

five Chinese cardinal points, corresponding in the sky to the Pole Star. The other four directions, which were indicated in the sky by groupings of equatorial constellations, were represented by heraldic animals and were marked by specific sacred places that were thought to protect the centre from evil coming from the four directions (Fig. 1). The Chinese symbol of the North, for instance, a tortoise intertwined with a snake (*genbu* 玄武), corresponds to Funaokayama, a hill which stood directly north of the palace before the latter was moved to the current location, and on which propitiatory rituals were originally performed by Yin-yang specialists.<sup>1</sup> To the north-east, a direction known as *kimon* 鬼門 ('gate of demons'), the city is also protected by the imposing site of Mt Hiei, an important Buddhist centre established at roughly the same time as the capital. Religious places devoted to astral deities are found throughout the city, and a variety of practices related to the stars that are worshipped here. Here I will present a few of these practices and their deities.



START HERE

### *The Great General of Directions*

Hidden away in a narrow shopping street in the Western area of Kyoto is a small shrine which, according to the inscription on the gate, is dedicated to the 'Great General' (Daishōgun 大將軍)<sup>2</sup> (Figs. 2a-b). Said to have been founded in 794, this shrine was one of the four worshipping halls dedicated to this deity, which were established around the capital to prevent sickness and other calamities from entering the city. Daishōgun Shrine, located northwest of the imperial palace, protected this direction.<sup>3</sup> But who is the deity venerated there?

1 Even today Funaokayama represents the northern direction in Kyoto geomancy, as seen in the map of Fig. 1. The other directions are marked by a blue dragon (*seiryō* 青龍) in the East, a white tiger (*byakko* 白虎) in the South, and a red bird (*suzaku* 朱雀) in the West.

2 The official name of the shrine today is Daishōgun hasshinsha 大將軍八神社, 'Shrine of the eight Daishōgun deities.' The eight deities personify the eight directions (the four cardinal points and the intermediate directions). For their identification, see Murai Yasuhiko 村井康彦, 'Daishōgun hachijinsha,' in Daishōgunshaseki hakkutsu chōsa hōkoku 大將軍社跡一発掘調査報告, Kyoto: Rokushōji kenkyūkai, 1973.



Daishōgun was one of the astral gods known as ‘ambulant deities’ (*yugyōjin* 遊行神), who represented directional interdictions (*kata-imi* 方忌) concerning specific times of the year. In the Chinese astrological system there were different kinds of interdictions: some were of a permanent nature and concerned everyone, such as the taboos related to the northeast; others affected each individual in different years of his or her life; and yet others applied to everyone but only for a limited time. A number of actions were to be avoided during certain periods of the year. Travelling was the activity most affected, but these temporary interdictions also related to the construction or maintenance of buildings, which were thought to cause a ‘violation of the earth’. Measures to escape the consequences of the interdiction, called *kata-tagae* 方違え, were taken preventively: they were based not on the observation of astrophysical movements, but on the knowledge of the invisible movements of certain astral deities, who came from their usual abodes in the skies to the earth, according to a fixed calendar. There were five major ‘ambulant deities’: the Pole Star, the planet Venus, Daishōgun, the Spirit of Metal (Konjin 金神), and the personification of the power of the Five Elements.<sup>4</sup>

The deities who caused the interdictions were not abstract entities, but were conceived as objects of devotion for whom specific iconographic representations were created. A concrete building at the back of the main hall of the Daishōgun Shrine houses a small museum where a hundred statues of Daishōgun are assembled, mostly dating from the tenth to the twelfth century, when worship of this astral deity was at its height. They represent Daishōgun in a variety of iconographic styles: in the guise of a warrior, wearing armour and holding a sword with his left hand, while the

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3 The other three shrines are more difficult to identify as they do not always correspond to the names and exact locations given in pre-modern sources. In the northern direction we find a Daishōgun Shrine within the precincts of today’s Imamiya 今宮 Shrine; in the East the Daishōgun Shrine of Higashi sanjō 東三条, which in ancient sources is indicated as ‘Okazaki Daishōgun’ 岡崎大將軍; located in the South is the Daishōgun shrine within the precincts of Fujinomori Shrine 藤森神社. See *Ibid.*

4 For an in-depth analysis of directional interdictions in pre-modern Japan, see the excellent study by Bernard Frank, *Kata-imi et kata-tagae. Étude sur les interdits de direction à l’Époque Heian*, Paris: Collège de France, 1998 (rev. ed, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1958).



right hand makes a mudra called 'sword mudra' (*ken-in* 剣印); as a court official, holding a mace (*shaku* 笏) with both hands; as a child; either standing, or seated, often in a half lotus position (*hankaza*) with one leg pending, a posture similar to that of the bodhisattva Miroku 弥勒<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 3). One possible explanation for the survival of such a large number of kami images (*shinzō* 神像) is that they were presented to the shrine by people who had violated the directional taboos and then had propitiatory rituals performed to Daishōgun, repeating the ritual donations a number of times within a certain period.

Propitiation from the god of directions enshrined here is still sought for in such activities as moving, building a house and travelling, although today's worshippers no longer feel it necessary to offer statues of Daishōgun to the shrine. The shrine sells a wide range of 'cosmological' amulets that ward off evil coming from the 'eight directions' and from inevitable unlucky geomantic arrangements (Figs. 4a-b). Protective talismans are also dedicated to other major deities who affect directional taboos; remarkable examples are Konjin and Toshitokujin 歳徳神 (Fig. 5), for whom a small worshipping hall has been established within the precincts of this shrine.<sup>6</sup>

The Daishōgun Shrine thus testifies to the persistence of traditional beliefs about specific stellar bodies and contributes to the understanding of Japanese astrological culture as manifested in artistic and devotional terms. It also offers material which may be used to explore the changing

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5 The images are discussed in a catalogue published on the occasion of an exhibition of the shrine treasures at the Kyoto National Museum: *Daishōgun shinzō to shashi* 大將軍神像と社史 [Images of the God Daishōgun and the History of His Shrine], Kyoto: Daishōgun hasshinsha, 1985. I am most grateful to the current head priest of the shrine who, during my fieldwork in April 2004, opened the Treasure Hall at a time of the year when it is not accessible to the public; showed me artefacts stored away, allowing me to take pictures; and provided me with a copy of this rare catalogue. Seventy-nine statues are listed as Important Cultural Property. One statue was also on display in London a few years ago, in the exhibition on Shinto art held at the British Museum. See *Shintō, the Sacred Art of Ancient Japan*, Victor Harris, ed., London: British Museum Press, 2001, pp. 142-3. The Treasure Hall is opened only once a year, in the first week of November.

6 On these two deities, see Breen's contribution in this volume.



knowledge of the skies through the centuries. For instance, on the second floor of the small museum other artefacts related to astronomy are displayed, and among them are a thirteenth-century rubbing of a Chinese stele representing a map of the sky (*tenmonzu* 天文図), a Japanese Buddhist chart of the Big Dipper in the form of a dragon (Fig. 6), and a celestial globe made by Shibusawa Shinkai (1639-1715), the famous astronomer who devised the first properly Japanese calendar.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Bodhisattva of the Cosmic Space*

Major Buddhist establishments have also been centres of worship of celestial bodies in a deified form. Although the rise of Esoteric Buddhism is considered responsible for the development of the Buddhist cult of the stars, in fact the practice of associating stars and planets with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas existed in China before the rise of Tantric (or Esoteric) Buddhism. In the Tiantai exegesis of the *Lotus Sutra*, for instance, three celestial deities appearing in the introductory chapter of the scripture are identified as Buddhist deities, the Sun Deva (Nitten 日天, Skr. Candra), Venus (Myōjō 明星, Skr. Aruṇa) and the Moon Deva (Gatten 月天, Skr. Sūrya), and are considered to be, respectively, manifestations (*ōsa* 応作) of the bodhisattvas Daiseishi 大勢至 (Skr. Mahāsthāmaprāpta), Kokūzō 虚空蔵 (Skr. Ākāśagarbha) and Kannon 観音 (Skr. Avalokiteśvara).<sup>8</sup>

Kokūzō, whose name means 'repository of space,' symbolized the universe in terms of cosmic space. This bodhisattva was understood to be the ruler of all stars, an aspect that pictorial icons illustrated by depicting him inside a moon disk said to represent the brightness of Venus, with the deities embodying the seven stars of the Big Dipper, planets and other

7 It may be of interest to note, albeit unrelated to Daishōgun, that this shrine also celebrates a popular 'star festival', Tanabata 七夕, which commemorates the mythical encounter of two stars, Shokujosei 織女星 (Vega) and Kengyūsei 牽牛星 (Altair) across the Milky Way. Fig. 2a shows the symbol of the festival, a freshly cut bamboo that on July 7th is placed at the entrance of shrines and upon which worshippers tie strips of paper containing their wishes to the stars. This festival is celebrated in other Shinto shrines in Kyoto, and elsewhere in Japan. On the origins of Tanabata see Kanezashi Shōzō 金指正三, *Hoshi uranai, hoshi matsuri* 星占い星祭り [Predicting through the stars, venerating the stars], Tokyo: Seiabō, 1974, pp. 122-26.

8 *Fahua wenju* 法華文句, by Zhiyi 智顗. T. 34, no. 1718, p. 24a.