

NOTEBOOK. The fusion (or confusion) of Daikokuten with Ōkuninushi.

Slide 27, [Condensed Visual Classroom Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan](#). Copyright Mark Schumacher. 2017.

Kūkai's Spelling Error

[Faure, p. 50-51](#). Pages 50 and 51
As the protector of Mount Hiei, Daikokuten was identified with Sannō Gongen 山王権現, that is, the god of Miwa (Ōkuninushi 大国主), who was also worshiped at Ōmiya 大宮, the western main shrine (Nishi Hongū) of Hie Taisha 日吉大社, at the foot of Mount Hiei. The fusion (or confusion) of Daikokuten with Ōkuninushi is traditionally attributed to a *lapsus calami*, an error committed by Kūkai when he wrote the Sino-Japanese name of Mahākāla, Daikoku 大黒 (Great Black One), as Daikoku 大国 (Great Country, also read as Ōkuni). FN 108

The alleged confusion took place much later, however, during the medieval period. At any rate, the fusion of the two figures would probably have taken place without Kūkai's "error," owing to the functional affinities shared by the two gods. Deliberate or not, the play on words confirmed a preexisting situation. As the "original landlord" (jishū or jinushi 地主) of Japan, Ōkuninushi—also known as Ōmononushi 大物主, a former demonic figure (as master of the mono 'ghosts')—was indeed predisposed to merge with Daikokuten. Tendai monks were familiar with such symbolic associations, and they did not need the typo of a Shingon priest to turn the perceived affinities between two gods into an identity. Whatever the case, certain features of Ōkuninushi passed to Daikokuten, reinforcing his character as a god of the third function, that is, a purveyor of wealth and fecundity. FN 109

Footnote 108

[Faure, p. 366](#). This would nicely illustrate the proverb "Even Kōbō Daishi (i.e., Kūkai, the greatest Japanese master of calligraphy) makes mistakes with his brush" (Kōbō mo fude no ayamari). The theory of Kūkai's error goes back to the [Chiribukuro 塵袋](#) (ca. 1264). On this point, see Iyanaga, "Daikokuten," in [Hōbōgirin](#) 7: 912b. Daikokuten probably inherited the rat as messenger from his association with Ōkuninushi, a god who was helped at one point by a rat, as well as from his association with the north (which he protects against demons, and which corresponds in Chinese cosmology to the sign of the rat, the beginning of the sexagesimal cycle). The Shugendō Yōten 修験要典 criticizes the assimilation of Daikokuten with Ōkuninushi as a confusion on the part of ignorant Buddhists. See Shugendō Yōten, 279. This confusion is reminiscent of that between Chronos (Time) and Kronos (the Titan, father of Zeus)—see Panofsky 1967: 109–111.

Footnote 109

[Faure, p. 366](#). This aspect had already developed in India, as can be shown by the pairing of Mahākāla and Hārītī. Ōkuninushi is a typical civilizing hero, who "created the land" (with the help of the tiny god Sukunahikona), a land he would eventually have to yield to the descendants of Amaterasu. He is also the master of agriculture and the inventor of sake. As a healer, a feature deriving from his encounter with the hare of Inaba in classical mythology, he came to be identified with the buddha Yakushi. He also represents beauty, love, and fecundity. As Daikokuten, he forms conjugal ties, and becomes a god of wealth. The affinities between Daikokuten and Ōkuninushi are particularly evident at Kiyomizudera, the temple of Kannon the giver of children, where his massive wooden statue stands in the Main Hall, adjacent to the Jishū Jinja, a shrine dedicated to Ōkuninushi in his function as a god "who ties the knot" (*en-musubi no kami*).