

## Article

# Reconsidering the “Popular View” (俗覧 *zokuran*): Tracing Vernacular Precedents in a Modern Illustrated Hagiography of Kakuban 覺鑊 (1095–1143)

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**Abstract:** As a supplement to sermonizing, the use of images has been crucial to growing the lay Buddhist following in Japan since at least the tenth century. While it may be the case that Buddhist images, much more so than texts, have historically been better able to draw in popular audiences through their accessible means of communication, the emergence of contemporary literate audiences meant new modes of accessibility. This article explores both the textual and illustrative histories of a modern illustrated hagiography on the medieval Shingon Buddhist monk Kakuban 覺鑊 (1095–1143). By tracing earlier vernacular approaches to Kakuban’s narrative that emerged throughout the evolution of this hagiography, it becomes clear that images were merely auxiliary in their appeal to modern Japanese readers and that such an appeal had been a consideration for generations of Buddhist compilers. This example draws attention to the mutually constitutive relationship between otherwise traditionally distinct functions of text and image in Japanese Buddhist hagiography, but also common conceptual divisions between lay and monastic experiences and popular and elite reading practices.

**Keywords:** illustration; hagiography; textual history; Shingon Buddhism; 19th century



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## 1. Introduction

This article explores the vernacular history of the illustrated hagiography *Kōgyō Daishi gyōjō zuki* 興教大師行狀圖記 (1888; hereafter, *Gyōjō zuki*), which is focused on the medieval Japanese Shingon monk Kakuban 覺鑊 (1095–1143). Illustrations added to this hagiography appealed to popular readers beyond the monastery by providing a visual representation of Kakuban’s life alongside the text. While it can be valuable to observe these breaks between textual and visual audiences and vernacular and formal modes of expression over time, adhering too strictly to such categories tends to obscure the multimodal reality of some written works. A closer look at the history of the *Gyōjō zuki* reveals that appeals to popular audiences were made long before the inclusion of these images and provides a counterexample to these otherwise hard conceptual divisions. The *Gyōjō zuki* emerged through a combination of Buddhist writings that included chronologies (*nenpu* 年譜) composed by priests, hagiographies (*gyōjō* 行狀) composed by religious vernacular writers, and hymns (*wasan* 和讃) meant to attract and inform lay followers.<sup>1</sup> Given these earlier appeals beyond the monastic community, the later visual representations within the *Gyōjō zuki* were not culminating appeals to popular culture through visual media, but rather part of an editorial continuum of multimodal appeals to popular culture over two centuries. The illustrated hagiography was not an end-product of a centuries-long process of visual vernacularization, whereby key biographical moments were distilled into an accessible visual narrative. Rather, popular audiences were a consideration from the beginning of this process and vernacular approaches to Kakuban’s life simply took visual form at the end.

This article situates the *Gyōjō zuki* among various expressions of text and image within Japanese Buddhism with a focus on their interrelationship and mediation by priests. It

then explores four key textual precedents to the *Gyōjō zuki* that demonstrate longstanding concerns over their popular accessibility and impact. These examples make it clear that a vernacular accessibility was the guiding principle for much of the evolution of the *Gyōjō zuki*. Finally, four illustrations drawn from the *Gyōjō zuki* exemplify this accessibility in visual form.

## 2. Image and Text in Japanese Buddhist Hagiography

In his study of sixth- and seventh-century hagiographies focused on the priest Gyōki 行基 (668–749), Jonathan Morris [Augustine \(2005\)](#) traces the curatorial aspects of the compilation process, especially as they relate to the range of interests of hagiographers. Gyōki's image within these hagiographies is dynamic and sometimes self-contradictory and shifts, across time, according to courtly sentiment, law, and social outlook. Like many hagiographies within religious cultures in and beyond East Asia, Gyōki's hagiographies are both functional and timely in their narrative service of the compiler or sponsor. Their almost exclusive focus on the spiritual prowess of the subject make them a particularly precise tool in this regard. Augustine's attention to both the variety and multiplicity of Gyōki's representations provides a helpful backdrop in this study of Kakuban's illustrated hagiography. In the case of the *Gyōjō zuki*, various versions of this hagiography came together through a similar dynamism; the interests of the compilers and their audiences varied and, as discussed below, some emerged directly out of new models of Buddhist practice aimed beyond the monastery. In a cross-comparative analysis, these preceding versions of the *Gyōjō zuki* suggest deep and varied considerations of content, audience, and reception leading up to the late-nineteenth century.

Such analysis also implicates text and image as co-constituent aspects of the compilation process. The relationship between text and image in Japanese Buddhism has developed alongside the interactive relationship between Buddhist priests and their followers, especially in contexts of proselytization. [Kaminishi \(2006\)](#) has explored the social and institutional functions of picture explanations (*etoki* 絵解き) from the late-tenth century through to the nineteenth century. Her study confronts the reality that religious images, while static in their form, come alive and adopt a range of meanings depending on the perspective of the viewer and, in the case of *etoki*, on the interests of the priest explaining the meaning of the image. Kaminishi shows how *etoki*, deciphered for lay audiences through scripted narrations performed by priests, became a medium through which religious and historical narratives were delivered directly to the Buddhist populace. Prior to and during the medieval era, when illiteracy was common in Japanese society, *etoki* and other forms of performative preaching became particularly effective for growing the Buddhist following. While the textual portions of the *Gyōjō zuki* provide ample explanation of the illustrations throughout, Kaminishi's framework helps to highlight their function, namely, how the *arrangement* of the images, along with their text, provided a narrative continuity and unified understanding of Kakuban's life and teachings. Two Shingon abbots, Takagi Gikai 高城義海 (1839–1911) and Hirose Kenshin 廣瀬賢信 (1852–1921), are named in the colophon as those responsible for the layout (*hokki* 発企) of the *Gyōjō zuki*, which suggests that the arrangement of the images, especially as they relate to the text, was a significant consideration during the compilation process.

The consumptive practices surrounding the *Gyōjō zuki* demand a similar analysis, especially given its publication during the Meiji period (1868–1912), a time of far greater literacy compared to the Edo period (1603–1868). It was also an era of Buddhist persecution, as the tradition had been temporarily restricted in its institutional, financial, and social power by policies issued by the Meiji government. To ensure its survival, the Shingon school established new models of outreach and proselytization that helped to re-imagine the social role of Shingon Buddhists in modern society, which included formalized preaching content standards, new foci on lay precept-taking and doctrinal concepts such as peace of mind (*anjin* 安心), and new efforts to benefit the nation during periods of war ([Hayes 2023](#)). Along with direct lay outreach from within the priesthood, Buddhist publishing

also became a new way to reach a modern, literate audience. In his work on the history of Buddhist book publishing in modern Japan, Hikino (2018) explains that new books broadly surveying Buddhist teachings were published in great volume beginning in the nineteenth century. Such works helped to curb a perceived ineffectiveness of Buddhist priests in communicating the basic tenets of the Buddhist tradition to the laity, while new letterpress technologies supported the quick assembly and dissemination of various other forms of public speech focused on Buddhism. Like the *Gyōjō zuki*'s original publisher, Morie Sashichi 森江佐七, Meiji-era publishers and booksellers took great effort to seize upon the new and widespread interest in communicable forms of Buddhist information and, in a reversal of Edo-period tendencies to purvey to specific sects or temples, published both within and across sectarian lines.<sup>2</sup>

The *Gyōjō zuki* falls in line with these and other efforts to directly reach lay audiences through public outreach during a watershed moment of technological change. Although the author of the *Gyōjō zuki* draws our attention to this popular appeal in his preface by mentioning the addition of illustrations, the form and content of the accompanying text suggests a similarly popular readership compared to the elite monastic audiences that tended to engage such institutional hagiographies. That is, while the *Gyōjō zuki* does explicate key doctrinal and practical concepts, it does so alongside geographical and historical details that contextualize and narrativize Kakuban's religious experience. Doctrine does not appear as abstract exposition untethered from history, as it tends to do in exegetical writing or sectarian treatises, but rather as part and parcel of the life of Kakuban, who traveled to and dwelled at specific locations and helped to materially establish sub-temples central to the Shingon tradition. In its presentation of Kakuban's spiritual career, the *Gyōjō zuki* even provides up-to-date (as of 1888) descriptions of some of the architectural spaces purported to have been occupied by Kakuban during key moments of practice. Additionally, and as detailed below, a hymnal version of this hagiography became part of a liturgical repertoire specifically meant to reach laypeople. This hymn was a crucial iteration leading up to the publication of the *Gyōjō zuki*, as lay practitioners were encouraged to embody this narrative for themselves in a ritual context. In this way, the geographical, historical, and thematic aspects of the *Gyōjō zuki* help to usher otherwise complex doctrinal ideas into the realm of relatable proximity; readers were well aware of the sites, spaces, and practices that contextualize Kakuban's spiritual prowess in the *Gyōjō zuki* and this awareness became important to the lay reception of this work.

### 3. The Vernacular Aspects of the *Gyōjō zuki*'s Textual Lineage

The *Gyōjō zuki* is a three-volume illustrated hagiography written by Ueno Sōken 上野相憲 (1832–1898).<sup>3</sup> The main body of the hagiography contains a total of thirty-seven woodblock illustrations that punctuate some of the major events throughout Kakuban's religious career. Twelve illustrations appear in the first volume, eighteen in the second volume, and seven in the third volume. Ueno Sōken prefaces this work with a mention of the addition of illustrations:

*The fruits of various explanations have been synthesized and illustrations have been added to suit the popular view (zokuran 俗覧). Recorded together, they comprise three volumes. It is titled Kōgyō Daishi gyōjō zuki and extols the rare sagely virtue of its subject.*

諸説の蘭菊を折中し、且つ圖畫を加えて、俗覧に便なら令、録して三巻と為す。題して興行大師行狀圖記と曰ふ雄、聖徳の萬一を讃欲在り。(pp. 10–11)

Ueno Sōken's mention of the addition of illustrations as suitable for the "popular view" reflects some of the presumptive connections between images and vernacular culture addressed above. Images indeed impart a level of cognitive accessibility that differs from text and, without the mediation of text, may be more quickly—though not necessarily more accurately—interpreted for meaning. And yet, one needs only look to Kaminishi's work on *etoki* to understand that images may not always convey a direct or uniform mean-

ing to all audiences and that mediation (e.g., through an accompanying text or a sermonizing priest) is also necessary to impute the intended meaning to the image. In this same regard, the mutually supportive function of text and image, especially when arranged side-by-side within a work like the *Gyōjō zuki*, also complicates the hard divisions often attributed to text and image in their conveyance of meaning.<sup>4</sup> Since the very non-textual nature of images invites an assumption of imprecision, one might easily echo Ueno Sōken's assertion that images function to meet the "popular view"; while they appear alongside text in the *Gyōjō zuki*, the images indeed provide a visually coarse accompaniment, often sparsely depicting a single moment from an otherwise lengthy and detailed textual description. It is perhaps no surprise that, on its surface, the direct and immediate apprehension of such images compelled Ueno Sōken to add them with popular audiences in mind.

Such divisions between text and image have also tended to dictate methodological approaches in Buddhist studies and art history. With some exceptions, twentieth-century Buddhist studies scholars have generally privileged textual approaches to the tradition and have focused on the historical, philological, and doctrinal content of textual recensions across and beyond Buddhist Asia. This is to say nothing of the saturation of logocentric methodologies wielded in religious studies more generally.<sup>5</sup> Art historical scholars with a focus on Buddhist art have—again, with some exceptions—generally focused on the visual, material, and social aspects of artistic production. Recent studies, however, have begun to forge a new path between and across these fields and have focused on the interplay between the textual and visual aspects of Buddhist material production.<sup>6</sup> In this same spirit, and as demonstrated in the analysis below, the compiled writings that preceded the illustrations in the *Gyōjō zuki* for two centuries involved definitive attempts to appeal to a "popular view" of Kakuban and his teachings. One example, moreover, suggests that Meiji compilers were quite liberal in their fidelity to previous accounts and sought to appeal, through both text and image, to popular audiences in their own way.

This appeal did not begin during the Meiji period with the addition of images, but during the Edo period with several key texts, the first of which is the *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* 密嚴上人行狀記 (1672). This work was written by the then up-and-coming vernacular writer Asai Ryōi 浅井了意 (1612–1691), whose writings spoke directly to the public and did so from several perspectives. His *Ukiyo monogatari* 浮世物語 (1666) encouraged the burgeoning urban class to seize upon the pleasures of life. His *Otogi bōkō* 御伽婢子, published during the same year, highlighted many of the moralistic pitfalls perceived within the society of his time (Bowring and Kornicki 1993, p. 135).<sup>7</sup> His earlier writings were largely biographical and focused, in some cases, on the virtues of "exemplary women" (*retsujo* 烈女). In his *Honchō jōkan* 本朝女鑑 (1661), for example, which was one of the first of its kind published during the Edo period, Asai grouped together short biographical accounts of women of high status, well-known female writers, and wives of officials. These accounts were composite ideals of contemporary female behavior and had a deliberate didactic function that appealed to the social concerns of Asai's readers, especially women (Yonemoto 2016, p. 25). Beyond the content of his work, Asai also appealed to wider audiences through the mixed use of kana and kanji (*kanazōshi* 仮名草子), which distinguished his writing from Buddhist institutional writing that tended to be composed in a form of classical Chinese with phonetic and syntactical notation (*kanbun* 漢文) and aimed at elite readers. Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* made similar appeals through its mixture of katakana and kanji (*katakanazōshi* 片仮名草子), which was able to be consumed by readers well beyond the monastery. By the time Asai had published his text in 1672, therefore, he had already built a captive audience of vernacular readers who, given the climate of Buddhist book publishing at the time, were hungry for accessible forms of Buddhist writing.

Asai was also a Buddhist monk who belonged to the True Pure Land (Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗) tradition and became the abbot of the Kyoto temple Honshōji 本性寺 during the last few years of his life. By and large, however, Asai is known first as a vernacular writer and, as Kimura (2015) points out, his tenure as abbot should not be taken as any indication that his motivations for writing Kakuban's hagiography were entirely religious.



Kimura traces two institutional biographies that preceded Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*. One is the *Mitsugon Shōnin engi* 密嚴上人縁起, a short biography of Kakuban published at Chishakuin 智積院 in 1663, and the other is the *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書, a Buddhist history compiled during the medieval era and written by the Rinzai monk Kokan Shiren 虎關師鍊 (1278–1346). Kimura concludes that Asai's efforts to so drastically reconstruct and reorganize these two prior biographical writings suggest that he was more concerned with audience reception and impact than he was with any fidelity to religious history or sectarian concerns over the representation of Kakuban. Kimura squarely implicates Asai as a "rewriter," which corroborates the constructed image of Kakuban in the *Gyōjō zuki*. Asai was interested in a social morality and its religious expression through Kakuban's activities, but also knew that his works would not necessarily be consumed by monastic audiences alone. Given that Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* so dramatically breaks with the style and audience assumed by these preceding institutional biographies, it provides a rich site for exploring how similar appeals to the "popular view" were well in place by the time illustrations were added to the *Gyōjō zuki*.

Finally, on this issue of Asai's deliberate appeal to popular readers, Wada (2000) has shown how Asai was sensitive to publishing trends moving away from commentarial works on Buddhist sutras (*kusuimono* 鼓吹物) and toward works that more subtly integrated doctrinal explanations with the express purpose of conversion (*shōdō* 唱導) among popular audiences. As Wada shows, much of this trend was dictated by bookstores with a vested interest in sales, a phenomenon that was part and parcel of a networked world of literary production and consumption beginning in the early modern era, which is considered in greater detail below.

Another influential chronology of Kakuban's life is contained in the *Ketsumōshū* 結網集, a seventeenth-century collection of biographies on eminent Shingon monks. The *Mitsugon Sonja nenpu* 密嚴尊者年譜 (1683), written in Chinese by the monk Unshō 運敝 (1614–1693), then abbot of Chishakuin, comprises the first volume in this collection. The *Mitsugon Sonja nenpu* is a chronology in the institutional sense in that it presents, in abbreviated form, some of the major moments during most years of Kakuban's life as they relate to the historical, doctrinal, practical, and architectural development of the Shingon tradition and its temple network. The chronology is organized by age, beginning with Kakuban's birth and ending with his passing, and may have been editorialized for institutional gain. Hendrick van der Veere (2000, pp. 54–55), for example, has pointed out Unshō's conspicuous mentions of corrections throughout the *Ketsumōshū*, which was written during a time when the Shingi Shingon branch (Shingi Shingonshū ha 新義真言宗派) was lobbying for the posthumous title of "great teacher" (*daishi* 大師) for Kakuban. Chishakuin would go on to be named one of two head temples of the Shingi branch, and it is possible that Unshō enhanced or exaggerated some elements of Kakuban's biography in order to elevate his prestige.

This aspect is important, but perhaps also unsurprising in light of the function of much religious hagiographical writing. Historical legitimation has long been crucial to the image and influence of religious institutions, and such writing is one convenient way of intimately linking its subjects to the doctrinal, practical, and architectural aspects of a religious institution through a constructed historical narrative. This legitimation was of particular interest during and following the Edo period, as the Shingi branch had begun to push for its independence, eventually recognized in 1901, from what would later be called the Kogi branch (*kogiha* 古義派) headquartered at Mount Kōya. Like many of his time, Unshō went to great lengths to highlight the spiritual and social prowess of Kakuban as a way to bolster the image of the Shingi branch. As shown below, however, Ueno Sōken appears to have outright ignored Unshō's institutional biography in his compilation of the *Gyōjō zuki*.

The *Gyōjō zuki* was also influenced by liturgical writings specifically directed to lay audiences. The *Kōgyō Daishi nenpu wasan* 興教大師年譜和讃 (Tankan [1774] 1977) was written by Tankan 但觀 (n.d.) and is thematically organized and chronologically ordered, a struc-

ture similar to both Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* and the *Gyōjō zuki*. This *wasan* is divided into eighty distinct topics beginning with Kakuban's entrance into the Buddhist tradition and ending with the persistence of his teachings following his passing. Each of these topics is elaborated on through a hymnal stanza of varying length that provides detail and context. In the introduction to this *wasan*, Tankan does not mention the sources for these details by title or author, only vaguely explains that some details have been omitted, and states directly that the text has not been editorialized using his own words. While Tankan's ambiguity might suggest that he drew from an array of sources, a survey of his *wasan* alongside Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* reveals that he drew just as heavily from Asai's work as the other compilers considered here; the vast majority of the writing is taken verbatim. Just over a century later, an abbreviated version of this *wasan*, titled *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan* 興教大師略和讃 (1878), was published by Sasaki Yoshinori 佐々木義範 (1830–1878). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the condensed nature of this more recent *wasan* causes the similarities with Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* to appear even more pronounced. Sasaki's version has since been formally integrated into the repertoire of proselytizing activities among the laity and persists to this day. Even the *Gyōjō zuki*'s liturgical precedents, therefore, were innately tied to concerns over popular reception.

*Kongaku reion* 根嶽鈴音 (Ueno [1880] 1982), written by the monk Ueno Hidetaka 上野英峻 (n.d.), captures a continued concern over the reception of popular audiences in its influence on the *Gyōjō zuki*. Just two years after the publication of Sasaki's *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan*, Ueno Hidetaka expanded considerably on this work by providing a line-by-line commentary on the entire *wasan*. This was an expository technique that allowed for greater detail and may have appealed to audiences curious about the life of Kakuban. This would fall in line with efforts by Shingon priests to redefine their public image during the Meiji era and to develop new approaches to proselytizing through *wasan*. Part of this initiative also meant encouraging lay participation in a key trio of *wasan*, which included the *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan* and fostered a much more public-facing engagement with the lay population for the Shingon school compared to previous centuries. In this regard, Akatsuka (2014, pp. 62–63) has suggested that the Shingi branch rushed to publish *Kongaku reion* in order to drum up popular interest in the newly compiled and published *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan*. This possibility is corroborated by an assembly held at Mount Kōya the very year the *wasan* was published, during which Shingon clerics formalized a series of guiding principles for preaching: to ensure uniform content standards in preaching across the Shingon school; to incorporate peace of mind (*anjin* 安心) as part of the demeanor and behavior of lay followers; and to establish a uniform repertoire of lay practices, which would later include the chanting of these three key *wasan* (Koya 1974, pp. 170–71).

In addition to the efforts of these preceding writers and compilers, the group responsible for assembling the *Gyōjō zuki* was, by the Meiji era, part of a networked, market-driven book culture that had an interest in accessible sources of Buddhist information. The *Gyōjō zuki*'s illustrator, Matsushita Shōetsu 松下尚悦 (n.d.), also provided illustrations for a hagiography of Sōtō Zen founder Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) titled *Kōso Jōyō Daishi gyōjitsu zue* 高祖承陽大師行実圖會 (1893). This work was published by the *Gyōjō zuki*'s publisher, Morie Sashichi. Morie Sashichi also published other works by the *Gyōjō zuki*'s author, Ueno Sōken, such as his doctrinal tract *Mikkai jishū* 密海慈舟 (1879). Others within this group had ties to works that may have also been deemed suitable for the “popular view.” The *Gyōjō zuki*'s carver, Ishikawa Bunjirō 市川文治郎 (n.d.), for example, also served as carver for the work *Tankai* 譚海 (1892), written by scholar and literary figure Yoda Gakkai 依田学海 (1834–1909). The literary scholar Yang (2022) has argued that in its blend of colloquial styles drawn from literary genres focused on life in Edo pleasure quarters (*sharebon* 洒落本), vernacular novels (*tokuhon* 読本), and novels focused on young love (*ninjobon* 人情本), *Tankai* constitutes a diverse genre of emergent Edo-period writing contemporarily referred to as *zoku* 俗 (“popular”). This stands in distinction to literary writing prior to this period, which was informed by Neo-Confucian attitudes toward Chinese script and referred to as *miyabi* 雅 (“elegant”). Similar to the preceding compilers, therefore, the Meiji-era group respon-

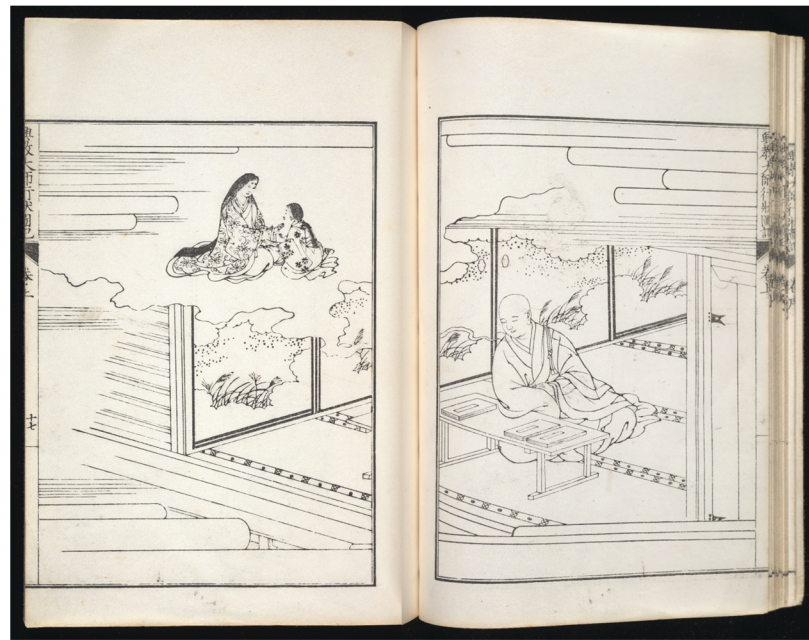
sible for the *Gyōjō zuki* were working across sectarian lines in support of a larger effort to make Buddhist figures more accessible to an emergent market of book buyers.

The above overview of the convergence of textual lines leading to the *Gyōjō zuki* reveals how the views of popular audiences were deep considerations for generations of writers and compilers. The focus on Kakuban's spiritual prowess, a quality typical of so much hagiographical work meant to reach popular audiences, as well as the linguistic and editorial decisions behind Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*, Sasaki's *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan*, and Ueno Hidetaka's *Kongaku reion*, together reveal that the "popular view" was a major influence leading up to the construction of Ueno Sōken's hagiography on Kakuban. The cross-sectarian work of both the *Gyōjō zuki*'s illustrator and publisher, as well as its carver's work on vernacular titles during this same period, further corroborates the popular appeal of this work in a booming Meiji market. This string of producers, compilers, editors, illustrators, and publishers comprised a two-centuries-long communications circuit, whereby the writers of some of the *Gyōjō zuki*'s earliest iterations, especially Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*, were responding directly to an audience of vernacular readers.<sup>8</sup> Compilers of later iterations of the *Gyōjō zuki* were readers in their own rights, and it is clear that they preferred Asai's work as a foundation for their own. This circuit ultimately led to Ueno Sōken, who purports to have added images to the *Gyōjō zuki* to appeal to popular readers, the consumptive practices of whom had, in reality, always been a part of this circuit. The following four examples drawn from the *Gyōjō zuki* further illustrate the vernacular connections between its early compilations and the addition of Meiji-era illustrations.

### 3.1. Seeing Kasuga Daimyōjin in a Dream

In a section titled *Kasuga no reimu* 春日靈夢 ("Oracle of Kasuga"; Ueno [1888] 1942, pp. 13–14), the *Gyōjō zuki* describes a pivotal moment in the religious career of Kakuban that speaks to his spiritual authority and to his relationship with the combinatory deity Kasuga Daimyōjin 春日大明神, the tutelary kami of Kasuga Shrine in Nara. According to this section, Kakuban had a dream in which he was visited by Kasuga. In this dream, Kakuban appeared childlike, as he had prior to taking tonsure. Kasuga held Kakuban in her lap and, while stroking his hair, lamented the fact that even as a treasure of the great dharma (*jūki no daihō* 重器の大法) he lacked a temple to propagate the teachings. She encouraged Kakuban to consider Mount Kōya, referred to as the "other mountain" (*tazan* 他山) in the text, as a suitable place to extend his Shingon teachings to society. Kasuga then introduces herself by name and vows to protect Kakuban and his future temple. Later, Kakuban builds a small shrine at the Denbōin, a sub-temple of Mount Kōya established in 1130, and enshrines Kasuga there. The right panel of the illustration (Figure 1) that accompanies this section depicts a then-sixteen-year-old Kakuban asleep while leaning on his writing table. The left panel depicts a dream cloud emanating from Kakuban, within which Kasuga reaches out for the much younger Kakuban.

Both Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* and Unshō's *Mitsugon Sonja nenpu* depict this episode with the Kasuga oracle. In the case of the *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*, Asai (1672, pp. 10–11) presents this episode in a section titled *Kasuga no takumu* 春日託夢 ("Dream of Kasuga") and does so with nearly identical language; save for scant uses of analogous terms, the language between the *Gyōjō zuki* and Asai's work appears verbatim, including details of Kakuban lying on Kasuga's lap, her stroking his hair, and so forth. Unshō's chronology (Unshō [1683] 1978, p. 371b), however, only briefly describes a dream of Kasuga and her encouragement for Kakuban to travel to Mount Kōya. Unlike Asai, Unshō includes no details of this scene.



**Figure 1.** Kakuban dreaming of Kasuga.

This episode also appears as one dedicated line in Sasaki's *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan* (Sasaki [1878] 1977, p. 488):

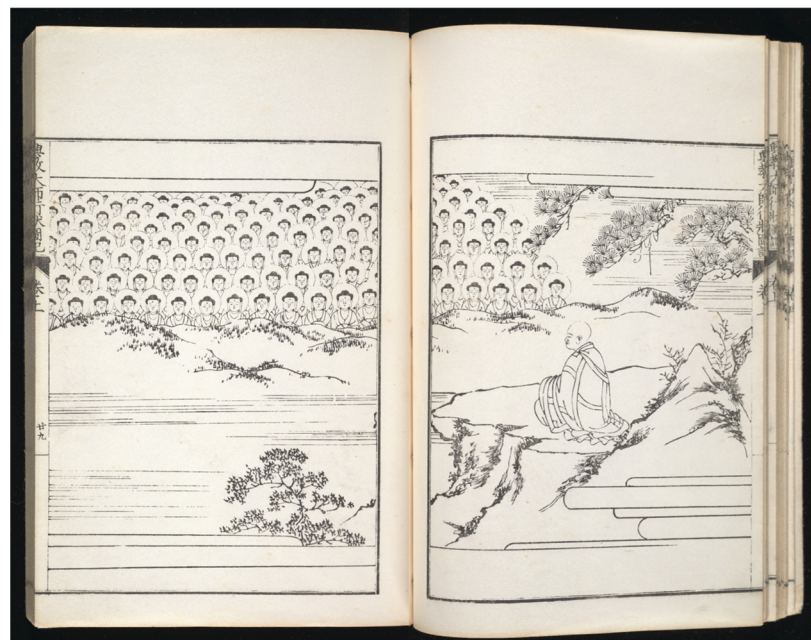
*Spring flowers on the lap of Kasuga, Ultimately a connection made*  
 春日摩頂の春の花 終に果実を結びけり

In a section titled *Gongaku to gūshō* 勤學遇聖 (“Vigorous Practice and Encounters with Sages”) in *Kongaku Reion*, Ueno Hidetaka's commentary (Ueno [1880] 1982, pp. 391–93) appears as nothing more than a verbatim citation of the entire section covering the Kasuga oracle drawn from Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*. Like the examples to follow, the above illustration of the Kasuga oracle in the *Gyōjō zuki* is not an initial attempt to present this episode in a direct and comprehensible way. The illustration captures details expressed much earlier by Asai, a vernacular “rewriter” who sought to reach his readership, rather than by Unshō, who provided no such details in his institutional chronology. These details eventually traveled down the line to a liturgical exegete attempting to drum up interest in a lay ritual focused on Kakuban's religious career.

### 3.2. Witnessing the Manifestation of Five Hundred Buddha Heads

In a section titled *Gonshū no monji* 勤修聞持 (“Retaining the Teachings through the Monji [Ritual]”), the *Gyōjō zuki* (Ueno [1888] 1942, pp. 27–29) presents another illustrative example of Kakuban's spiritual prowess. According to this section, in 1121, Kakuban had committed to a period of intense ritual practice at Rishō-in 理性院, a sub-temple of Daigōji 醍醐寺 in Kyoto. The primary ritual undertaken during this period was the *gumonjihō* 求聞持法, a ritual meant to sharpen and strengthen the memory of the individual with the aim of developing as deep an understanding of the Buddhist teachings as possible. The central object of devotion in this ritual is Kokūzō Bosatsu 虚空藏菩薩 (Skt. Ākāśagarbha), a bodhisattva associated with the guardianship of spiritual wisdom. It is also purported that Kūkai 空海 (774–835), the founder of the Japanese Shingon tradition, undertook this same ritual in preparation for his trip to China to receive training in esoteric teachings (Nakamura 1975, vol. 1, p. 274). The text goes on to describe how Kakuban returned to Negoroji 根來寺 after this period of intensive practice, at which time five hundred Buddha heads auspiciously manifested before him. The right panel of this illustration (Figure 2) depicts Kakuban seated on a bank or cliff edge. Buddha heads appear before him in this panel and extend across the page to the edge of the left panel.





**Figure 2.** Kakuban witnessing the manifestation of five hundred Buddha heads.

In this same section, Ueno Sōken provides further context by explaining that a similar experience was had by the mytho-historical Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574?–622?) and that Negoroji was thereafter known as Gohyaku butchōsan Negoroji 五百佛頂山根来寺 (“Five Hundred Buddha Head Mountain Negoroji”).<sup>9</sup> Similar to the episode of the Kasuga oracle, this section of the *Gyōjō zuki* highlights Kakuban’s spiritual authority and prowess; he is empowered by the very ritual that purportedly empowered Kūkai, visited upon by the same vision of Buddha heads alleged in the mytho-histories of legendary figures tied to the importation of Buddhism from China, and Kakuban’s vision becomes a part of the very name of the temple tied to his Shingi lineage.

This episode appears in Asai’s *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* (1672, pp. 19–20) under a section of the same title but does not appear in Unshō’s *Mitsugon Sonja nenpu* in any form. Like the Kasuga oracle episode, Asai’s work appears to be the sole source of information, as the textual description of this scene is taken verbatim. It is also significant that Ueno Sōken decided not to cut any of the additional context provided here surrounding Prince Shōtoku and the name given to Negoroji.

As for the *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan*, Sasaki ([1878] 1977, p. 489) also focuses on the immediate connection between the *monji* ritual and the manifestation of Buddha heads in the following way:

*Upon immediately reaching the height of the monji [ritual], Five hundred Buddha heads appeared*

聞持の峰には忽ちに 五百佛頂を出現し

Ueno ([1880] 1982, pp. 404–5) comments on this line in a section of *Kongaku Reion* titled *Shū to kengen no i* 修顯現異 (“Practice and Unusual Manifestations”), though again relies almost entirely on Asai’s previous accounts from the *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*; save for minor changes to a few analogous terms, the writing is verbatim. Like in the previous example, each of these agents along the communications circuit drew principally from Asai’s work in their showcase of Kakuban’s spiritual achievement. Equally notable is the exclusion of this episode from Unshō’s chronology. Taken together, these aspects suggest that the inclusion of an illustration of five hundred Buddha heads before Kakuban was considered by the *Gyōjō zuki*’s compilers an effective means of impressing upon readers the unsurpassed nature of Kakuban’s religious authority. Asai’s work provided an initial

textual entry point long before the inclusion of illustrations during the Meiji period, and one through which vernacular readers could likewise experience Kakuban's narrative.

### 3.3. Meditating on the Five Elements

In yet another visual example of Kakuban's spiritual prowess, the *Gyōjō zuki* offers a surreal image of Kakuban absorbed in contemplative practice. In a heavily illustrated section titled *Denbōin o okosu* 興傳法院 ("Establishing the Denbōin"), the author provides a deep description of the interior and exterior architecture of the Denbōin, a sub-temple of Mount Kōya that was later moved to Negoroji, renamed the Daidenbōin 大傳法院, and symbolically aligned with Kakuban's Shingi lineage. This description leads to another related to temple architecture, this time focused on Mitsugon-in 密嚴院, another sub-temple of Mount Kōya, the name of which was also later rescinded and reapplied to another hall at Negoroji. The passage describes how embankments for an artificial pond were built at Mitsugon-in, the pond filled, and that a meditation hall was built on a mound in the center of the pond. Following its construction, images of the wrathful guardian deity Fudō myōō 不動明王 (Skt.: Acala Vidyārāja) were added. Kakuban is said to have been practicing there and entered into a concentrated state (*nyūjō* 入定) focused on the five elements (*gorin* 五輪 or *godai* 五大) comprising earth, water, fire, wind, and space. The passage goes to describe how when Kakuban directed his concentration to the water element, water began to flow between the paper screens lining the walls and leaked from the ceiling. Likewise, when he directed his concentration to the fire element, flames swirled within the quarters and erupted from a star in the sky. This dramatic moment is captured in the illustration (Figure 3) that accompanies this section. In the right panel, Kakuban is seated in repose within the hall, surrounded by flowing water. On the left panel, he is depicted from a rear three-quarters perspective surrounded by roaring flames. Mist extends diagonally across both panels, unifying the scene.

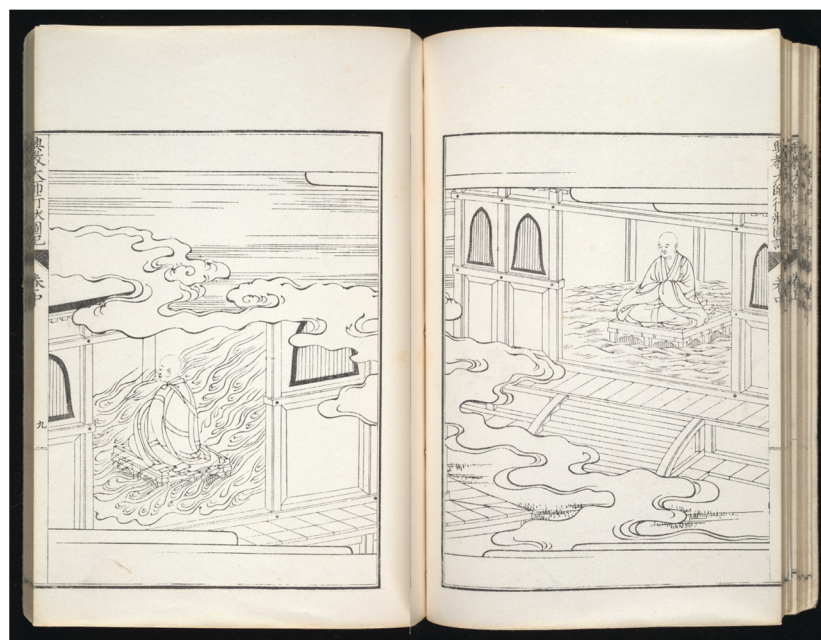


Figure 3. Kakuban meditating on the five elements.

While Unshō ([1683] 1978, p. 376b) presents this episode in the *Mitsugon Sonja nenpu*, the account appears in very abbreviated form; he only mentions Kakuban's concentration on the water element and the subsequent flooding of the meditation hall. Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* (1672, vol. 2, pp. 5–6), however, presents the exact same episode in its entirety and in verbatim language, including the architectural description, which again suggests that Asai's version was better suited for a visual accompaniment in the *Gyōjō zuki*. In

fact, one wonders if the inclusion of the entryway, walls, decorative windows, and stairs of the meditation hall in the illustration were due, in part, to the ample description provided by Asai.

As is the case with the examples above, Sasaki ([1878] 1977, p. 490) captures this moment in the *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan*. Given the mention of both the water and fire elements here, it is clear that he used Asai's work, rather than Unshō's, as a foundation:

*In contemplating the water element, water submerged [the hall], In contemplative repose directed to fire, a blaze swelled<sup>10</sup>*

水輪定には水湛へ

阿遮等至には火炎満つ

It is significant that Ueno Hidetaka's commentary (Ueno [1880] 1982, pp. 405–7) on the *wasan*, which appears as a section titled *Tokutsū to kanjin* 得通感神 ("Attaining Supernormal Powers and Receiving [Protection from] Kami"), is also taken verbatim from Asai's work. His commentary goes just as far to include the detailed descriptions of the architectural aspects of this hall and its placement at the center of an artificial pond. Given the central role that Asai's detail played across each of these iterations of the *Gyōjō zuki*, it is perhaps no surprise that many of these same details are captured visually in the accompanying illustration.

### 3.4. Composing the *Shōjigaki no mon*

While the three visual examples above represent a deep intertextual network of borrowing between and across written genres within the Shingon tradition, one example (Ueno [1888] 1942, pp. 22–27) appears to be somewhat unique to the *Gyōjō zuki*. In a section titled *Shūhō o kansaku* 修法勸策 ("Encouragement of Esoteric Ritual"), Kakuban is seated in meditation in what appears to be the inner Buddha hall (*jibutsudō* 持佛堂) of the Chōchi-in 長智院, a sub-temple of Mount Kōya located near the mausoleum of Kūkai. The right panel of this illustration (Figure 4) captures the exterior of the inner Buddha hall and includes the steps leading up to the interior space and a pine tree in the background. The left panel captures the interior space: Kakuban in reverse three-quarters view and seated facing a low table topped with offertory incense and a sutra and the lower scroll edge of what is presumably a hanging Buddha image.

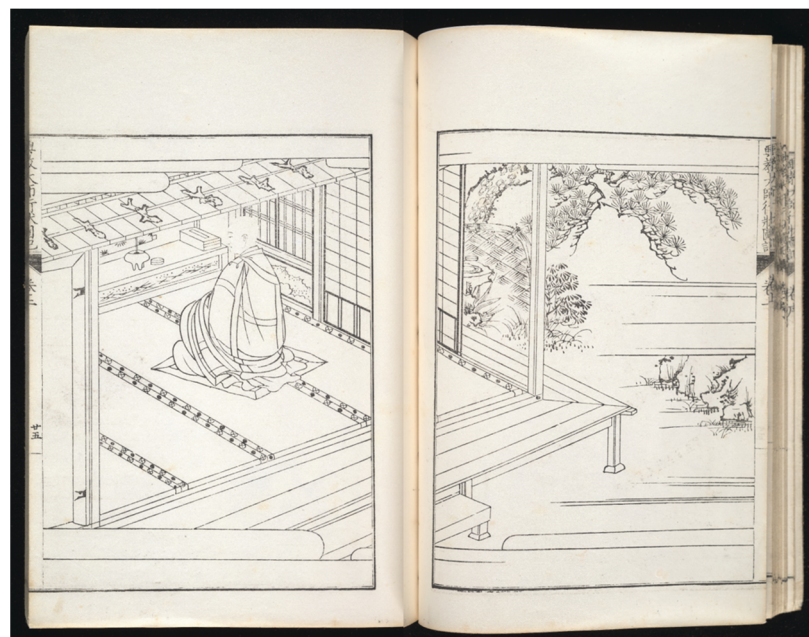


Figure 4. Kakuban seated in the inner Buddha hall.



The scene depicted in this illustration requires some context, which is offered most fully by the *Gyōjō zuki*'s accompanying text. According to the text, around 1115, Kakuban was staying at Chōchi-in and wrote a verse, later referred to as the “Paper Screen Text” (*Shōjigaki no mon* 障子書文), on the paper screen wall within the inner Buddha hall. The verse is comprised of several traditional formulations focused on the Mahāyāna concept of nonduality, and Ueno Sōken presents this text in full within this section. The *Gyōjō zuki* then goes on to describe how Kakuban's written expression of his understanding led him to commit to a thousand-day silent retreat (*sennichi mugongyō* 千日無言行).

The level of detail presented here, which includes locations, dates, sequences of activities, and the full *Shōjigaki no mon* text, is striking when surveyed alongside each of the *Gyōjō zuki*'s preceding iterations. There is no mention of this episode in Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*, nor in Unshō's *Mitsugon Sonja nenpu*. The *Kōgyō Daishi ryaku wasan* (Sasaki [1878] 1977, p. 477) offers the only substantive mention of this sequence of events but provides only a brief reference to the silent retreat said to have followed Kakuban's composition of the *Shōjigaki no mon*:

*He practiced silently for his own benefit for one thousand days, For the sake of others  
repeatedly suffered and persevered*

千日無言の自利の行 誰がため苦忍の勤めぞや

Given *Kongaku reion*'s relationship to the *wasan* as a commentary, Ueno Hidetaka ([1880] 1982, pp. 393–95) also engages this episode, but likewise provides no detail or elaboration whatsoever; in a section titled *Shōshu no tokukan* 精修得感 (“Benefits of Intensive Practice”), he simply places Kakuban at Chōchi-in and mentions his one-thousand-day period of silent practice.

Ueno Sōken's provision of this sequence of activities, his inclusion of the *Shōjigaki no mon*, and his decision to provide an illustration of an otherwise relatively unknown narrative detail suggests his deliberate coordination with the illustrator and those responsible for the layout of this hagiography to construct a portion of Kakuban's narrative. As in each of the above examples, Kakuban's spiritual prowess and religious innovation are on full display for readers, and yet this example demonstrates how altogether new images—both conceptual and literal—can emerge by situating scant biographical details within a much larger religious and institutional narrative.

It is difficult to say from which prior work Ueno Sōken may have learned about and ultimately borrowed the verses for the *Shōjigaki no mon* for this section of the *Gyōjō zuki*. Hendrick van der Veere (2000, p. 33) describes how, in a reversal of the sequence described above, several scholars believe that it was the thousand-day silent retreat that prompted Kakuban's composition of the *Shōjigaki no mon* and that such early biographical details appear in *Kōyasan Daidenbō-in hongan reizui narabi ni jika engi* 高野山大伝法院本願靈瑞竝寺家縁起 (Kakuman [1292] 1977, p. 10; often abbreviated as *Reizui engi* 靈瑞縁起), written by Kakuman 覺滿 (n.d.). Unfortunately, the *Reizui engi* provides no details surrounding the *Shōjigaki no mon*, but simply places Kakuban at Chōchi-in during this same period. It remains unclear from which text Ueno Sōken may have cited the full verses from the *Shōjigaki no mon*.

This portion of the *Gyōjō zuki* is also an example of the co-constituent qualities of text and image. The image of Kakuban seated in the inner Buddha hall provides only an uncontextualized glimpse of his larger hagiographical narrative, which includes his candid and authoritative written expression of the heart of Mahāyāna teachings, and his delivery of this expression in physical proximity to Kūkai's mausoleum. Without the accompanying text, this illustration could suggest any number of scenarios, and, in this way, it is the inclusion—or, in this case, the invention—of text that imparts a narrative function to this illustration. Perhaps more so than the examples above, this example runs counter to Ueno Sōken's statement that his inclusion of illustrations was appropriate in meeting the “popular view”.



#### 4. Conclusions

Returning to Ueno Sōken's preface to the *Gyōjō zuki*, it appears that illustrations met the "popular view" only insofar as they drew from similar considerations expressed for more than two centuries prior. There are clear textual connections between the *Gyōjō zuki* and the four textual examples analyzed above. In each case, Asai's *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki* provided the primary source of information, which was re-delivered verbatim and provided much of the textual description that appears to have informed nearly all of the prior iterations of the *Gyōjō zuki*. The arrangement and content of the added illustrations, many of which include visual details presented in Asai's text alone, suggest similar connections between these earlier iterations and the visual elements of the *Gyōjō zuki*. Much of this early vernacular attention is thrown into even sharper relief when considering Unshō's general disinterest in Asai's work, to which he no doubt had access as a source of information. Equally notable, as demonstrated in the example of the *Shōjigaki no mon*, were efforts to meet the "popular view" that were not merely replicative but wholly generative. That is, compilers constructed an entirely new textual and visual episode drawn from sparse and inconsistent historical details, and, in this provision, further contextualized Kakuban's spiritual prowess among the Buddhist sites and structures in and around Kyoto.

The *Gyōjō zuki* most certainly met modern demands for communicable forms of Buddhist information, which grew alongside efforts from within the Shingon school to reach out to the public in new ways. Despite Ueno Sōken's claim, however, the addition of illustrations was not the primary mechanism by which the *Gyōjō zuki* was made communicable to popular audiences. Rather, generations of compilers saw in the work of Asai Ryōi an equally rich and deliverable narrative that situated Kakuban's religious achievements within the broader milieu of early-modern Buddhist architectural sites, regional temple networks, and lay-oriented practices. This case encourages future approaches to other illustrated hagiographies in modern Japanese Buddhism with a similar attention to their earlier textual histories. Other works may have had similar vernacular precedents, which may help to further dissolve the overreliance on hard categories of text and image, but also of lay and monastic engagements with modern Buddhist book culture.

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#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Hendrick van der Veere (2000, p. 13) translates *gyōjō* as "necrology." *Gyōjō* of Buddhist figures were indeed compiled posthumously, but "necrology" places emphasis not on the behaviors and activities of the subject, as conveyed by the two characters (*gyōjō*行状, "behavior records") in this compound, but rather on the deceased state of the subject. "Behavior records" could provide an etymologically precise picture of these written and illustrated works, though "hagiography" is used in this article to better emphasize their constructed nature.
- <sup>2</sup> While Morie Sashichi published general works on Buddhist iconography, such as the *Zōho shoshū Butsuzō zui* 増補諸宗佛像圖彙 (1783) by Kino Shūshin 紀秀信, they also published heavily within the Shingon and Sōtō Zen schools. For an overview of dozens of Sōtō works published by Morie during the Meiji era, see Kawaguchi (1988).
- <sup>3</sup> In order to avoid confusion, the full names of both Ueno Sōken and Ueno Hidetaka (introduced below) are provided throughout, rather than their surnames alone.
- <sup>4</sup> These hard divisions emerge, in part, through what Jacques Rancière and Elliott (2009) calls the "identitarian alterity of resemblance," which continually undermines aspects of mediation and complementarity shared between text and image. The capacity for images to *resemble*, rather than depict, reality relegates them to categories of mere imitation and suggestion. Images can more easily produce discrepancies and, for this reason, tend to be classified as a "coarser" but more readily apprehensible medium compared to text. As I show below, however, the vernacular appeals made in preceding textual versions of the *Gyōjō zuki* complicate this picture insofar as text, not image, was the initial medium through which compilers sought to reach popular audiences.
- <sup>5</sup> Tracy (1998, pp. 384–85) has described the scholarly tendency in religious studies to focus on written texts in Western monotheistic religions, but also in religions of Asia. This has gone hand-in-hand with historical tendencies to marginalize traditions, often deemed "archaic," for which non-written materialities and expressions of religiosity are more important than writing.

- Recent English-language studies focusing on the interplay between text and image in Japanese Buddhism include Bodiford (2006), Wakabayashi (2012), Winfield (2013), O’Neal (2018), and Moerman (2022).
- There exists a spurious preface attributed to Asai long after the initial publication of the *Mitsugon Shōnin gyōjōki*. Ishikawa (2012) has shown how this preface only appears in one of three extant versions of the work. The content of each of these versions is identical, but two of three are comprised of differently arranged versions of the second and third volumes. Oddly, a preface was added to the end of the second volume in one of these variant arrangements. The general chronology of the content also takes different form in this same arrangement. Given these details, Ishikawa suggests that readers should be suspicious of the preface’s ties to Asai. Ishikawa’s argument is sensible but also notable insofar as it demonstrates a historical interest in diversifying the provenance of works attributed to Asai.
- This model of a communications circuit was first proposed by Robert Darnton (1982), who argues that book production comprises a reflexive loop of expression and reproduction; authors are readers themselves, and thus their consumptive practices influence their own contributions to the styles, forms, and genres of a given book culture. Thereafter, the support and criticism from the author’s readership goes on to shape their future publications. This model is particularly helpful for considering the terrain of Meiji-era publishing because it conceives of book production as a social act that involves not just the author and their expression, but also their interactive relationship with readers, publishers, booksellers, illustrators, and other stakeholders within the book market. This would also include the influence of the bookstores raised earlier with regard to Asai’s reactions to the publishing trends of his time. In his recent work on the anti-Buddhist polemics of Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基 (1715–1746), Eric Tojimbara (2022) has demonstrated how communications circuits can also emerge from specific works and, in this way, provide the basis for an evolving public discourse. Tojimbara’s focus on single publications is also helpful in light of this consideration of the *Gyōjō zuki* since, as shown below, the Meiji-era group responsible for its assembly found ways to include their own interpretation of Kakuban’s religious career.
- Chishakuin, the co-head temple of the Shingi lineage, also adopted this suffix in its title following its establishment in 1601.
- Asha 阿遮 is a transliteration of the Sanskrit Acala (Jpn: Fudō), which is a wrathful deity often associated with protection of the dharma. The room where Kakuban is said to have committed to this contemplation was adorned with images of Acala, but the figure is also most often associated with the element of fire. The translation takes the term in this symbolic sense.

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