

Article

The Elderly Nun, the Rain-Treasure Child, and the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel: Visualizing Buddhist Networks at the Grand Shrine of Ise

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Abstract: The nunnery Keikōin was a powerful Buddhist institution, famous in late-medieval Japanese history for its vigorous and successful fundraising campaigns on behalf of the Grand Shrine of Ise. Much is known about the nuns' fundraising activities, but very little is known about their religious practice. A recently discovered painting, I believe, sheds some light on this long-standing question. It depicts an elderly nun invoking the deity Uhō Dōji in the form enshrined at Kongōshōji, a temple situated at the top of Asama Mountain, to the east of Ise's Inner Shrine. Based on several of the iconographic elements, I argue the nun portrayed in the painting is from Keikōin and that she is shown engaging in esoteric Buddhist practices related to those carried out at Kongōshōji. Comparative analysis with other paintings and the historical record has, moreover, led me to propose that the Keikōin nuns performed these esoteric practices at Ise's Kora no tachi, the hall where young shrine maidens prepared the daily food offerings for Ise's deities.

Keywords: Ise shrines; Kongōshōji; Uhō Dōji; Keikōin; esoteric Buddhism; Shingon; *kora*; Kora no tachi



Citation: Andrei, Talía J. 2022. The Elderly Nun, the Rain-Treasure Child, and the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel: Visualizing Buddhist Networks at the Grand Shrine of Ise. *Religions* 13: 585. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13070585>

Academic Editors: Bernard Faure and Andrea Castiglioni

Received: 13 April 2022

Accepted: 9 June 2022

Published: 23 June 2022

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1. Introduction

An aged nun wearing a luxurious gold brocaded *kesa* is depicted in profile kneeling on a ground of white pebble stones (Figure 1). She appears as if in a trance, looking towards a large emanation of Uhō Dōji 雨宝童子 (Rain Treasure Child), whom she invokes with the closed-stupa mudra (*heitō-in* 閉塔印). Uhō Dōji manifests in the form enshrined at Kongōshōji temple 金剛證寺, as a child with long black hair, balancing a five-wheeled stupa (*gorintō* 五輪塔) on its head, and holding a wish-fulfilling jewel (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠) in its left hand and a jeweled staff (*hōbō*) in its right. A white jewel sparkles on the deity's forehead, a dharma wheel (*rinpō* 輪宝) rests on its hairline. The deity wears shoes and a white robe patterned with red and gold dharma wheels. A large pine and plum tree frame the two figures. The sun and moon rest on auspicious clouds above; a wish-fulfilling jewel perched on a pillow of golden clouds floats between them.

As will be argued in the following pages, this painting, which came to light at an auction in 2014 and is now in the collection of Gakushūin University, tells us an enormous amount about the religious history of late-medieval Ise, an area in present-day Mie prefecture that serves as the location for the Grand Shrine of Ise 伊勢神宮.¹ The late-medieval history of this area has remained obscure due to critical gaps in the archival record. When read with and against the textual record, this painting fills in some of these gaps by offering a rare view of *kami*-Buddhist combinatory practices, women's power, and esoteric Buddhist rituals and networks at and around Ise during this crucial period in the site's history.

Now considered the Shinto site par excellence and a place of perfect purity, the Grand Shrine of Ise is where the tutelary deities of Japan's imperial house are enshrined. While the shrine itself is old, these ideas of "Shinto purity"—a Shinto untarnished by external influences—are quite recent, dating to the shrine-temple separation edicts (*shinbutsu bunri*

神仏分離) of the Meiji government (1868–1912). Such ideas were not part of the religious mind of medieval Japan, which saw no sharp dividing line between the local, animistic worldview of the *kami*-worshipping tradition that later was codified as Shinto and the teeming world of buddhas and bodhisattvas that reached Japan in the sixth century. Over time, the two religious views and their respective deities merged and were intertwined, a phenomenon referred to by the neologism *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 (“buddhas as original ground and local deities as manifest trace”).²



Figure 1. *Keikōin Nun and Uhō Dōji*, Edo period, 17th century, hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper, 34 × 81 cm. Gakushūin University, Tokyo.

This syncretic worldview was even produced at the imperial shrines of Ise, the sacred site which arguably has had the most complicated and contentious relationship with Buddhism. Numerous Buddhist temples were established in Uji and Yamada, the towns that served the shrines, and Ise's clergy would often take the tonsure and retire to one of these nearby temples upon completion of their shrine duties (Andreeva 2019, p. 127).³ The hereditary lineages of Ise shrine priests—Watarai, Arakida, and Ōnakatomi—established family temples (*ujidera* 氏寺) near the shrines and from at least the mid-twelfth century they buried Buddhist sutras on Asama Mountain. Moreover, it was the fundraising efforts of Buddhist monastics that led to the rebuilding of the shrines and their surroundings in the late sixteenth century, and the subsequent revival of the shrines' vicennial renewal (*shikinen sengū* 式年遷宮), after more than a century of neglect and deterioration that was the consequence of the long, internecine wars.

As important as the activities of Buddhist monastics were at Ise, our understanding of the links between the Buddhist community and the Ise shrines remains woefully incomplete. The most active and successful of these fundraising monastics was a group of nuns based in Keikōin 慶光院. The archival record of the nuns' achievements on behalf of the Ise shrines is lively and detailed, but it is relatively silent on the nuns' Buddhist faith and worship. We know more about Kongōshōji, another important Buddhist temple in the Ise area that aligned itself with the shrines by identifying one of its protector deities, Uhō Dōji, as the Buddhist essence (*honji* 本地) of Amaterasu 天照, the ancestral *kami* enshrined in Ise's Naikū 内宮 (Inner Shrine). However, little textual evidence exists of the relationship between the two temples.

Another institution that may have played a role in the relationship between these two temples is Ise's Kora no tachi 子良館, the hall where shrine maidens (*kora* 子良) prepared the food offerings for Ise's *kami*. By welcoming and even engaging in Buddhist practice on Ise's sacred precincts, the *kora* served as a link between the Buddhist community and the Ise shrines. No record exists, however, on the relationship between the Kora no tachi and Keikōin or Kongōshōji. Understanding these relationships may offer a better understanding of the complex web of connections, reciprocal influences, economic interests, and priorities of the varied and numerous religious institutions active in Ise during the late-medieval period.

The painting of the elderly nun in contemplation before an emanation of Kongōshōji's Uhō Dōji (Figure 1) sheds new light on these issues. Her gold embroidered *kesa*, a sign of rank and status, together with the painting's combination of iconographic elements, have led me to conclude that the woman depicted is a Keikōin nun. This unique painting is of great artistic and historical interest, providing visual hints about the nuns' religious practices and the intricately woven net of religious life at Ise in the late 16th and 17th centuries. Combining iconography specific to Kongōshōji, Keikōin, and the Ise Shrines, the painting offers a visual connection between these religious sites as well as evidence for esoteric Buddhist practice on Ise's sacred grounds.

I will use the painting as a primary source to shine a light on the combined Shinto-Buddhist faith and practice that developed around medieval Ise and will show that the painting depicts a combinatory system of faith that originated at Kongōshōji and spread widely from the medieval to the modern period. More specifically, the iconography of the painting, together with a number of visual and textual records, lead me to conclude that the Keikōin nuns were engaged in esoteric Buddhist practices related to those at Kongōshōji, and that they may have carried out esoteric rituals on Ise's sacred grounds, at the Naikū Kora no tachi.

I will begin with a brief historical and religious background of the three institutions at the center of this story: Ise, Keikōin, and Kongōshōji. This will set the stage for the iconographical analysis of the Gakushūin painting that follows. I will end with a discussion of Buddhism at Ise's Kora no tachi, considering in particular the relationship of this hall and its young residents to Keikōin.

2. Situating Ise—The Shrines, Keikōin, and Kongōshōji

The term “Grand Shrine of Ise” refers to a vast institution of shrines spread across the landscape around the eastern side of the Kii peninsula in present day Mie prefecture. It consists of two principal shrines, the Naikū 内宮 (Inner Shrine or Kōdaijingū), devoted to Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神, the Sun Goddess and legendary ancestor of the imperial family, and the Gekū 外宮 (Outer Shrine or Toyouke daijingū), devoted to Toyouke Ōmikami 豊受大神, the goddess of food and harvest. The two principal shrines are surrounded by more than 120 subordinate shrines (*massha*) and auxiliary shrines (*betsugū*).

Since the late seventh century, the Ise shrines have been rebuilt (ideally) every twenty years in a ceremony called the *shikinen sengū* (abbreviated as *sengū*) (Rambelli 2014, p. 233).⁴ The reconstruction of Ise’s two principal shrines and fourteen auxiliary shrines takes place on adjacent plots of land. Once the new shrines are complete, shrine priests carry out a ritual transfer of the *kami* from the old sites to the new; the old shrines are then dismantled, and the land is left vacant. There are a number of explanations for this practice, all based on the idea of Ise as the homeland of Japan’s native religion, Shinto, and the locus of the utmost purity that requires periodic renewal to ensure its untarnished state.⁵ Traditionally, either the imperial household or a military government has provided the funds for Ise’s *sengū*.⁶ Only one major interruption occurred, during the civil wars of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the ruling powers were bankrupted and the shrines forced to seek new sources of patronage from among the commoner classes. They did so by empowering Buddhist monastics to crisscross the country raising funds on their behalf. The most committed and effective of these fundraising monastics (*kanjin hijiri* 勧進聖) came from the nunnery Keikōin. The Keikōin nuns spearheaded numerous campaigns that restored Ise’s grounds and revived its vicennial *sengū* in the late sixteenth century.

Sources describe Keikōin as an independent Rinzaï Zen sect temple based in Uji Uradachō, a town that served the Naikū. In the medieval period, Keikōin’s grounds consisted of a small Daijingū shrine and a Benzaiten *kokuya* 穀屋 (fundraising hall), where the nuns prayed for peace and distributed amulets (the nuns also lived in the *kokuya*).⁷ The temple had no principal image (*honzon* 本尊), no sutras, no Buddhist implements, and nuns who did not recite sutras (Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 230; Ise-shishi Henshū linkai 伊勢市史編集委員会 2011–2013, vol. 2, p. 550; Kojima 1985, p. 276; Hamaguchi 1949, p. 1).⁸ According to Hamaguchi, Keikōin did not fulfill the mission of a Zen temple—it did not have a dharma banner (*hōdō* 法幢) or disciples, and it did not spread the doctrine of salvation and enlightenment (Hamaguchi 1949, p. 1).⁹

According to temple lore, Keikōin was founded by the second daughter of Emperor Godaigo (r. 1318–1339), Princess Sachiko (b. ~1316–1319), a figure who is best known as Ise’s last Consecrated Imperial Princess (*saiō* 斎王). The *saiō* were unmarried princesses chosen by divination when a new emperor came to power to serve as a kind of “vestal virgin” representing the Imperial House at Ise Shrine ceremonies. In 1333, Sachiko was chosen to be *saiō*, but after completing three years of ritual purification, political turmoil led to Godaigo’s exile and Sachiko was forced to abandon her position (Anzai 1987, p. 141). She took the tonsure with the Buddhist name Shūtoku 周徳 and went to live in a temple in Kumano, an area not far from Ise that is famous in medieval history for the ambitious *kanjin* 勧進 (fundraising) campaigns of the Kumano nuns (*Kumano bikuni*).¹⁰ Later, Shūtoku moved to Ise and established Keikōin, where she became an active fundraiser for the shrines, successfully leading a campaign to rebuild Uji Bridge in 1376—the bridge had been in such a dilapidated state that pilgrims were unable to visit the Naikū (Hamaguchi 1949, p. 3).

Keikōin’s historical record is silent for the next eighty years, until the appearance in the late fifteenth century of Shuetsu 守悦 who, same as Shūtoku, descended from the Kyoto nobility.¹¹ She too was an energetic fundraiser and traveled around the country raising money for the Ise shrines. Shuetsu was assisted in her efforts by the head priest of the Naikū, who provided her with an official letter to use as evidence that her *kanjin* was

approved by the shrines. Her *kanjin* led to the rebuilding of Uji Bridge in 1491 and again in 1504 after it was washed away in a series of floods (Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 247; Teeuwen and Breen 2017, p. 121).

The Keikōin nuns continued fundraising on behalf of the shrines, rebuilding Uji Bridge again in 1545 and restoring the Gekū in 1563—one-hundred-twenty-nine years after its last reconstruction. In 1585, the nuns succeeded in rebuilding both shrines, achieving the first *shikinen sengū* in nearly two-hundred years. In recognition of their achievements, the Keikōin nuns received the imperial name *shōnin* 上人 (saint) directly from the emperor and were permitted to wear purple robes, the imperial color (Hamaguchi 1949, p. 1; Hagiwara 1983, pp. 270–71; Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 260). They were also the only Buddhist clergy allowed to worship within Ise shrine fences (*naiin*) during the *sengū* (Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 258; Ise-shishi Henshū Iinkai 伊勢市史編集委員会 2011–2013, vol. 3, p. 827; Tsukamoto 2010, p. 19).¹² Though *kanjin* for Ise's *sengū* was no longer necessary after the establishment of the Tokugawa government, Keikōin was so deeply tied to the *sengū* that it remained in charge of Ise's rebuilding process.¹³ The Keikōin nuns no longer participated in the *sengū* after 1669, but their exclusive privilege of worshipping within Ise's shrine fences during the *sengū* continued until 1769, and they remained a powerful presence around Ise until the Meiji period (Onishi 1960, p. 688; Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 230; Tsukamoto 2010, p. 23).

While the historical record of Keikōin's achievements on behalf of the shrines is abundant, it is comparatively slim on the nuns' Buddhist practice. Sources simply state that Keikōin was a Rinzai Zen temple with no main or branch temple affiliations. Despite the official Rinzai affiliation, the iconography of the Gakushūin painting suggests that the Keikōin nuns engaged in esoteric practices related to those carried out at Kongōshōji, another nominally Rinzai Zen temple with Shingon origins located at the top of Asama Mountain to the east of the Naikū.¹⁴ As mentioned, the nun in the painting is shown visualizing Kongōshōji's Uhō Dōji. This deity was identified by Kongōshōji's Shingon proponents as the Buddhist essence of the *kami* enshrined in the Naikū, the imperial ancestress Amaterasu. Originating at Kongōshōji, this form of combinatory faith spread widely in the Muromachi period. I will now introduce Kongōshōji, providing a detailed description of its legendary history, ritual practice, and enshrined deities, focusing in particular on the origins and development of the temple's Uhō Dōji faith. This background will help us better understand the complex and layered iconography of the Gakushūin painting.

According to legend, Kongōshōji was established during the reign of Emperor Kinmei 欽明帝 (r. 539–571) when a monk named Kyōtai Shōnin 暁台上人 built a hermitage on Asama Mountain where he performed the Morning Star Meditation (*Kokūzō bosatsu* *Gumonji-hō* 虚空蔵菩薩求聞持法), an esoteric ritual centered on the star Venus (Myōjō 明星) and the bodhisattva Kokūzō 虚空蔵 (Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 229; Kawaguchi 1994, p. 6; Gorai 1978, p. 393).¹⁵ In this first iteration the temple was called Venus Hall (Myōjōdō 明星堂) (Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 157).¹⁶ According to the *Asama dake giki* 朝熊岳儀軌 (Ritual Procedures of Asama Mountain; written in the Muromachi period, between 1394–1449), the temple was restored and renamed Kongōshōji in the early ninth century by Kūkai 空海 (also known as Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, 774–835), the founder of the esoteric Shingon sect 真言宗 (Tada 2019, pp. 258–59).¹⁷ The *giki* relates that in 825 Kūkai was performing the Morning Star Meditation on Myōjō Rock at Zenkonji temple in Nara, when just before sunrise a *dōji* 童子—a child guardian of the Buddhist dharma—descended from the heavens and offered to show Kūkai a spot on Asama Mountain where he would be able to successfully complete the ritual (Sakurai et al. 1975, p. 78). When Kūkai arrived at Asama he received another message, this time from the mountain's *kami*, to carry out the Morning Star Meditation there. Upon completing the ritual, a nobleman appeared and guided Kūkai to Amaterasu (Gorai 1978, p. 392). She told him that Asama Mountain was the place where the *kami* first descended, as well as where Venus (Myōjō) appeared surrounded by the light of a dharma wheel and then transformed into the bodhisattva

Kokūzō.¹⁸ Kokūzō was then enshrined in a temple on the mountain. Amaterasu lamented that the temple had been destroyed during the reign of the fifty-second emperor. Ever since Amaterasu and another *kami*, Ame no koyane no Mikoto, manifested at Asama every day waiting for the temple to be rebuilt. Amaterasu implored Kūkai to rebuild the temple and to carry out Shingon Buddhist rituals on Asama Mountain, explaining that this was the only way the *kami* would protect the realm in the future. Amaterasu then made Uhō Dōji the protector of Asama Mountain and those who performed the Morning Star Meditation; in return, Amaterasu told him, practitioners must worship Uhō Dōji (Gorai 1978, p. 392).

In the 1614 *Asama dake engi* 朝熊岳縁起 (Karmic Origins of Mount Asama), written by the Kongōshōji monk Meisō 明叟, we are told that the temple was rebuilt and converted in 1392 to Rinzaï Zen under the Kenchōji temple monk Tōgaku Buniku 東岳文昱, who, as with Kūkai, did so based on an oracle from Amaterasu, which he received during an Ise pilgrimage (Kubota 1968, p. 4).¹⁹ Despite its new sectarian affiliation, many of Kongōshōji's Shingon practices were retained and its principal image remained the bodhisattva Kokūzō, an esoteric deity, attended by Myōjō tenshi 明星天子 (Venus) and Uhō Dōji. Indeed, around the time of its Zen conversion, Asama became a training site for travelling mountain ascetics (*yamabushi* 山伏) connected to Sanbōin 三宝院, a sub-temple of the esoteric Buddhist complex Daigoji 醍醐寺, southwest of Kyoto (Kubota 1968, p. 15). Moreover, at this time, we begin to see Sanbōin-related Shugendō practices at Kongōshōji, which were increasingly influenced by Ryōbu Shintō 両部神道 ("Shinto of the Two Worlds Mandalas"), a combinatory system developed by Shingon monks in the twelfth century that was based on the association of the Naikū and Gekū with the Taizōkai 胎藏界 (Womb World) and Kongōkai 金剛界 (Diamond World) mandalas (Kubota 1968, p. 15).

According to Nishida Nagao, after the temple's conversion, the Shingon faction that remained at Kongōshōji was in conflict with the temple's Zen faction (Nishida 1977, p. 41). Meanwhile, until the early fifteenth century, Uhō Dōji had remained in a relatively minor, supportive role as guardian of Asama and attendant to Kongōshōji's principal image, Kokūzō (Kubota 1968, p. 15). Around this time, however, Uhō Dōji was elevated in status to emanation of Amaterasu and Kokūzō (Nishiyama 1999, p. 90; Faure 2016, p. 277). Nishida believes Uhō Dōji faith was invented by Kongōshōji's Shingon Ryōbu Shintō proponents between 1419–1428 and that they wrote the *Asama dake giki* to assert their interests at the temple (Nishida 1977, pp. 39–41).

In the *giki* we are told that Amaterasu stroked the head of Sekisei Dōji (Uhō Dōji) and blew out a five jewel (stupa) (*gorin*), which she placed on the *dōji's* head, and Kokūzō blew out a golden wish-fulfilling jewel (*nyoi hojū*) and placed it on the *dōji's* forehead.²⁰ The bodhisattva Jizō then emerged from the *dōji's* red wish-fulfilling jewel and preached salvation from the six paths. From the *dōji's* jeweled staff (*hōbō*) Venus emerged and recited a verse about growth and prosperity. Bernard Faure observed that the cult of Uhō Dōji established in the *giki*, "reflects (and allows) the transition from Kokūzō to Amaterasu, and from Asama to Ise" (Faure 2016, p. 277). Through Uhō Dōji the *giki* thus forged the link between Kokūzō/Asama and Amaterasu/Ise and established the basis for the focus on Uhō Dōji at Kongōshōji from the fifteenth century on.

The identification of Uhō Dōji as Amaterasu's original essence (*honji*) became increasingly popular from the late Muromachi period; shrines dedicated to this manifestation of Amaterasu were established throughout Japan and images of Amaterasu as Uhō Dōji proliferated (Odaira 2014, pp. 290–91).²¹ A Heian period sculpture of Uhō Dōji housed at Kongōshōji served as the model for many of the images that circulated at this time.²² The sculpture follows closely the deity's description in the *giki* (Figure 2). Carved from a single block of Japanese cypress, the figure stands on a mountainous rock, wearing a plain, long-sleeved robe and shoes, holding a wish-granting jewel in its left hand and a jeweled staff in its right. Its straight hair flows past its shoulders, and on top of its head rests the esoteric Buddhist symbol of the five elements, the *gorintō*.²³ According to temple tradition, Kūkai carved this sculpture after Amaterasu manifested before him as a 16-year-old *dōji*

(Tada 2019, p. 257; Kubota 1968, p. 14). In other words, Amaterasu was worshiped at Kongōshōji in the form of Uhō Dōji.



Figure 2. *Uhō Dōji*, Heian Period, Cypress wood, 102 cm. Kongōshōji, Ise City. Reproduced with permission from Faure (2016). Copyright 2016 University of Hawai'i Press.

Kongōshōji thus connected itself to the Ise shrines through the identification of Uhō Dōji as Amaterasu's original essence. Although this led to occasional conflicts with the shrines, as early as the Muromachi period we see evidence of Kongōshōji becoming part of a "three-shrine pilgrimage" (*sangū mairi*), together with the Naikū and Gekū. By the early Edo period the link between the shrines and Kongōshōji was firmly established—Ise's *onshi* (low-ranking priests who spread Ise faith) brought pilgrims to the temple as part of an Ise pilgrimage (Kubota 1968, p. 1). The necessity of visiting Kongōshōji can even be found in a line from a popular Edo period folk song: "If you go on a pilgrimage to Ise, go to Asama! If you don't go to Asama, your pilgrimage is incomplete".²⁴

As this discussion has shown, Kongōshōji and Keikōin were, in very different ways, closely tied to the Ise shrines during the medieval and early modern periods—at Kongōshōji, the connection was made through the identification of the temple's Uhō Dōji as the original essence of Amaterasu, the imperial kami enshrined in Ise's Naikū; at Keikōin the connection to Ise was forged by the fundraising campaigns carried out by the Keikōin nuns on behalf of the shrines. However, as mentioned, the historical record is relatively silent on the relationship between Kongōshōji and Keikōin, as well as on the Buddhist practice of the Keikōin nuns. For this reason, the painting recently acquired by Gakushūin University (Figure 1) is of great historical significance for the light it sheds on this lacuna, providing strong evidence for the form of Buddhist worship at Keikōin, and tying the nuns' practice to both Kongōshōji and the Ise shrines.

3. Keikōin Nun and Uhō Dōji Painting: Iconographic Analysis

An elderly nun kneels on a ground of white pebbles and forms the “closed stupa mudra” (*heitō-in*) to invoke the large emanation of Kongōshōji’s Uhō Dōji that appears before her (Figure 1). A large pine and plum tree elegantly frame the figures. Above, the sun and moon rest on auspicious clouds while a wish-fulfilling jewel floats on a golden cloud between them.

Based on the nun’s gold embroidered *kesa* and the white pebble ground on which she kneels, as well as the surrounding motifs which will be discussed in detail below, I believe the aged woman depicted in the painting is a Keikōin nun (perhaps even a specific nun, such as Shuetsu), and that she is shown visualizing Kongōshōji’s Uhō Dōji, the original essence of Amaterasu, the sun goddess and imperial ancestress enshrined in the Naikū. While the luxurious *kesa* points to the Keikōin nuns’ aristocratic origins, the stones, suggestive of the river-washed pebbles surrounding the Naikū and Gekū, may refer to the privileged status of the nuns, the only Buddhist clergy allowed within shrine grounds during Ise’s *sengū*. These pictorial elements alone draw a connection between Keikōin (the nun), Kongōshōji (Uhō Dōji), and the Ise shrines (Amaterasu as Uhō Dōji).

The connection is further reflected in the nun’s mudra, *heitō-in* (Figures 3 and 4). Initiations, known as *kanjō* 灌頂 in esoteric *kami* practice, are secret formulas transmitted from master to disciple, consisting of a mudra, a mantra, and an accompanying visualization (Teeuwen 2000, p. 102).²⁵ The first step of the Ise *kanjō*, carried out at the gate (*torii*) of a shrine, calls for the practitioner to form the *heitō-in* while vocalizing the syllable *a*. This mudra and mantra represent the Taizōkai 胎藏界, or Womb World, of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi’s 大日如来 compassion (Itō 1996, pp. 64–65). In Ryōbu Shintō, the Taizōkai is identified with Amaterasu, the Naikū, and the sun; Uhō Dōji is also identified with Amaterasu in Ryōbu Shintō (Teeuwen 1993, p. 232).²⁶

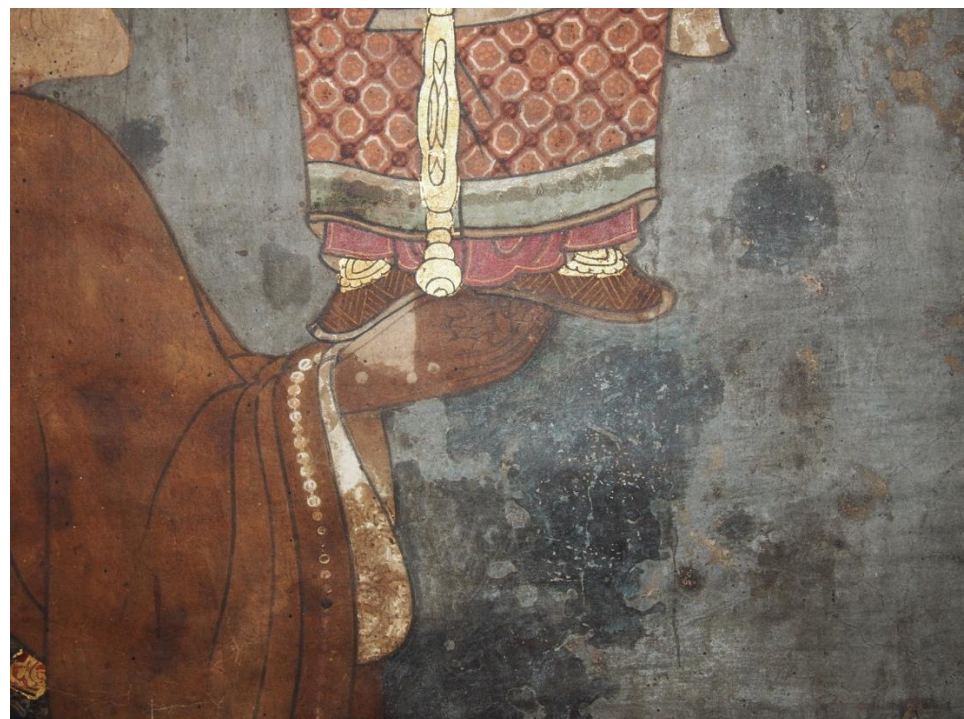


Figure 3. *Keikōin Nun and Uhō Dōji*, Edo period, 17th century, hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper, 34 × 81 cm. Gakushūin University, Tokyo. Detail of mudra.



‘closed stupa’ mudra (*heitō-in*)

Figure 4. Heitō-in mudra. Reproduced from Inaya Yūsen, *Shingon Shintō shūsei*; Seizansha, 1993.

Visual evidence of this teaching and its popularity can be found in an Edo period woodblock print showing Kongōshōji’s Uhō Dōji with the seed syllable of Dainichi of the Taizōkai, *āḥ*. The text surrounding Uhō Dōji, moreover, refers directly to Amaterasu (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Woodblock print of Uhō Dōji from the Sanjūbanjin (Thirty Deities) series. Edo period. (Image courtesy of Brian [Bocking](#) (2000)).

It seems likely, therefore, that the accompanying visualization for the *heitō-in* would be Amaterasu or one of her Buddhist manifestations. As Amaterasu’s original essence, Uhō Dōji was understood to be equivalent to Amaterasu and thus an appropriate visualization for the *heitō-in*. We see this represented in the Gakushūin painting: the nun forms the *heitō-in* and invokes Amaterasu in the form of Kongōshōji’s Uhō Dōji. As Toba Shigehiro and others have shown, this imagery would not have been unusual, countless representations in the Edo period depict Amaterasu as Uhō Dōji (Figures 6 and 7) ([Hagiwara 1978](#), pp. 287–88, 401; [Toba 1997](#), p. 140; [Kikuchi 1984](#), p. 860).



Figure 6. *Sanja takusen*, Edo period, hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper, 54.6 × 23.5 cm. Author's collection.

Moreover, Edo period *sanja takusen* ('The Oracles of the Three Shrines') scrolls, which represent Amaterasu in the form of Kongōshōji's Uhō Dōji, decorate Amaterasu's robe with the same dharma wheels as those on Uhō Dōji's robe in the Gakushūin painting (Figures 6 and 7).

The sun, moon, and wish-granting jewel at the top of the painting form further points of connection between Kongōshōji, Keikōin, and the Ise shrines. On one level, the sun and moon symbolize Amaterasu/Naikū and Toyouke/Gekū, respectively. Together, they also may be understood as Uhō Dōji, who was identified in a Ryōbu Shintō text, the *Uhō Dōji keibyaku* 雨法童子啓白, as the true form of both the sun and moon.²⁷ More generally, as in other Buddhist images, the sun and moon infuse the painting with an atmosphere of otherworldly timelessness.

The addition of a wish-granting jewel between the sun and moon is an iconographical arrangement pointing to Kongōshōji. The same arrangement of motifs, with Venus (Myōjō) in place of the wish-granting jewel, appears at the top of the seventeenth century *Kongōshōji Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* (*Kongōshōji Ise sankei mandara*; Figure 8).²⁸



Figure 7. *Uhō Dōji* (also known as *Sanja Gongen*; Manifestations of the Three Shrines), Edo period, sheet, ink on paper. University Art Museum, Kyoto City University of Arts. Reproduced with permission from [Faure \(2016\)](#). Copyright 2016 University of Hawai'i Press.

While the majority of pilgrimage mandalas depict the sun and moon, only the *Kongōshōji Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* includes this third iconographical component, which refers to Kongōshōji's origins in Kokūzō and the Morning Star Meditation—Kokūzō is identified with Venus (Myōjō), and both deities are at the center of the ritual.²⁹ The symbolic form (*sammaya*) of Kokūzō, moreover, is the wish-granting jewel. During the Morning Star Meditation the practitioner forms and recites only the wish-granting jewel mudra and mantra ([Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003](#), p. 132).³⁰ We may therefore think of Kokūzō, Venus (Myōjō), and the wish-granting jewel as being equivalent and interchangeable in medieval esoteric thought and iconography ([Dolce and Matsumoto 2010](#), p. 179). Amaterasu came to be incorporated into this Buddhist system and by the fourteenth century was commonly equated with the wish-granting jewel (Figure 9).³¹



Figure 8. *Kongōshōji Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*, early 17th century, hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper. 146.2 × 150.4 cm. Yoshiminedera, Kyoto.

Lastly, the combination of sun, moon, and wish-granting jewel at the top of the painting might carry an additional reference to Kūkai, the legendary founder of Kongōshōji. Drawings of Kūkai from the fourteenth century show him seated below a wish-granting jewel flanked by the sun and moon (Figure 10). According to Lucia Dolce, the wish-granting jewel in these drawings symbolizes Venus (Myōjō) and Kokūzō (Dolce and Matsumoto 2010, p. 179). Moreover, Bernard Faure argues that the point of these drawings was to identify Kūkai with the wish-granting jewel (Faure 2016, pp. 258–62). The wish-granting jewel in the Gakushūin painting is thus endowed with several layers of meaning, simultaneously signifying Venus (Myōjō), Kokūzō, Amaterasu, and Kūkai, and by extension Kongōshōji and the Ise shrines. Its inclusion in the Gakushūin painting and its position between the sun and moon further links the Keikōin nun's religious practice with Kongōshōji. Finally, the placement of the wish-granting jewel in the highest position of the painting is meaningful. In Japanese religious landscape painting, compositional space is arranged vertically according to relative sacredness, with motifs in the lower regions of the painting considered less sacred than those in the uppermost regions.³² We should therefore understand the wish-granting jewel to be the most sacred element of the Gakushūin painting.



Figure 9. Amaterasu (Tenshō Daijin), Edo period, woodblock print, ink on paper. University Art Museum, Kyoto City University of Arts. Reproduced with permission from [Faure \(2016\)](#). Copyright 2016 University of Hawai'i Press.

The pine and plum tree, which figure prominently in the Gakushūin painting, are motifs with a long history of symbolic and seasonal associations in East Asian art, variously associated with winter, strength, longevity, steadfastness, courage, perseverance, and hope. The fragmented forms of the trees and the way they curve over and frame the central figures is a common visual device of East Asian painting. However, the inclusion of pine and plum in a religious painting with so few iconographic elements suggest these trees carry symbolic meaning beyond such generic associations.

Although only the upper portion of the pine is visible, its twisted trunk and arc-shaped boughs are striking. A pine of similar form is depicted in the *Jingū Chōkokan Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* (*Ise sankei mandara*; Figure 11), a painting that was commissioned by the Keikōin nuns. In the mandala, the pine extends over the Naikū Kora no tachi, the hall where the young *kora* prepared food offerings for Ise's *kami* (Figure 12, detail of Figures 11 and 13). Although there are many other pine trees depicted in the mandala, the one behind the Naikū Kora no tachi is distinctive in size, form, and color, and its upper section is a mirror image, nearly identical to the Gakushūin pine. Moreover, lichen grows on the trunks of both pines, an inclusion not found on any of the other pine trees in the *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*. Comparing this depiction of the Naikū Kora no tachi with its depictions in the other two extant *Ise Pilgrimage Mandalas*, paintings not commissioned by the Keikōin nuns, we find the hall without a pine tree framing it (Figures 14 and 15).³³ This suggests the Naikū Kora no tachi, or the area just behind it, was of particular significance to the Keikōin nuns and further suggests that the pine in the Gakushūin painting, which I believe shows the same tree viewed from the opposite side of the Kora no tachi, depicts the same location and is thus imbued with a corresponding significance.



Figure 10. *Kūkai with Jewels and Dragons*, 14th century, color on paper. Ninnaji, Kyoto. Reproduced with permission from Faure (2016). Copyright 2016 University of Hawai'i Press.



Figure 11. *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*, late 16th century, hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper, 67 1/2 × 73 1/4 in. (171.4 × 186 cm). Jingū Chōkokan Museum, Mie Prefecture, Japan.



Figure 12. *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*, late 16th century, hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper, 67 1/2 × 73 1/4 in. (171.4 × 186 cm). Jingū Chōkokan Museum, Mie Prefecture, Japan. Detail of Naikū Kora no tachi.



Figure 13. Labeled Ise Pilgrimage Mandala.



Figure 14. *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*, 17th century, former hanging scroll, now mounted as a two-panel folding screen, ink and colors on paper, 59 1/2 × 71 in. (151.1 × 180.3 cm). Kimiko and John Powers Collection, Colorado.

The pine may be merely a framing device to signify the sacred nature of the hall in the mandala and the nun and Uhō Dōji in the Gakushūin painting. However, it could also represent the Many-Branched Pine (Momoe no matsu 百枝松), a sacred pine on the grounds of the Naikū where pilgrims worshipped Amaterasu.³⁴ The exact location of the Many-Branched Pine is unknown. According to an entry from 1076 in Minamoto Toshifusa's 源俊房 *Suisaki* 水左記, the sacred pine was in front of the Naikū.³⁵ Several poems include lines that suggest it was located in Kamiji Yama, an area at the upper reaches of the Isuzu River, south of the Naikū.³⁶ The Naikū Kora no tachi was also situated at the southern end of the Isuzu River, just past the Naikū's second *torii*, in front of Kaze no Miya Bridge (Shitomi 1797, p. 14).³⁷ It is possible that the Many-Branched Pine, or a similarly large sacred pine, was located behind the Kora no tachi, towards Kaze no Miya Bridge. The entry for the Naikū Kora no tachi in the *Ise sangū meisho zue* includes a poem, presumably about the Kora no tachi, that mentions a grove of pine trees (Shitomi 1797, pp. 14–15).



Figure 15. *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*, 17th century, pair of hanging scrolls, ink and colors on paper, each 50 × 34 3/8 in (127 × 87.3 cm). Mitsui Bunko, Tokyo.

There is less visual and archival evidence to aid in identifying the plum tree in the Gakushūin painting, but a poem by Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) suggests that it too points to the Naikū Kora no tachi. When Bashō visited Ise in 1688 he was shocked to find not a single plum tree on Ise's grounds. He approached an Ise priest to inquire how this could be and was told that Ise's only plum tree could be found behind the Kora no tachi. Inspired, Bashō wrote the following haiku: "How befitting it is, for holy virgins, a solitary stock of fragrant plum".³⁸

Based on the visual and textual evidence, I believe the Keikōin nun is shown in contemplation on or near the grounds of the Naikū Kora no tachi. Pines are much longer-lived trees than plums so the absence of the plum in the Jingū Chōkokan *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*, which dates to the late sixteenth century, might further suggest a seventeenth century date for the Gakushūin painting. However, we still need to understand the significance of Ise's *kora* and the Kora no tachi to Keikōin and the larger Buddhist community. Why are the Naikū and Gekū Kora no tachi so prominently depicted in all three *Ise Pilgrimage Mandalas*, paintings that were commissioned by itinerant Buddhist monastics to aid in fundraising campaigns for the shrines? In the following sections I will attempt to address these questions raised

from the iconographic analysis and will seek the answer in the activities of the *kora*, which were heavily influenced by esoteric Buddhist doctrine and practices.

4. Buddhism and the Kora No Tachi

The Naikū and Gekū Kora no tachi served as the residence halls of the *kora*, the shrine maidens who prepared and carried out the ritual food offerings to Ise's *kami*. Among the many priests who served Ise's *kami*, only the head *kora* (*okorago* 御子良子) held the key to Ise's most sacred halls, and she alone was permitted inside Ise's daily food offering hall (Mikedono 御饌殿) (Odaira 2010, p. 293; Yamamoto 2005, pp. 4–5).³⁹ Because she had the most intimate access to Ise's deities, the *okorago* had to remain in a state of absolute purity and was therefore the only one among Ise's ritualists who was never to leave shrine grounds (Teeuwen and Breen 2017, p. 44).

The historical archive on the *kora* and the Kora no tachi is scant, due in large part to the secretive nature of the orally transmitted rituals of the *kora*, but it suggests that, contrary to the official position of the Shrine, Buddhism and its practitioners were welcomed at the Kora no tachi. The Shingon monk Tsūkai 通海 (late 13th c.?), for example, writes in his *Tsūkai Daijingu sankeiki* 通海大神宮参詣記 (Records of Pilgrimage to the Ise Grand Shrine) that there was an enormous tree in front of the Naikū Kora no tachi under which monks and lay people would gather and converse (Nishiyama 1993, p. 191; Jingū Shichō 神宮司庁 1935–1940, p. 29). In the *Genkō Shakusho* 元亨釈書, the Zen monk Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬 (1278–1346) describes being stopped under a huge tree by a Naikū priest and told he was not allowed to go any further because Ise's *kami* hated monks (Ise-shishi Henshū linkai 伊勢市史編集委員会 2011–2013, vol. 3, p. 202). The tree, presumably the same as the one described by Tsūkai, apparently served as the boundary line (*genkaiten* 限界点) for monastics; a cedar tree served this function on the side of the Gekū.⁴⁰ It is doubtful that the large tree described by Tsūkai and Kokan was the famous Many-Branched Pine.⁴¹ Another telling account of Buddhist proclivities at the Kora no tachi comes from the monk Hasshin 発心 (mid-thirteenth century), who describes a *kora* interceding on his behalf when an Ise priest stopped him from approaching the Naikū. The *kora* told the priest that Hasshin should be permitted to proceed because the *kami* accepted Buddhists. Remarkably, the priest relented thanks to the young *kora*'s intervention (Hagiwara 1978, p. 351).⁴² Hasshin's story is particularly revealing because it not only provides anecdotal evidence of Buddhist activity on shrine grounds, but also gives a sense of the power and influence of Ise's *kora*, a point made explicit in Tsūkai's *Daijingu sankeiki* where he writes that the most important role at Ise was fulfilled by the *kora*.⁴³

Concrete evidence for Buddhist faith at the Kora no tachi is found in Bashō's 1688 travel diary, in a haiku expressing surprise and delight upon encountering an image of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* at the Gekū Kora no tachi: "What a stroke of luck, it is to see, a picture of Nirvana, in the holy Compound!" (Matsuo 1966, p. 80; Tsunematsu 2015, p. 65).⁴⁴ Moreover, Yamamoto Hiroko and Odaira Mika have shown that the *kora* were themselves practitioners of esoteric Buddhism, and that the ritual practice at the Kora no tachi combined elements of Shinto and Shingon (Odaira 2010, pp. 292–95; Yamamoto 2005, pp. 12–13).⁴⁵ The Gekū *okorago* even performed esoteric rituals in Ise's food offering hall, during the twice daily offerings to Ise's *kami*.⁴⁶ Another Shingon connection may be found in the research of Miyake Hitoshi, who has found that Ise's *kora*, upon completion of their duties, often married retired *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics) from the Shingon temple Segidera 世義寺, located in the Ise town of Yamada (Odaira 2014, p. 288; see Figure 13).

The important role played by Ise's *kora* combined with the strong Shingon ties at the Kora no tachi may explain the prominent depiction of the halls on the Naikū and Gekū grounds in all three extant *Ise Pilgrimage Mandalas*, two of which were commissioned and used by Shingon *yamabushi* (Figures 14 and 15).⁴⁷ Still, we need to understand the nature of the relationship between Keikōin and the Naikū Kora no tachi. The Keikōin nuns would have instructed the painter of the *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* they commissioned to mark the Naikū Kora no tachi with the Many-Branched Pine (or a distinctive pine tree), and the

Keikōin nun in the Gakushūin painting is shown invoking Uhō Dōji on the grounds of the hall (based on our interpretation of the pine and plum). The following section will propose two theories concerning the connections between these two institutions.

5. Keikōin and the Naikū Kora No Tachi

One possible explanation for the nuns highlighting the Naikū Kora no tachi in their *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* relates to Keikōin's founder, Shūtoku, Emperor Godaigo's daughter and Ise's last *saiō*. As we know, the *saiō*, as with the *kora*, was a prepubescent girl who served Ise's deities. The *saiō* only participated in Ise's three most important seasonal rites (*sansetsusai* 三節際).⁴⁸ During these rituals, the *saiō* would enter Ise's grounds and at the western gate of the shrine's innermost fence (*mizugaki*) she would hand the Naikū *kora* a branch hung with mulberry cloth (*futo-tamagushi*) to offer Ise's *kami* on behalf of the imperial house (Yamanaka 2020, p. 216). The ritual duties of the Naikū *kora* were also limited to the shrine's most important annual ceremonies, including the three seasonal rites (the Gekū *kora*, by contrast, was responsible for the twice daily food offerings to Amaterasu and Toyouke at the daily food offering hall—Mikedono) (Yamamoto 2005, p. 5). During these ceremonies, the Naikū *kora* presented offerings, such as the *saiō*'s branch hung with mulberry cloth, to Amaterasu at the foot of the Naikū's pivot post (*Shin no mihashira* 心御柱) (Odaira 2003, pp. 44–45).⁴⁹ Located under the floor of the Naikū shōden 正殿 (main hall), the pivot post is the center of Ise's most sacred and exclusive hall. It is the *shintai* 神体 of Amaterasu, the object into which the deity descends, and only the Naikū *kora* was permitted before it (Yamamoto 2005, p. 5; Odaira 2003, pp. 44–45). According to Mark Teeuwen and John Breen, at a very early stage in the Shrine's history, even before there was a proper shrine building, the *saiō* would have been the one to carry out rituals at the pivot post.⁵⁰ It seems likely, therefore, that when the *saiō* system was abolished in the fourteenth century, the ritual duties of the *saiō* were transferred to the Naikū *kora*.⁵¹ Indeed, there was precedent for doing this, as recorded in the Ise Protocols of 804: "at present, it is the *ōmonoimi* [*okorago*; the head *kora*] rather than the abstinence princess [*saiō*] who approaches the Great Kami and serves her in close proximity" (Nishimiya 2020, p. 224; Teeuwen and Breen 2017, p. 44). In addition, until the middle of the sixth century, the *saiō* resided in a fenced-in compound on the upper bank of the Isuzu River (as we know, this is where the Naikū Kora no tachi was situated (Teeuwen and Breen 2017, p. 40; Nishimiya 2020, pp. 223–24)). The emphasis placed on the Naikū Kora no tachi in the Jingū Chōkokan *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* could thus point to Keikōin's historical roots and illustrious origins in the *saiō*. The mandala was used by the Keikōin nuns as a visual accompaniment to recitation performances (*etoki* 絵解き) to raise funds for the maintenance and renewal of the shrines.⁵² Standing before an audience, the nun would point to different areas of the painting and weave together a narrative that combined religious present and legendary past, extolling Ise's wondrous sites and spiritual benefits, its miraculous history and its local specialties. Elevating and emphasizing Keikōin's origins and historical ties to Ise in the *saiō* through the depiction of the Naikū Kora no tachi would impress the nun's audience and give legitimacy to her plea, leading to more generous donations.⁵³ The depiction of the Keikōin nun invoking Uhō Dōji at the Naikū Kora no tachi in the Gakushūin painting, however, suggests a spiritual connection to the hall or its residents that went beyond any immediate financial needs related to the nuns' fundraising campaigns.

More research on the origins and nature of that spiritual connection is necessary, but one clue may be found in the historical significance of the *dōji*, a child guardian of the Buddhist dharma, and its relationship to the *kora*. With the emergence and development of Ryōbu Shintō in the medieval period, the *dōji* rose to prominence and became extremely influential. As Odaira Mika has shown, the *dōji* was equated at this time with Ise's *kora*, a figure who, as we know, was also extremely influential in the medieval period and who was engaged in esoteric Shingon rituals (Odaira 2010, pp. 291–94). Faure has observed that the term *dōji*, moreover, "designates both the god and the child medium possessed by the god"—so in this sense too, at medieval Ise *dōji* referred to the *kora* (Faure 2021, p. 180). Indeed, we

know from historical accounts that the *kora* received divine oracles from Ise's *kami*, and that she would whisper divinations about the future—presumably received from the *kami*—as she walked from the Kora no tachi to Ise's food offering hall (Yamamoto 2005, pp. 2–3). In addition, according to Odaira, Shingon Ryōbu Shintō texts placed the *kora* on an equal level of importance as Ise's pivot post. As the object into which Amaterasu descends, accessible only to the Naikū *kora*, it seems possible that medieval esoteric practitioners would have identified the pivot post with the *kora*, the child medium possessed by Amaterasu. The mutual identification of the *dōji*, the *kora*, and the pivot post may have led the Keikōin nuns to worship Amaterasu in the form of Kongōshōji's *dōji*, Uhō Dōji, at the Naikū Kora no tachi, and thus the depiction of the nun invoking Uhō Dōji in the Gakushūin painting. We may never know with certainty the meaning of the iconography or the location of the nun's worship in this painting, but I am hopeful that new visual and textual evidence will continue to emerge that will help us improve our understanding of the Keikōin nuns' Buddhist practice and its connection to Kongōshōji and the Naikū Kora no tachi.

6. Conclusions

This paper has attempted to cast new light on an important but murky period in Ise's religious history through the close study of an enigmatic painting of an elderly nun in contemplation which, I have argued, represents a Keikōin nun. Combined visual and textual analysis has led me to draw several conclusions about the Keikōin nuns' Buddhist practice, something we know very little about from the historical record. I believe the nun in the Gakushūin painting is shown visualizing Amaterasu in the form of Kongōshōji's Uhō Dōji on or near the grounds of the Naikū Kora no tachi. The Uhō Dōji faith established at Kongōshōji by its Shingon Ryōbu Shintō proponents is thus reflected in the painting, providing evidence that Keikōin, contrary to the historical sources, was not strictly a Rinzai Zen temple. It further suggests that the Keikōin nuns, as with Ise's *kora*, may have engaged in esoteric Buddhist practice on Ise shrine precincts.

We are left with many questions about this unusual painting, the most basic of which is how would it have been used? It was not a primary image (*honzon*) nor a central focus of ritual or worship. Maybe it commemorates a vision, a dream, or even an experience of a Keikōin nun. Continued research into Keikōin and its esoteric networks, together with a close study of any related visual and textual materials that come to light, will surely yield new discoveries and interpretations. As this study of a single painting has shown, combining visual analysis with the textual record is a powerful tool, essential to obtaining a full historical understanding of Ise and of Japanese religion writ large.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ This painting was lot A-062 in the 80th auction of Kogire-kai, where it was titled *Ise ōkami rairin ga* (伊勢大神来臨画). In the accompanying catalogue description, we are told that the box of the painting is inscribed by Matsura Hiromu (1791–1867), the 10th daimyo of Hirado. In his inscription, Matsura writes that the painting came from Nanto (Nara), and identifies the figures as Kasuga Myōjin and the monk Myōe Shōnin. Matsura's reference to Nanto may be based on his assumption that the work was painted in the same studio as the *Kumano Pilgrimage Mandalas*. As the author of the Kogire-kai catalogue entry points out, the seated figure is undoubtedly a nun, so Matsura's identification of this figure as Myōe is incorrect. The author goes on to speculate that the figures represented in the painting are a Keikōin nun and Uhō Dōji. This identification is based on the painting's date of production, which the author believes is the early Edo period, and its correspondence with the the Keikōin nuns fundraising activities on behalf of the shrines.

² For a detailed discussion of *honji suijaku*, see Teeuwen and Rambelli (2003).

³ In Yamada alone there were 67 Shingon temples, 34 Tendai temples, 145 Zen temples, and 50 Pure Land temples (Kikuchi 1984, p. 859).

- 4 On the reverberations of Ise's architectural tradition in modern times as well as the shrines' representations in text and image, see (Reynolds 2001, pp. 316–41).
- 5 For a thorough discussion of the changing concept of purity at Ise and the complex relationship of Ise and Buddhism, particularly how it developed during the reign of Empress Shōtoku (718–770) and her advisor, the monk Dōkyō, see (Ooms 2008, pp. 187–223).
- 6 Ise's rebuilding was funded from the late eleventh century by a special tax (*daijingu yakubukumai*) imposed on communal and private lands throughout Japan, though political chaos from the early fifteenth century onward rendered the collection of this tax impossible (Teeuwen 1996, pp. 23, 163; Kojima 1985).
- 7 According to Nishiyama Masaru, Keikōin's buildings were magnificent. From the temple the nuns distributed red printed *kokuya fuda* 穀屋札. Printed on the front of the *fuda* was *Ise naikū shōganninshū kokuya* 伊勢内宮諸願人衆穀屋 and impressed with a *kao*; on the back was written in black *Benzaiten yōshuso* 弁財天養首座 and impressed with a stamp (Nishiyama 1989, p. 207). According to Kobayashi Yukio, Keikōin's third nun Seijun 清順 lived in a hermitage in the town of Okamoto; she was originally a Kumano nun (Kobayashi 2014, p. 208).
- 8 In the section "Ise bikuni no kōseki," in *Miko to Bukkyō-shi*, Hagiwara Tatsuo writes that Keikōin had no *hondō* but its *honzon* was Shakyamuni (Hagiwara 1983).
- 9 Keikōin began as a temple devoted exclusively to *kanjin hijiri* activity. Later (presumably once *kanjin* was no longer necessary), the nuns prayed for the welfare of the shōgun and the nobility (Hamaguchi 1949, pp. 1–2).
- 10 According to Anzai Nahoko, Sachiko entered the temple Hōanji in the town of Kumano in Kyoto, though the majority of sources say she went to a temple in Kumano in the Kii peninsula (Anzai 1987, p. 143). *Keikōin ki*, for example, says Sachiko lived in Kii as a *kanjin hijiri* (Hamaguchi 1949, p. 3; Hagiwara and Nishigaki 1985, p. 230).
- 11 Shuetsu was from the Asukai family, a branch of the Fujiwara (Hamaguchi 1949, p. 4; Kojima 1985, p. 276).
- 12 According to *Ujiyamada-shishi*, during the *sengū* the Keikōin nuns were permitted to worship within the Mizugaki, the shrine's innermost fences (Ujiyamada Shiyakusho 宇治山田市役所 1929, p. 1013).
- 13 The Keikōin nuns were in charge of organizing the *sengū* until Kanbun 9 (1669) (Ise-shishi Henshū Iinkai 伊勢市史編集委員会 2011–2013, vol. 3, p. 827). Ieyasu donated 30,000 *koku* for the Keichō 14 (1609) *shikinen sengū* and subsequent Tokugawa shōguns followed his example. The Keikōin nuns would receive the bakufu donation and then distribute it to the shrines (Ujiyamada Shiyakusho 宇治山田市役所 1929, p. 1011).
- 14 Two pieces of evidence already pointed to a relationship between Keikōin and Kongōshōji. The first is the gravestones of two of Keikōin's head nuns, Seijun (mid-sixteenth century) and Shūyo 周養 (late sixteenth century), which are both located in Kongōshōji's Okunonin. The second, of much later date, is that Keikōin gave Kongōshōji the Benzaiten statue enshrined in their *kokuya* in response to the *shinbutsu bunri* policy of the Meiji period (Shimizu 2014, p. 57; Odaira 2014, p. 288). I saw Seijun and Shūyo's gravestones when I visited Kongōshōji in 2014.
- 15 The *Gumonji-hō* is an esoteric Buddhist ritual performed for perfect memory. Kyōtai also prayed at Asama for the safety and prosperity of the realm.
- 16 Kinmei was probably not referred to contemporaneously as Tennō (emperor); the first emperor with the title of Tennō is believed to have been Emperor Tenmu (631–686).
- 17 According to Nishida Nagao, the *giki* was written around 1448 (Nishida 1977, p. 39).
- 18 The *Gumonji-hō* involves visualization of Kokūzō in the form of Venus (Myōjō).
- 19 Because Tōgaku Buniku died in 1416, Tada Jitsudō believes that the *engi* was written by a Togakubuniku's disciple for the purpose of fundraising. He also argues that Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, after a pilgrimage to Ise and Asama in the ninth month of 1393, saw the dilapidated state of Kongōshōji's halls and ordered the temple to be rebuilt (Tada 2019, pp. 259–60).
- 20 The deity is formally called Kongō Sekisei Zenshin Uhō Dōji 金剛赤精善神雨法童子.
- 21 Kubota Osamu points out that the *honji suijaku* relationship between Uhō Dōji and Amaterasu is recorded in the 1614 *Asama dake engi* and the *Uhō Dōji keibyaku*, B version (Kubota 1968, p. 14). According to Nishida, Uhō Dōji faith originated at Kongōshōji and is ultimately rooted in the temple's *honzon*, Kokūzō, who is identified as both the wish-granting jewel (*nyoi hōju*) and Myōjō Tenshi, or Venus (Nishida 1977, p. 40). In commentaries on the Lotus Sutra, Myōjō Tenshi is identified as Kokuzō (Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003, p. 140).
- 22 The temple Hasedera also has a statue of Uhō Dōji, which is very different in appearance than the figure at Kongōshōji. Hasedera's Uhō Dōji was carved between 1537–1544. Adorned with a crown, its hair is styled with buns on each side of its head (*mizura* 角髪). It wears a red robe with a green gusset and holds a wish-fulfilling jewel in its left hand and a jeweled staff in its right. According to Toba Shigeru, the difference in appearance is due to the way Uhō Dōji is described and visualized in the origin histories of each temple. As with Kongōshōji, Hasedera issued images of its Uhō Dōji (Toba 1997, pp. 119–79).
- 23 According to John Rosenfield the *gorintō* "symbolizes the five physical constituents of all material matter, all living deities. The cubic base denotes the earth and often bears the Indic syllable "A". Next is a sphere that designates water and is marked with the syllable "Vi". The four-sided pyramidal section signifies fire and is marked with the syllable "Ra". Above that a hemisphere denoting wind is marked by the syllable "Hūm". The jewel shape at the top, signifying space or the void, is marked with the

syllable “Kham”. The five syllables together form *a-vi-ra-hūm-kham*, the mantra that represents Mahāvairocana in his Reward Body (J: *hōjin*; S: *sambhogakāya*) at the moment of cosmic creation—as depicted in the *Womb World Mandala*” (Rosenfield 2011, p. 187).

24 Ise *e mairaba* Asama o kake yo, Asama kakeneba kata sangū; 「お伊勢へ参らは朝熊をかけよ、朝熊かけねば片参宮」 (Kubota 1968, p. 1; Knecht 2006, p. 224).

25 This type of *kanjō* is called a *jumyō kanjō* 受明灌頂, also known as a *gakuho kanjō* 学法灌頂. (Rambelli and Porath 2022, pp. 9–10). According to Itō Satoshi, the ritual procedures for shrine obeisance (*shinpai* 神拝) and shrine-pilgrimages (*shasan* 社参) were also called *kanjō*. He writes that “in the ritual procedure for shrine obeisance, the practitioner took the shrine precincts as the ritual space, the body of the kami (*shintai*) as the primary icon, formed mudras, chanted mantras, and visualized the kami’s true body (that is an avatar of a buddha, or the same as one’s own mind)”. (Itō 2022, p. 340).

26 Uhō Dōji is also identified as a manifestation of Dainichi Nyorai, the primordial Buddha (Gorai 1978, p. 394).

27 According to Kubota, Version A of the *Uhō Dōji keibyaku* was written before 1555 (Kubota 1968, pp. 12, 14).

28 For an introduction to the pilgrimage mandala genre in English, see (ten Grotenhuis 1999; Knecht 2006; Hirasawa 2013; Morse 2009).

29 Kokūzō is identified with dawn and celestial light, linked to the “morning star” Venus (Myōjō) around the sixth century in China (Andreeva 2019, p. 131; Yamasaki 1988, pp. 184–85).

30 According to Yamasaki, the *Gumonji-hō* practitioner concentrates exclusively on the single practice union with the deity Venus (Myōjō tenshi) (Yamasaki 1988, p. 185). According to Nishida, upon successful completion of the Morning Star Meditation (*Gumonji-hō*), Myōjō tenshi will appear before the practitioner. He goes on to state that Kokūzō is the true form of Myōjō tenshi because he is the lord of the stars; this is why he is also known as Kokūzō daimyōjō tenshi bosatsu (Nishida 1977, p. 40).

31 In addition, Faure writes: “the wish-fulfilling jewel, in his [the Tendai priest Jihen] view, unites the Yin and Yang, heaven and earth, and the powers of the two Ise shrines”. (Faure 2016, p. 280).

32 For example, in the *Kasuga Shrine Mandala*, Mount Mikasa is placed at the top of the painting with Kasuga’s *kami* floating above. Moreover, in the *Fuji Pilgrimage Mandala* the composition moves vertically from bottom to top, from the more secular, everyday life towards Fuji’s tripartite peak, each enshrined with a Buddha. Nishiyama Masaru makes a similar argument about the compositional arrangement of the *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* in his chapter “Taikon ryōbu sekai no tabibito—Tekusuto 3 Ise sankei mandara,” (Nishiyama 1998, pp. 147–73). Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis makes the following observation about *kami* mandalas: “Despite the fact that *kami mandara* are often described as being maplike or realistic in their depiction of geographical details, compositions are sometimes manipulated to emphasize certain details. Sacred Mount Mikasa must appear in the honored position at the top of the composition [in the *Kasuga miya mandara*], but Mount Mikasa is located in the eastern part of the city of Nara”. (ten Grotenhuis 1999, p. 150)

33 The other two *Ise Pilgrimage Mandalas* are housed in the Mitsui Bunko (Tokyo) and the Kimiko and John Powers Collection (Colorado). For analysis of the *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala*, see (Nishiyama 1998; Knecht 2006; Shimizu 2014; Andrei 2018).

34 Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204), for example, wrote in his diary that he worshiped the Naikū at the Momoe no matsu (Azuma 1895, p. 72; Ujiyamada Shiyakusho 宇治山田市役所 1929, pp. 850–51).

35 In *Shinto meishōshi* it says if the *Suisaki* is correct and the Momoe no matsu was in front of the Naikū then it would have been near the Minami no Shueiya (Azuma 1895, p. 72).

36 A poem by Tsuchimikado-in no kozaishō (dates unknown) and two poems by Jichin Kashō (thirteenth century) use the phrase “*Kamiji yama momoe no matsu*” and can be found in (Azuma 1895, p. 72). *Kamiji yama* in these poems could also refer more generally to the Naikū (Andreeva 2010, fn. 96, pp. 274–75). Momoe no matsu was also an expression used in poetic offerings to the Ise shrines when referring to a sacred tree or a spirit dwelling (Fukudome 2016, pp. 125–36, esp. pp. 130–31).

37 According to the 1707 *Ise sangū annaiki* (Internal Diary of the Inner Shrine?), the pilgrimage route through the Naikū moved from the Kora no tachi to Isuzugawa Bridge (Kaze no Miya Bridge) to a monk–nun worship hall (Chieda 2013, p. 87). In the late medieval period, Kaze no Miya Bridge and the surrounding area was maintained and occupied by Shingon *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics) who lived and raised money in a fundraising hall (*kokuya*) at the base of the bridge. The shrine on the opposite side of the bridge, Kaze no Miya, became a place from where Buddhist monks and nuns worshipped the Naikū. The Kora no tachi and its young residents were thus in close proximity to Buddhist activity.

38 御子良子の一もとゆかし梅の花 (Okorago no ichi moto yukashi ume no hana; The shrine maidens (*okorago*) have a single plum blossom tree). This poem comes from Bashō’s *Oi no Kobumi* (Records of a Travel Worn Satchel) (Matsuo 1966, p. 80).

39 The *kora* was originally called *monoimi*. The new title, which combines the characters for child 子 and good 良 was changed in the medieval period to emphasize that it was a child who served in this role (Odaira 2003, p. 42).

40 The cedar tree was called the *Ioe sugi* 五百枝杉.

41 There is a large deciduous tree matching Kokan’s description on the side of the Naikū, illustrated adjacent to a hall labeled “Kora no tachi,” in the fourteenth century *Ise ryōgū mandara* 伊勢両宮曼荼羅 (Nara National Museum), a painting heavily influenced by Shingon Ryōbu Shintō. A large cedar tree in front of the Gekū is labeled *Ioe sugi*; Kūkai is shown floating above.

42 Yamamoto Hiroko describes this episode as a dream by a Naikū priest, Arakida Nobutsune, in which he receives an oracle that turns him into a believer of Buddhist law (Yamamoto 2005, p. 2).

- 43 In his *Sankeiki*, Tsūkai writes that the *kora* stands at the front of the group of Ise priests during shrine rituals, which Tsūkai interprets as sign of her importance (Jingū Shichō 神宮司庁 1935–1940, p. 40).
- 44 This poem comes right after the poem about the plum tree behind the Kora no tachi in *Oi no Kobumi* (Records of a Travel Worn Satchel).
- 45 A description of four ‘secret’ rituals performed by the *kora* can be found in *Shingon Shintō shūsei*, in the section titled “Kora daiji”. These rituals are carried out by the *kora* as they prepare the food for Ise’s kami. At the end of each of the four rituals the *kora* recite ‘Ondakinikyachikyakaneineisowaka’ オンダキニキヤチキヤカネイネイエイソワカ. According to this source, the *kora* are a boy and a girl; the boy must leave the position before his 15th birthday; the girl must leave with the arrival of her first period (Inaya 1993, pp. 166–67).
- 46 One of these esoteric (*mikkyō*) rituals, known as the Amaterasu Ōmikami Hihō 天照大神秘室, was performed by the *kora* in the food offering hall (御饌殿 *mikedono*) during the twice daily offerings to the *kami*. It was believed that if this secret practice was not carried out the emperor would become weak and lose control of the four seas. Another esoteric ritual performed by the *kora* in Ise’s food offering hall was the *sokui kanjō* 即位灌頂 (‘enthronement ritual’), which was sometimes called the *Dakini-hō* 辰狐法, (Odaira 2010, p. 293; Yamamoto 2005, pp. 12–14).
- 47 On patronage-related issues surrounding the *Ise Pilgrimage Mandalas*, see (Shimizu 2014; Andrei 2018).
- 48 The three seasonal rites were the biannual *tsukinamisai* 月次祭, in the sixth and twelfth months, and the *kannamesai* 神嘗祭 in the ninth month.
- 49 I am following the translation of *shin no mihashira* by Teeuwen and Breen (2017).
- 50 They write that the *saiō* would have “suspended the mirror of Amaterasu from an ‘abstinence post’ in a procedure similar to that described in the myth of the Rock-Cave of Heaven”. (Teeuwen and Breen 2017, p. 40).
- 51 In fact, according to Odaira Mika, the *kora* who married the *yamabushi* of Segidera descended from the *saiō* (Odaira 2014, p. 288).
- 52 For a comprehensive and in-depth discussion of *etoki* in Japan, see Kaminishi (2006).
- 53 I make a similar argument that the shape of Uji Bridge in the Jingū Chōkokan *Ise Pilgrimage Mandala* points to the Keikōin nuns’ origins as Kumano *bikuni* in Andrei (2018, p. 84).

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