

【Kosaka Kōshin Monuments】

Kōshin is a folk religion of Chinese Daoist origin with influences from Buddhism and Shinto. The word *kōshin* refers to the fifty-seventh day of the Chinese sixty-day sexagenary cycle. According to Kōshin belief, when one fell asleep on the night of a *kōshin* day, three worms that dwell in the body would escape and report on the sleeping person's wrongdoings to the Court of Destiny. A person's life would then be shortened in accordance with their sins. To prevent the worms from escaping, observers of Kōshin stayed awake all night.

Monks of the esoteric Tendai Buddhist sect are believed to have brought the ritual to Japan in the eighth and ninth centuries. Kōshin became popular within the royal court during the Heian period (794–1185) and spread widely in the 1400s. Believers kept a vigil every 60 days, for a total of 18 vigils over three years. When this cycle was completed, out of gratitude they erected small monuments bearing their own names, a practice that began during the Edo period (1603–1868).

Kōshin beliefs apply not only every sixty days, but also every sixty years. Within the sixty-year Chinese zodiac, it was believed that calamity would strike in the fifty-seventh year—the Kōshin year—during which Kōshin groups erect large monuments. The four monuments here date from between 1800 and 1980. The more recently built monuments bear only the simplified inscription “Kōshin” (庚申), but another of the monuments, which bears the image of Shōmen Kongō, a deity who protects against disease, is believed to be even older. Many Kōshin monuments were destroyed in the late nineteenth century, when roadside shrines were banned and roads were widened. Others were saved by communities who collected them in one location, as has been done here.