

*On the Stolen Bronze Buddha Which Gave an  
Extraordinary Sign and Identified a Thief<sup>1</sup>*

In some part of Hine district, Izumi province 和泉國日根郡,<sup>2</sup> near a highway, there lived a thief whose name is unknown. Evil-natured, he lived by robbery and had no faith in the law of karmic causation. He would steal metal from temples to make into strips and sell.

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, a Buddhist image of Jin'e-ji 盡惠寺<sup>3</sup> in that district was stolen by the robber. One day a man passed on horseback along the north side of the temple. He heard a voice crying, "Ouch! ouch!" The man on horseback, thinking someone was being hit, galloped forward in the direction of the voice, which faded out as he came closer. He stopped the horse to listen, but he heard nothing except the sound of metal being hammered. Therefore he passed on by the place. As he went further along, however, he heard the same cry. He could not bring himself to ride off; he returned but again he heard no cries, only the sound of hammering. Suspecting that there had been a murder or at least some evil scheme, he wandered about for a while and sent his attendant to peer secretly into the house. The attendant saw a man cutting off the limbs and chiseling the neck of a bronze Buddha that had been laid on its back.

On the spot he caught the man and asked him, "To which temple does this Buddha belong?" He said, "This is the Buddha of Jin'e-ji." At that, a messenger was sent to the temple to ask about the Buddha, and he learned that it had been stolen. The messenger reported the whole affair in detail. Both the monks and patrons of the temple came to the spot and, surrounding the broken Buddha, wailed, "How pitiful! How dreadful! What fault caused our great master<sup>4</sup> to suffer such a disaster? If the sacred image were at the temple, we would look up to it as our master. Since it is broken, what shall we revere as our master?"

The monks purified a palanquin to enshrine the broken Buddha, held a tearful funeral service<sup>5</sup> at the temple, and let the thief go with-

1. Cf. *Konjaku monogatari* (XII, 13).

2. Present Sennan-gun, Ōsaka-fu.

3. Unidentified.

4. *daishi*; see II.17, n. 6.

5. *mogari*, funeral rite before burial; see Chap. II(3)a. They treated the broken Buddha like a human being.

out punishment. But the man who had caught the thief sent him to court, where he was imprisoned.

We learn indeed that the Buddha performed a miracle in order to stop evil and that the Buddha's spirit responds to utmost devotion! In the twelfth volume of the *Nehan-gyō*<sup>6</sup> there is a passage which runs like this: "I have a high regard for the Mahayana teachings.<sup>7</sup> I killed a Brahman<sup>8</sup> who spoke ill of a Mahayana scripture.<sup>9</sup> Consequently I will not fall into hell hereafter." Another passage in the thirty-third volume of the same scripture<sup>10</sup> speaks to the same effect: "Those of the *ichisendai* 一闍提<sup>11</sup> shall perish forever. If you kill even an ant, you will be accused of the sin of killing; you will not, however, be accused of the sin of killing if you kill the *ichisendai*." (Because the *ichisendai* slanders the Three Treasures, fails to preach for all beings, and lacks a sense of gratitude, killing him is not a sin.)<sup>12</sup>

*On the Bronze Bodhisattva Miroku Which Was Stolen  
by a Thief and Revealed His Identity by  
a Miraculous Sign<sup>1</sup>*

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, an imperial messenger went round the city at night. When he was in the city at midnight, he heard wailing in the field covered with smartweed<sup>2</sup> south of the Kazuraki nunnery 葛木尼寺<sup>3</sup> in the capital of Nara. Something cried, "Ouch! Ouch!" On hearing this he proceeded in the direction of the cry, and found a thief breaking a bronze image of Bodhisattva Miroku 彌勒菩薩<sup>4</sup> with a stone. He caught and questioned the thief who confessed,

6. *Daihatsu nehan-gyō*, XII (*Taishō*, XII, 434c). 我... 心重大乘聞婆羅門 誹謗方等... 斷其命根... 以是因緣 從是已來 不墮地獄。

7. 大乘 *daijō*; see I.23, n. 13.

8. A member of the top caste of the Hindu community which was in charge of sacrificial rites. As Buddha denied their spiritual authority, Buddhism was rejected by them.

9. 方等 *hōdō*; equal to *hōkō*, *daijō*.

10. *Daihatsu nehan-gyō*, XXXIII (*Taishō*, XII, 562b). See Chap. II(2)a. 一闍提輩 永斷滅 故以是義故 殺害蟻子 猶得殺罪 殺一闍提 無有殺罪。

11. Transliterated from Skt. *icchantika*; see Chap. II(2)a.

12. Kyōkai's note.

1. Cf. *Konjaku monogatari* (XVII, 25).

2. 藜原 *tadehara*, the field of smartweed or a local name.

3. Located east of Daian-ji on the East Side of Nara. See *Shoku Nihongi*, XXXVI (Hōki 11: 14); also, Fukuyama, *Narachō jūin*, 74-80.

4. Maitreya; see Chap. II(3)b, n. 131.

“This is the bronze of the Kazuraki nunnery.” Returning the image to the nunnery, the messenger sent the thief to court, where he was imprisoned.

The dharma-body Buddha of the ultimate reality<sup>5</sup> has neither flesh nor blood. Why then did it suffer from pain? This took place only to show that dharma exists changeless. It is another miraculous event.

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### *On the Fiends, Messengers of King Yama, Who Canceled Death in Exchange for a Bribe<sup>1</sup>*

Nara no Iwashima 檜磐嶋<sup>2</sup> lived at the Fifth Avenue, the Sixth Street, East Side of Nara 諾樂左京六條五坊,<sup>3</sup> that is, in the village west of Daian-ji 大安寺.<sup>4</sup> In the reign of Emperor Shōmu he got a loan of thirty *kan*<sup>5</sup> from the Sutara 修多羅 fund of Daian-ji,<sup>6</sup> went to the Tsuruga port in Echizen 越前都魯鹿<sup>7</sup> on business, and loaded the goods he had purchased on a boat to bring them home. On the way home he suddenly fell ill and got off the boat. Thinking he would go on alone, he hired a horse and set out.

When he reached Shiga-no-karasaki, Takashima district, Ōmi province 近江[國]高嶋郡磯鹿幸前,<sup>8</sup> he looked around and saw three men half a furlong<sup>9</sup> away running after him. At the Uji Bridge of Yamashiro 山代宇治橋,<sup>10</sup> they caught up and went along with him. Iwashima asked them, “Where are you going?” They replied, “We are messengers from the office of King Yama<sup>11</sup> sent for Nara no Iwashima.” Then Iwashima said, “I am the very one you are sent for. But why do you want me?” The fiend messengers<sup>12</sup> answered, “When

5. 理法身 *ri-hosshin*; see Chap. II(3)b.

1. Cf. *Kongō hannya-kyō jikkenki* (I, Kyūgohen 13); *Sanbō ekotoba* (II, 14), *Konjaku monogatari* (XX, 19), *Genkō shakusho* (XXIX).

2. Since Iwashima lived in Nara, 檜 may be 諾樂 (奈良).

3. The southeast quarter of the capital.

4. Daian-ji was called Ōtsukasa-no-ōtera or Takechi-no-ōtera before its transfer to the capital of Nara in about 710 (see Chap. I(1)c). It was originally built by Emperor Tenmu 天武 in 674.

5. One *kan* consists of one thousand *mon*, pieces.

6. See Chap. I(1)c, nn. 65, 66, for Sutara-shū 修多羅宗. According to “Daian-ji garan engi” (*Nara ibun*, ed. by Takeuchi, I, 369), the Sutara fund was 1,668 *kan* and 61 *mon* in 747, the biggest at Daian-ji.

7. Present Tsuruga-shi, Fukui-ken 福井縣敦賀市.

8. The northern part of present Ōtsu-shi, Shiga-ken 滋賀縣大津市.

9. One *chō* 町 equals about 120 yards.

10. Located at present Uji-shi, Kyoto-fu. See I.12, n. 8.

11. 閻羅王闍.

12. 使鬼.

we looked for you at your home, we were told, ‘He has gone on a business tour.’ Therefore, we went to the port so that we might meet and catch you there, but a messenger from the Four Divine Guardians<sup>13</sup> implored us, saying, ‘You should excuse him, since he is engaged in business with a loan from the temple.’<sup>14</sup> So we let you go free for a while. We have spent so many days trying to catch you that we feel hungry and exhausted. Do you have any food with you?” Iwashima answered, “I have only dried rice,” and gave it to them to eat. The fiend messengers said, “Don’t come any closer to us, or you will be made sick by our spirit.<sup>15</sup> You need not be afraid of us, though.”

Eventually Iwashima took them home and gave them a feast. The fiends said to him, “We like the flavor of beef very much.<sup>16</sup> Will you serve us beef? We are the fiends who steal cows.” So he told them, “I have two brindled cows. Will you let me go free if I offer them to you?” They said, “Well, we have eaten much of your food. If we release you because of your kind treatment, we shall be accused of a grave sin and be hit one hundred times with an iron stick. Do you by chance know anyone of the same age?” “No, I don’t,” he answered. Then one of the three fiends, after thinking a while, asked, “In which year were you born?” He answered, “I was born in the fifth year of the tiger.”<sup>17</sup> Then the fiend said, “I heard that there is a diviner<sup>18</sup> who was born in the same year at the shrine of Izagawa 率川社.<sup>19</sup> He can be your substitute. We will take him instead. I urge you, however, to recite the *Kongō hannya-kyō*<sup>20</sup> one hundred times,<sup>21</sup>

13. 四王 *Shiō*, four deities who guard the four quarters of the world, that is, Dhṛtarāṣṭra 持國(E), Virūdhaka 增長(S), Virūpākṣa 廣目(W), and Vaiśravaṇa 多聞(N). See *Konkōnyō saishō-kyō*, VI (*Taishō*, XVI, 427b-432c).

14. This indicates a belief that business conducted with the temple funds is an act to attain merit. In Tang and later China, moneylending became a flourishing business of the temple. Michihata explains the presence of many legends on the penalties incurred by stealing the samgha property or not repaying the loan of the temple as one of the measures for self-protection taken by the monks. See his *Tōdai Bukkyōshi no kenkyū*, 539.

15. 氣, vital force.

16. Animal sacrifice is made for an evil foreign deity (II.5) or hungry ghosts such as in this story.

17. 戊寅 *tsuchinoe-tora*; a combination of the Ten Stems and the Twelve Branches used as a device to indicate the year; in this case, the year of birth.

18. 相八卦讀 *sōhakkeyomi*; literally, one who can read the features of a house or man, and the eight trigrams (Ch. *pa kua* 八卦). Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *The History of the Chinese Philosophy*, 378-395.

19. Izagawa is the name of a brook which originates in Mt. Kasuga (see II.31, n. 2) and flows into the Saho River

20. *Kongō hannya haramitsu-kyō* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (*Vajracchedikāpraññāpāramitāsūtra*) (*Taishō*, VIII, No. 235). See the *Vagaakkedikā* or *Diamond Cutter, Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, ed. by Cowell (SBE, XLIX, 109-144).

21. 百卷; literally, one hundred volumes, but translated here as one hundred times for it is a one-volume scripture.