### Gāneśa Origins

**Faure, p. 78-79.** “The well-known stories regarding Gāneśa’s birth and his hybrid form reflect a late development of Puranic legend, and they actually obscure Vināyaka’s demonic origins. They have many variants, and a brief outline will suffice here. Gāneśa is usually described as one of the two children of Śiva and Parvatī, the other being Skanda. In the standard myth, he is the guardian of Parvatī, who created him from the secretions of her body. In some variants he is produced by Śiva alone, or by the union of Śiva and Parvatī. In later Hinduism, he is also said to be self-born (svayamabhū); being the creator, he has no father or mother.”

Gāneśa’s elephantine appearance is said to have originated in the following episode. On one occasion, having been told by his mother to guard the door of her bathroom while she was taking a bath, he incurred his father’s wrath for refusing him entrance. Śiva’s looks can kill, and in this case his angry third eye reduced Gāneśa’s head to ashes. To placate Pārvatī’s wrath, or perhaps feeling some remorse, he managed to replace the child’s head with that of an elephant, which happened to be nearby. In some versions of the myth, the confrontation between Śiva and Gāneśa turns into a real fight... In spite of the myth, the motif of the elephant head remains difficult to explain. Perhaps one should see there a sign of the demonic aspect of the god. Michel Strickmann attempts to explain it by citing the obedient nature of the elephant, but to be precise, Vināyaka is anything but obedient. I believe that the elephant head points to the uncanny nature of that god. On the other hand, the motif of the substitution of heads can be interpreted simply as an allusion to his non-brahmanical (lower caste, village) origin. In another version, Śiva creates Gāneśa to help the devas in their fight against the asuras...In this version, it is Pārvatī herself who gives Gāneśa his elephant head. In another version, the beheading of Gāneśa occurs after a fight with Śiva that calls to mind the fight between the higher (divine) and the lower (demonic) orders. Once beheaded, Gaṅapati submits to Śiva, who makes him the leader of the gana (hence his name Gaṅapatī). We will retain from this myth not only Gāneśa’s antagonistic, albeit not simply Oedipal relationship with his “father” Śiva, but also his function as guardian of the door (and keeper of secrecy).”

### Elephant Skin

**Faure, p. 94.** “The demonic image of Vināyaka fuses with that of Gajāsura, the elephant demon killed by Śiva (or by Gāneśa himself in certain versions). In Buddhist iconography, the theme of that subjugation is picked up in the motif of the elephant skin which Mahākāla holds above his head, and in the depictions of Vajrapāṇī and his doubles (Trailokeyājaya, Ācāra, and Ucchusma) trampling supine Vināyakas (instead of Mahēśvara and his consort).”

**Faure, pp. 46-47.** Mahākāla is often represented holding an elephant skin over his shoulders. This motif can be traced back to a mythical episode in which Śiva, appearing as Mahākāla, kills the demonic elephant Gajāsura. According to a variant, the asura Nīla tried to kill Śiva by taking the form of an elephant. Nandin, the guardian of Śiva’s palace, killed him and offered his skin to Śiva. Covering himself with it, as a kind of armor, Śiva went to fight another asura, the demon king Andhaka, to punish him for desiring Parvatī, Śiva’s consort. Because the blood of the wounded Andhaka, as it fell to the ground, produced clones of him, Śiva and the other gods created female forms (śakti) of themselves—the seven or eight Mothers (mātār) to drink this blood before it touched the ground. Andhaka eventually repented and took refuge in Śiva, who magnanimously gave him to Parvatī as her son. Andhaka then became the leader of Śiva’s troupe, that is, Gāneśa. This quasi-Oedipal myth thus describes the birth of the Seven Mothers and their relation to Vināyaka. In the Mahākāla mandala, the god is surrounded by the Seven Mothers (<See Slide 32 for images>), to whom is added an eighth female counted Bontenmo (Brahmā mother, i.e., Brahmāni). Mahākāla is frequently represented as trampling on the elephant-headed deity Vināyaka (demonic aspect of Gāneśa), for reasons to be examined later. Yet Mahākāla & Gāneśa were closely related and occasionally perceived as identical. The affinities (& antagonism) between Mahākāla & Gāneśa may explain, on the formal plane, the exchange of certain of their features (such as Gāneśa’s pot belly) after they enter the Japanese pantheon. Like Gāneśa, Mahākāla was related to female demons such as the Seven Mothers and the dākinīs.

### Dual Form, Pairing, Twinning

**Faure, p. 89.** “In Japan, this elephant-headed god is mainly represented in two ways: when standing alone, he is usually called Šōten or Vināyaka (J. Binayaka 毘那夜迦); when in sexual embrace with a consort, he becomes the dual-bodied Kangiten, the Bliss Deva (or devas).”

“Kangiten 歓喜天 (or Sōshin Binayaka 双身毘那夜迦) is said to represent not only the blissful sexual union of the demon Vināyaka with his consort Senāyaka, but also the subduing of the former by the latter (a form of Avalokiteśvara/Kannon), as well as the nonduality of the Womb & Vajra realms.”

**Faure, p. 77.** “Technically speaking, Gāneśa is not Śiva’s son, since he was produced from the filth of Pārvatī’s bath; in the same way, his half-brother, Skanda, was born from Śiva’s semen, outside his mother’s womb. It is paradoxical that this “parthenogenetic” god would become a god of sexual union. This characteristic puts the two brothers in the broader category of gods who are not born from a mother’s womb.”

**Faure, pp. 107-108.** “Stein’s analysis shows how the pair Skanda & Gāneśa, the young warrior & the pot-bellied protector, after being dissociated in Buddhism, reconstituted itself partially in other pairs such as Mahākāla & Hāritis, Vaiśravaṇa & Kubera, Mañjuśrī & Pindola, Vajrapāṇī & Vināyaka, and above all, Weituo 韋驮 & Mile 大師, the gatekeepers of China’s monasteries. It is the case of Kangiten, a dual deity formed by Vināyaka & the 1000-armed Senju Kannon 千手観音, and that of the dual-bodied Vaiśravaṇa (Sōshin Bishamon) that are the most significant. Importantly, it is the same Skanda who, under the erroneous transcription Weituo, became, as gatekeeper of Chinese Buddhist monasteries, the companion of Budai, the pot-bellied “laughing Buddha,” a great friend of children. Stein argued that the figure of Gāneśa influenced that of Budai, so that the pairing of Budai & Weituo at the gate of Chinese monasteries is, through a strange détournement, that of Gāneśa & Skanda as “gatekeepers.””