258. Significantly, the title of his essay has become "Why did the Patriarch Cross the River?" The reed/rush appears only in the subtitle, to qualify the Indian patriarch ("The Rush leaf Bodhidharma Reconsidered").

“but rather a layered and polysemous icon of the paradigmatic patriarch, an image that structurally and thematically makes simultaneous reference to both the Buddha and his momentous decision to emerge from the mountains; to the attainment of nirvāṇa by “crossing to the other shore”; to the arhats who diligently struggle to ford the stream; and to the poetic voice (from the *Classic of Poetry*) that will not be kept from its desired goal by merely physical obstacles. In some way, each of these strands inscribes the self-salvific efforts and determination that the Ch’an school championed in general and invested in Bodhidharma in particular.”⁷⁰

It is possible that these references played a role in the contexts of Chan or literati painting. But obviously, apart from an allusion to the passage of the *Shi jing* 詩經 (“Who says the river is wide?/On a single reed you can cross it!”⁷¹), none mentions the motif they are supposed to explain, that is, the reed. This is the problem when one limits interpretation to the Chan context of patriarchal transmission or to the artistic context, since the figure of Bodhidharma has clearly gone beyond these contexts to diffuse itself in popular culture and merge with folkloric motifs.⁷² This second level of interpretation tends to appear rather in minor forms (ukiyo-e, *netsuke*, *e-hon*), where the narrative is less controlled than in the orthodox textual tradition. What appears to be a dubious, aberrant syncretism, and therefore unworthy of study, reveals perhaps the deeper logic at work.

A clue is unwittingly provided by Li Chi-tsing when he mentions the existence of a Japanese painting of the beginning of the fourteenth century (currently at Jōdoji 浄土寺, in modern day Shizuoka Prefecture), which contains an inscription from the Chinese Zen master Yishan Yining 一山一寧 (Jp. Issan Ichinei, 1244–1317). This work depicts Bodhidharma “as a massive, brawny figure, with a huge head with impressive features,... holding a trident, [with a] halo around his head.”⁷³ The motif of the trident rather calls to mind Tantric deities: in the Sino-Japanese context, one knows for instance several representations of the Gandharva-King, a frightening figure who tames the demons causing infantile diseases and impales their heads on his trident, while being himself visibly of demonic origin.⁷⁴

The motif of the reed leaf points toward the same direction. We find in some documents of the Gozu Tennō shrine in Tsushima 津島 (Owari, modern Gifu prefecture), a version of the Japanese creation myth in which the sun goddess Amaterasu, standing on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, stirs the ocean below with the tip of her spear, creating with the foam thus produced the island of Tsushima. At that moment, an old man appears, standing on a reed leaf. He introduces himself as the tutelary god of that land, and declares that he will later on become a god of epidemics. In other variants, the old man is clearly designated as Gozu Tennō, and the reed leaf becomes a one-pronged vajra, a Tantric ritual instrument, which in turn gives birth to the Japanese archipelago.⁷⁵ We recall that, during the ritual of

70 Lachman 1993, p. 266.

71 Watson 1984, p. 25.

72 The case of the *namazu*, a favorite motif of some Zen paintings, and Ouwehand’s treatment of its mythological background, constitutes a paradigmatic example of the need to go beyond sectarian Zen interpretations.

73 See Fontein and Hickman 1970, pp. 53–56.

74 See for instance *Kakuzenshō* 覚禪鈔, in T. Zuzō 4, pp. 366–375.

75 See Yamamoto 1998, pp. 586–88. On Japan as a “divine land” in the shape of a one-pronged vajra, see also *Keiran shūyōshū*, T. 76, p. 626.

expulsion of epidemics, as it is still performed at Tsushima, Gozu Tennō, having been duly worshiped in his shrine, is sent off *ad patres* on a reed boat. The motif of the reed leaf seems therefore to connect Gozu Tennō and Bodhidharma, as epidemic deities.

We can now understand that Daruma's wrathful face is a clue to his demonic nature. Like the famous demon-queller Shōki 鍾馗 (Ch. Zhongkui), he was initially a malevolent spirit who, once duly propitiated, became a protector invoked in exorcisms. The fact that he became an object of derision should not be misinterpreted. To be sure, his caricature represents an anticlerical critique of dissolute monks; but humor and laughter also represent an attempt to assuage the fear that he inspired. His function as pestilence god is only one aspect—the most visible—of his demonic nature.

Even in the Zen school, another conception, more complex, of the patriarch Bodhidharma seems to have emerged. Thus, in a late biography of the Sōtō Zen master Dōgen, we learn that the latter, having fallen ill during his trip to China, was saved *in extremis* by the god of Inari 稲荷, who gave him a pill that “dispels poisons and cures all diseases.”⁷⁶ In the earlier versions, however, it was the Chinese deity Daigen shuri 大權修利, a mountain god, protector of the monastery where Dōgen had stayed, who came to the rescue.⁷⁷ And in a later variant, it is the daughter of the *nāga* king (who in the *Lotus sūtra* gives to the Buddha the wish-fulfilling jewel). She is depicted, emerging from the water to give the remedy to the monks of Dōgen's escort, while a gigantic Daruma emerges from a valley behind the hills.⁷⁸ We recall that, in the Chinese legend, Bodhidharma had been poisoned, which, in mythological logic, makes him a specialist of poisons.⁷⁹ Indeed, it is only after two unsuccessful attempts in which the poison did not seem to affect him that, having transmitted his teaching to his disciple Huike 慧可, he knowingly took the poison and decided to leave this world. The function of Rector of destinies which, as we have seen, was perhaps an important aspect of the cult of Daruma, also evokes these texts, widespread in Tendai and largely inspired from Daoism, on the so-called “Method of Bodhidharma to know the time of one's death.” We may also note that Daruma and Daigen shuri are worshiped as a pair, at the back of the main altar of the Dharma Hall in Sōtō monasteries.⁸⁰ This cult calls to mind that of the “back door” (*ushirodo* 後戸) of Japanese Buddhist temples, dedicated to the god Matarajin and similar deities, protectors with a dubious past or an ambivalent nature.⁸¹ The image of Daruma is usually located on the left (the north west), Daigen shuri on the right (on the north east)—two directions associated with the “Demon gate” (*kimon* 鬼門).

Daruma as God of Fortune

We can at long last return to our initial question: Why did Daruma become so popular in the Edo period? It is the result of a complex evolution, which metamorphosed him from a “malevolent spirit” to a crossroad deity. Thereafter, the image of Daruma seems to bifurcate

76 See *Teiho Kenzeiki zue* 訂補建寧記図絵 (1802).

77 See Durt 1983, pp. 607–608.

78 See *Echizen no kuni Eiheiiji kaisanki* 越前国永平寺開山記 (1689), Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo 東京大学史料編纂所. I am indebted to Duncan Williams for this reference.

79 Note in this respect that smallpox was perceived as a kind of “fetal” poisoning caused by the mother. See Furth 1999, pp. 172–182.

80 Durt 1983, p. 608.

81 See Suzuki 2001, pp. 197–337.

into a god of the placenta and a ruler of human destinies, and an epidemic deity and—through a propitiation that leads to a final inversion of signs—into a god of fortune. Many factors contributed to this metamorphosis. If I have insisted here on the symbolic dimension, it is clear that not everything has happened at that level, and that sociological and economic factors have also played a role.⁸² The development, from the end of the Muromachi period onward, of large urban and commercial agglomerations like Sakai, Osaka, and Edo, and of centers of production and dissemination of products responding to the new urban culture, must obviously be taken into account. It is at this time that “Daruma markets” appear.⁸³ At the same time, the progressive disappearance of social groups like the *shōmonji* 声聞師 who, in their door-to-door calling (*kadozuke* 門付) of the New Year, had played an important role in the development and the preservation of rituals centered on certain gods of fortune, and at the same time slowed down their “popularization,” may have been instrumental. According to Komatsu Kazuhiko, these deities, from the moment they were no longer associated to specialized, low-caste groups (*shōmonji* or *hinin* 非人), lost their aura of strangeness and were folklorized.⁸⁴ Such was perhaps the case with Daruma, given his linkage to beggars.

Daruma’s popularity is also clearly related to the vogue of the tumbler dolls as good luck charms (*engimono*) (Figure 11). Actually, the first tumbler dolls were not Daruma dolls, but another figure called *okiagari koboshi* (the little monk who bounces back). The term, like that of Daruma, came to designate prostitutes in the slang of Edo.⁸⁵ This “little monk” (or “kid,” another meaning of *kobōshi*), appeared in Japan only toward the Muromachi period, but he had a Chinese predecessor, which seems to have been popular since the Tang. The Chinese doll was called *bud-aoweng* 不倒翁 (Jp. *futōō*, “the old man who never falls”). As noted earlier, the notion of *okiagari*, “bouncing back on one’s feet,” evoked a rapid cure, and in this case the hope of a light smallpox. This symbolism may have paved the way to Daruma’s transformation into a *hōsōgami*. Indeed, it is only when these tumbler dolls (*okiagari* Daruma) came to be associated with smallpox in Japan that they became truly popular, more than they had ever been in China.⁸⁶



Figure 11. Daruma and *omikuji*. Hōrinji (Darumadera), Kyoto. (Photo: B. Faure)

82 See on this point, Belleville 2000.

83 The commercial aspect of Daruma is described in Minegishi 2002 and McFarland 1987.

84 Komatsu 1998, pp. 138–140.

85 Kido 1932, p. 568.

86 On Chinese tumblers, see Kido 1932, pp. 574–75; on Korean tumblers, see *ibid.*, pp. 577–78. The development of the *okiagari* Daruma in the countryside (and more particularly Eastern and Northern Japan) was permitted by another development, that of silkworm breeding. The Daruma doll became an object of good luck (*engimono*) for sericulture. The embryological symbolism that associates Daruma with silkworms (*mayu* Daruma) may also point toward the practice of *mushi okuri*. Although silkworms are beneficial, they die in large numbers, and might become *goryō* themselves.

Far from being the paradigmatic figure of Zen individualism, Daruma is merely one of the most visible elements (doubtless due to his robe's color) of a complex, largely submerged network or rhizome, made of symbols, individuals, institutions, practices, objects, and *tutti quanti*. The links that the above analysis tried to disengage, or sometimes the dotted lines it merely suggested, are not all verifiable, and some may turn out to be unreal. My claim is that this, however, does not affect the heuristic value of the method. I have been trying to explain the sudden emergence of the Daruma cult after the end of the medieval period. To that effect, I had to remove Daruma from his habitual context (that of the Zen tradition) and place him in another context (that of popular religion and folklore). Through that transfer, the object as well as the method of study have been radically transformed. As a result, the symbol has found a new freedom, a capacity of transformation which is that of all popular gods, and which the Zen tradition, by depriving Daruma of his legs, had amputated. This symbol, which had long incubated within the Zen school and on its margins, suddenly spread in rapid and irresistible fashion. The trigger mechanism seems to have been the convergence of various factors — socio-economic, epidemiological, iconographical, technical (the tumbling doll), among others. It would be vain to attempt to catch sight of the rare occasions in which this symbol surfaced in textual or iconographic sources, because its spread in people's minds seems to follow (appropriately for a god of smallpox) an epidemiological model. Rather, it is our heuristic model that may help us understand textual or iconographic sources—just like Ouwehand's study of the *namazu* lore provides a better background to understand the famous Zen painting of the monk trying to catch a *namazu* with a gourd than any orthodox Zen interpretation.⁸⁷

Daruma's case is by no means exceptional, however. He is indeed representative of a whole category of hybrid gods that are neither buddhas nor kami, and have fallen largely through the cracks of a traditional scholarship that is too often obsessed with textual sources, with a search for origins and genealogical developments, and with clear-cut divine personalities. There are significant exceptions, for instance Ouwehand's magisterial study of the *namazu*. Likewise, my analysis of Daruma, while giving the historical context its due, shows that only a "systemic" or structural approach can explain the subterranean influence or long percolation of certain symbols or notions and their resurgence centuries later within new symbolic formations that come to a sudden efflorescence when encountering proper socio-historical conditions.

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87 See Josetsu 如拙 "Hyōnen zu 瓢鮎岡" (Muromachi period), Taizōin 退蔵院 (Kyoto National Museum).

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