

The Many Faces of the Fuji Faith

Upholding Ascetic Traditions

Enrakuji Temple is located at the southern edge of the Kofu Basin, northwest of Mt. Fuji. Tradition holds that it was founded by En no Gyoja, the father of Shugen asceticism. Although accounts of En no Gyoja's life are heavily mythologized, the chronicle *Shoku Nihongi* does record his banishment to the island of Izu Oshima off the nearby Izu Peninsula in 699. According to legend, every night he walked across the waves to Mt. Fuji and climbed to its summit.

Enrakuji Temple maintained a shelter and worship hall (*omuro*) at the 2nd Station on the Yoshida Ascending Route that was used by Shugen ascetics for centuries afterward. The temple's statue of En no Gyoja, a Prefectural Cultural Property, may originally have stood in the *omuro* during climbing season.

In past centuries, Enrakuji held an annual ritual called Fujikiri, or Fuji-Cutting, on April 15. During the ritual, an ascetic climbed a wooden tower 8.5 meters high, covered in brushwood and ringed with 28 hoops made of wisteria vine (*fuiji*), to cut down the highest hoop. This officially announced the beginning of ascetic practice for the season. It may be an echo of Shugen practice on Mt. Fuji.

Today, a remarkably similar ritual is still held at Daizenji Temple on the eastern edge of the Kofu Basin.