Introduction

In the spring of the ninth year of Emperor Jomei (637), on the twenty-third of the second month, a large star shot across the sky from east to west. Then there was a sound similar to that of thunder. The people said it was the sound of a shooting star. Others said it was earth-thunder. Thereupon, the monk Min said it was not a shooting star, but a celestial dog; its barking sounds like thunder.

*Nihon shoki*

The mythological creature known as *tengu* has had a long and complicated history in Japan. The earliest known reference to *tengu* in Japan is found in the eighth-century *Nihon shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan). The word “*tengu*” originated in China, where *tian gou*, as its literal meaning “celestial dog” suggests, refers to a comet or an animal. The *tengu* popularly known in Japan today have beaks or long noses, wings, and human bodies, and are often disguised as *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics). *Yamabushi* themselves worship *tengu* as guardians of the mountains, where much of the mountain ascetics’ religious training takes place. Festivals honoring *tengu* are held at various temples throughout the country, many of which are located in or near mountains and are centers of *shugendō*, the order of mountain ascetics.

In traditional Japanese folktales, *tengu* are usually depicted as forest spirits or deities. They can be mischievous (kidnapping children from
villages) or comical (playing tricks on people who wander into the mountains). Sometimes they are outwitted by humans. In a popular folktale, a tengu is fooled by a child into trading his treasured kakuremino (a straw raincoat that grants its wearer invisibility) for an ordinary bamboo tube that the child claims is a telescope. Tengu also are known for their supernatural powers, and unusual phenomena are attributed to them. When a tree in the forest unexpectedly falls, it is referred to as a tengu daoshi (tengu knockdown), inexplicable laughter heard in the woods is called tengu warai (tengu laughter), hail is known as tengu tsubute (tengu stones), and a sudden gust is a tengu kaze (tengu wind).3

Studies of tengu date back to the work of Tokugawa (1603–1868) scholars Ogyū Sorai, Hiraga Gennai, and Hirata Atsutane, and novelist Takizawa Bakin. During the Meiji (1868–1912), philosopher and folklorist Inoue Enryō wrote the Tengu-ron (The Tengu Theory) as part of his series of studies on Japanese demons and goblins. In 1908, M. W. de Visser contributed an article on tengu in English to the Asiatic Society of Japan. These and more-recent publications by Chigiri Kōsai are the most comprehensive studies available on tengu.

In his “Yama no jinsei” (Life of the Mountains) and other works, Yanagita Kunio grouped tengu with other legendary forest creatures such as yama otoko (mountain men), yama onna (mountain women), and foxes, all of which are linked to strange occurrences in the mountains.4 Yanagita was primarily interested in the development of folk beliefs in the life and history of mountain people. He suggested that tengu were one of several images of mountain dweller created by villagers. Miyake Hitoshi, Miyamoto Kesao, and Carmen Blacker have mentioned tengu in relation to mountain worship, shugendō, and yamabushi.5

Scholarly works on tengu, primarily by folklorists and scholars of popular religion, have been attempts to define the origins and characteristics of tengu as they appear in folk tales and beliefs. However, in an effort to define tengu, scholars have overlooked the social and historical significance of the wide variety of representations of tengu and its transformations. In addition, very few historians have deemed mythical creatures such as tengu worthy of serious study. Most of the previously mentioned images of tengu that prevail in modern Japanese folk tradition are creations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or later. The earlier medieval period, however, presents tengu quite differently. Tengu assume surprisingly diverse forms in Buddhist didactic literature, histories, war chronicles, diaries, popular and court literature, and narrative scroll paintings. Tengu appear not only as mountain creatures and comets, but also as vengeful spirits that seek to bring chaos to anyone who caused them suffering, or as enemies of Buddhism who defy or
plague Buddhist priests and mislead people with their magic tricks. They also appear as Buddhist priests who failed to achieve nirvana and so were relegated to the “realm of tengu” for their conceit and worldly attachment. What, then, are tengu? Instead of attempting to define these mythological creatures for which there clearly exists no single identity, this book will explore through them the world in which they were created.

**Tengu and Evil in Medieval Japan**

The medieval period in Japan is generally known for chronic social disorder and instability, caused by the rise of the warrior class, frequent warfare, and an absence of political unity and continuity. Religion, too, underwent dramatic changes. With the widespread notion that the world was approaching the last stage in the demise of the Buddha’s teaching came new interpretations and practices within the traditional order in preparation for the “Final Age.” Tengu that appeared during this period were usually symbolic of evil or chaos. They were used by some to explain social disturbances and condemn political enemies, and by others to justify religious views. An analysis of tengu can give us a better understanding of the pluralistic nature of the values and beliefs of different classes during this turbulent period than can any attempt to examine the various segments of society directly.

In this work, I have chosen to concentrate on tengu from the late Heian (897–1185) to the late Kamakura (1185–1333), especially on tengu as a manifestation of Mara or ma, the personification of the Buddhist concept of evil symbolizing obstacles to be overcome on the path to enlightenment. “Evil” as discussed here does not necessarily refer to moral evil (aku), but rather to temptations of desire and passion that hinder one from attaining enlightenment. In this sense, evil is the antithesis of the Buddha or Buddhism. It may also refer to the more universal “evil” of pain and suffering, misfortune, natural disaster, or social disorder, and to the unequal distribution of suffering or fortune. These are problems that exist in all societies at all times; religions endeavor to offer explanations, such as divine punishment, malevolent spirits, or predestined fate. Religions also offer solutions to these problems: be a moral person, venerate the god(s) or spirits, perform proper rituals. Yet such explanations and solutions are not always convincing, and the suggested remedies not always effective.

In Buddhism, evil is often explained as a predestined consequence of karma—or acts from one’s previous lives—which operates within the continuous cycle of death and rebirth. Yet people do not always readily admit their karmic fate. Demonic figures continued to appear in Hindu and Buddhist myths as external causes for suffering and evil that cannot be
explained. One of these figures, Māra, originally an evil deity from Indian folklore, was incorporated into the Buddhist cosmology. Māra not only brought pain and misfortune, but also obstructed the Way of the Buddha. Thus Māra was designated the antithesis of the Buddha—more so than any other demonic figure in Buddhist mythology. In medieval Japanese texts, tengu as Māra often physically challenged Buddhist monks, created temptations in the minds of the trainees, caused natural disasters such as whirlwinds, were sources of illness and death, and provoked social disturbances and war.

Other demonic creatures representing evil can be found in medieval Japanese literature, the most obvious being oni (often translated as “ogre”)—and not all tengu images fit into any one category. Focusing on a particular dimension of tengu risks undermining its pluralistic nature, but there are several good reasons for doing so. First, tengu as a manifestation of ma is the most predominant representation of tengu in medieval Japan as far as literary sources of the period are concerned. This is not surprising because Buddhist thought and institutions played a major role in the religious, intellectual, social, and political life of the times. Nevertheless, Buddhist images of tengu have not formed the basis of any study of tengu until now. Second, this book investigates not only tengu images, but also the concept and use of evil in medieval Japan. Representations of evil are often constructed to explain phenomena that disrupt society. Identifying those who disturb social order as evil (usually challengers or defiers of authority) legitimizes the institution seeking to determine that order. Through a close examination of tengu, we will see what Buddhist institutions defined as evil and how they used the rhetoric of evil to justify their own positions and marginalize others. Finally, although focusing on a single dimension of tengu, this work will also deal with a variety of tengu images that evolved as symbols of ma over several centuries. The dimension of tengu discussed in this book is in itself a plurality that reveals the diversity and complexity of Buddhist notions of evil.

“Reading” the Tengu zōshi

This book is divided into two parts: Part 1, “Tengu and Buddhist Concepts of Evil,” discusses Buddhist appropriations of tengu in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries in relation to the concept of ma. Chapter 1 explores the transformation of tengu from a possessing spirit rooted in indigenous folk beliefs to a symbol of ma that can only be conquered by Buddhist monks, and looks at how the latter became firmly established by the late Heian. The concepts of madō and tengudō, developed by the Buddhist clergy as one of the many solutions to the degenerations of the Final Age, are examined.
in Chapter 2. These early chapters demonstrate how *ma*, as much as it is a religious construct, is also a social construct. Multiple interpretations of *ma* developed in response to social changes and challenges to the Buddhist community. *Tengu*, too, were assigned numerous images in response to the challenges faced by Buddhism to bolster its legitimization.

Part 2 focuses on the *Tengu zōshi*. Also known as the *Shichi tengu-e* (Seven *Tengu* Scrolls), the *Tengu zōshi* is a set of narrative scrolls (*emaki*) dated to A.D. 1296. It consists of the Kōfukuji, Tōdaiji, Enryakuji, Onjōji, and Tōji (which includes scenes from Daigoji and Kōyasan) scrolls, and the two so-called “Miidera” scrolls. The first five scrolls, as their titles suggest, refer to prominent Buddhist temples in Nara and Kyoto, and each depicts its monks as *tengu*. The first of the two Miidera scrolls begins with three short tales about *tengu*, followed by a scene in which Ippen (1239–1289), the founder of the new Ji school of Pure Land Buddhism, and the itinerant Zen monk Jinen Koji (literally the Layman Jinen; d.u.), appear as *tengu*. The final scroll begins with a scene in which *tengu* from every sect gather and resolve to build a temple, engage in practice, and attain buddhahood. The work concludes by stating that all have achieved salvation.

The *Tengu zōshi* has been studied not only by art historians, but also by scholars of history, religion, and literature as a source of insight into Buddhism and late Kamakura society. Kuroda Hideo, Imai Masaharu, Kanai Kiyomitsu, and others interested in Ippen and the “new” Kamakura Buddhism have examined the scenes in which Ippen appears in the Miidera A scroll. The depiction of Jinen Koji has aroused the interest of historians of Zen as well as historians of the performing arts, especially in reference to the Nō play *Jinen Koji*. A brief reference in the Miidera A scroll has been noted by Amino Yoshihiko as the earliest source for the term “*eta*” for *hinin* (outcast), and the scene of the *eta* child catching a kite (a bird of prey) by the river has been widely reproduced in histories of *eta-hinin*. The depictions of temple activities such as the Sakura-e at Daigoji, ritual dances (*ennenmai* and *dengaku*) at Kōfukuji and Onjōji, as well as the numerous assembly (*daishu sengi*) scenes, have been studied by social and cultural historians of medieval Buddhism.

Nevertheless, most *Tengu zōshi* studies have only touched on one or two segments of the scrolls. Moreover, those scholars who have examined them in depth have focused primarily on how “new” Buddhism is represented in the scrolls. This has much to do, first, with the current trend in studies on Kamakura Buddhism and, second, with the lack of established methodology for the extensive use of visual materials such as *emaki* for historical analysis. More-comprehensive studies of the *Tengu zōshi* are now available, owing to the work of scholars of religious history and literature.
such as Harada Masatoshi, Abe Yasurō, Misumi Yōichi, and Makino Junji; the discovery of copies of the scrolls’ text at the Kanazawa Bunko Library by Takahashi Shūei; and recent work by art historian Tsuchiya Takahiro. Close scrutiny of the scrolls’ content and context suggests that they were most likely produced by those belonging to or closely associated with established Buddhist schools: their criticism of the religious community clearly stems from this point of view. It is therefore essential to pay attention to the presentation of these schools in the scrolls. At the time they were made, Buddhist institutions were confronting grave challenges. In addition to the spread of new and popular schools of Buddhism, serious reform movements emerged from within, led by people like Jōkei (1155–1213) and Myōe (1173–1232) of the traditional Hossō and Kegon sects, respectively. The Tengu zōshi must be studied within its social and intellectual contexts if we are to understand its true place and meaning in the history of medieval Japan.

The analysis of the Tengu zōshi presented here owes much to the recent development of historical iconology (kaiga shiryōron) in the field of Japanese history and the pioneering work of Kuroda Hideo. In recent years, several historians of medieval Japan have been experimenting with various approaches to the use of art, employing visual materials such as portraits, pictorial maps, and narrative scrolls as documents that must be critically “read” and analyzed within their historical and social contexts. Critical reading of pictures allows us to better comprehend manners, behavior, and conduct reflecting social status and profession, to gain an understanding of “space” as revealed in the historical landscape, and to perceive general mentality and ways of thinking. However, as Kuroda notes, no clear methodology has yet to be established, and many historians still neglect the serious reading of visual sources, dismissing them as fictions that cannot be used as credible historical evidence. The four chapters dealing with the Tengu zōshi presented here demonstrate the ways in which illustrated narrative scrolls can be used as primary sources to offer new insights into the period under study.

As with any document, we must first comprehend the Tengu zōshi’s general content, and so that content is outlined in Chapter 3. Although the scrolls do not exist in their complete, original form, this chapter attempts to grasp their overall structure and composition in light of other surviving variant texts. Detailed analysis of each scroll is also included. Next, to identify accurately what is being depicted in the paintings, we must comprehend the culturally and historically specific way of seeing expressed in them. Only by understanding the various meanings of tengu that existed at the time of its production can we truly grasp the meaning of the Tengu
Thus the examination in Chapters 1 and 2 of the different notions of tengu that developed prior to the production of the scrolls is essential for a close reading of the scrolls. For example, in Chapter 4, which discusses the use of tengu images to critique Buddhism during the Kamakura, a careful look at the scrolls reveals that the author makes distinctions between anti-Buddhist and tengudō images to express the difference in the nature and degree of criticism leveled against established and new Buddhist schools. This discovery, however, is not possible without prior knowledge of the diversity of tengu images that existed at the time (the Kamakura period, or late thirteenth century). In conjunction with contemporary historical sources and literature, Chapter 4 further identifies the specific practices of late-Kamakura Buddhist monks being criticized in the scrolls.

Chapter 5 addresses the question of the authorship of the Tengu zōshi. Although attributing the scrolls to a specific individual may not be possible, an attempt to identify the author may reveal the circumstances under which the scrolls were made and lead us to discover meanings in the images and text that may not otherwise be apparent. In addition to certain visual and verbal representations that clearly express a specific position and motivation, such speculation may ultimately uncover a line of thinking that directs us to the author. In the case of the Tengu zōshi, addressing the question of authorship prompts further analysis of the conflict between the two major temples depicted in the scrolls—Enryakuji and Onjōji—and the manipulation of Buddhist ideologies to legitimize the superiority of one over the other.

Chapter 6, the final chapter on the Tengu zōshi, explores the meaning of ma as presented in the scrolls through an analysis of visual and textual representations of tengu. The thirteenth century saw the rise of “original enlightenment thought” (hongaku shisō), a teaching known for its extreme nondualism between opposites such as man and woman, buddha and layperson, good and evil. According to the original enlightenment thought, monks belonging to the realm of tengu are entitled to buddhahood because ma and the Buddha are one and the same. Understanding the discourse of original enlightenment and its presentation in the concluding scroll reveals that the author’s intention in producing the Tengu zōshi was above all to urge reform within orthodox Buddhism.

In sum, a close analysis of the Tengu zōshi helps us visualize one aspect of the critique of Kamakura Buddhism and how tengu images were used to express this in the late thirteenth century. At the same time, the varying images and the dilemma embedded in them—of Buddhism as a way to conquer tengu versus Buddhism embracing monks that become tengu—embody the challenges faced by established Buddhist institutions of
the period. The conclusion reexamines the meaning of *tengu* and this “di-
lemma” and discusses in broader context how *ma*, the Buddhist concept of
evil is, after all, socially constructed not only to explain problems that exist
in the world, but also to justify the existence of an institution that depends
on its presence to survive. Through a reading of *tengu* images from the
above viewpoints, this book ultimately examines the rhetoric of legitimacy
used by Buddhists in medieval Japan.