

Shugendō Mountain Worship

Shugendō is an endemic Japanese religion that developed during the seventh century as a blend of Shinto, Daoism, Buddhism, and the worship of mountains as the dwelling places of deities, spirits, and the dead. Much like Shinto, Shugendō is rooted in a strong sense of reverence for nature, and mountain worship is believed to have been practiced in Japan long before the arrival of Buddhism in the sixth century. During the centuries that followed, the two peaks of Mt. Tanigawadake, called the “two ears,” came to be known as the home of Sengen Daibosatsu, a syncretic fusion of Buddhist and Shinto deities. A shrine to Sengen Daibosatsu was erected on Okinomimi, the northern peak. A secondary shrine (*satomiya*) was established nearer to the base of the mountain and still exists today as Fuji Sengen Jinja Shrine.

According to legend, in the spring of 1380, Okinomimi was illuminated by a strange light, and Sengen Daibosatsu appeared to a sleeping villager in a dream, saying that he would bless the village with his presence on the peak. The next day, villagers climbed the mountain to find a single cherry tree in full bloom with a mirror hanging from its branches. They built a shrine to house the mirror.

Early in the seventh month of each year, Shugendō practitioners (*yamabushi*) used to climb to Okinomimi to worship at the inner shrine of Fuji Sengen Jinja. That practice no longer continues, but a formal ceremony to “open” the mountain is performed each year on the first Sunday in July. This is followed by a prayer for the safety of visitors to the mountain.