

Child-rearing Kwannon

My pilgrimage to Zen temples in the North-East District in Japan during my stay in Yonezawa in 2002-2004 included a visit to Hakkosan-Koushouji Temple in Tachikawa Town in Yamagata Prefecture in the precincts of which was a unique statue of a mother holding a baby. The chief priest of the temple, Rev. Shōyū Maeda, who kindly served tea to the unexpected guest told that the statue was an authentic duplicate of Child-rearing Kwannon existed in Kinshouji Temple in far away Chichibu, Saitama Prefecture. According to Rev. Maeda, it was several decades ago that his predecessor and father was so fascinated when he travelled to Chichibu and saw the original piece that asked a stone artist in Amarume, adjacent to his home town, to make an exact replica.

The Child-rearing Kwannon in question has been of interest among scholars of Kirishitan (*i.e.*, Christianity introduced into

Japan by the Portuguese in the 16th century, or contemporary Christians) and is regarded as a Maria Kwannon statue in *The study of stone-made Maria Kwannon Christian Buddha statues*, authored by Prof. Shigeru Takada, of St. Paul's University, Tokyo, and published from Rikkyo University Press in 1970.

In late November, I finally paid a visit to Kouyasan-Kinshouji Temple located 70 km to the north-west of Tokyo on the west slope of Chichibu Basin where wintry mist filled the air. When I passed under the temple's gate, a spectacular scene appeared in front in that numerous stone statues of various sizes and designs stood on both sides of the footpath, on the sloping and level plots and everywhere. When looked back, many statues of Arhats (disciples of Shakyamuni) were also seen on the upper storey of the gate. In the precincts, there were several halls which housed fine statues of Jizō (skt. *Ksitigarbha*) and other Buddhist saints. The statue of Child-rearing Kwannon found on the verandah of the main hall did not look like a religious icon, save that she was wearing a crown, sitting on her bottom and exposing her upper body to the breast to suckle a baby. On the foot of the pedestal were inscribed, "The 4th year of Kwansei (1792), Yoshinoya Hanzayemon, etc."

The chief priest, Rev. Ryūgo Nakai was busy in the garden of another nearby temple, Kougakusan-Koumyouji, of which he was also in change, to prepare for the winter, when I went there. He stopped his hand and told me the legends. It is said that most of those statues in Kinshouji Temple including the Child-rearing Kwannon were brought in by ordinary people during Tenmei and Kwansei Eras (1781-1801) and as many as 3,800 pieces were carved to the order of customers by artisans who had their workshops in front of the temple, while some one thousand and several hundred pieces remained to date. Yoshinoya Hanzayemon, was a rich merchant in Yedo (the present-day Tokyo). Although he and his wife had no child ever since their marriage, after the couple visited here and prayed to the Eleven-face Kwannon, *i.e.*, the principal icon of the temple, they were blessed with a son when the husband was over fifty and the wife was forty-seven years of age. Before long, however, both the baby and mother passed away one after another. Hanzayemon had decided to dedicate a special statue for the memory of the deceased and, sparing no costs, asked an Ukiyo-e artist to draw a design and took it to the master artisan in Chichibu. It is assumed that the artist might have had some knowledge of Christianity, even though it was almost 180 years after the prohibition of Kirishitan by the Tokugawa government (1614), and superposed the image of Hanzayemon's late wife and son to that of the Virgin Mary and Infant Jesus. Answering to my question, Rev. Nakai told that no tradition of Kirishitan was heard in Chichibu district.

Myself is of opinion that whether one thinks of a Child-rearing Kwannon as a Maria Kwannon should rest with his or her belief. Kwannon (skt. *Avalkiteshvara*) was originally not but a goddess of mercy and, as Rev. Nakai agreed, her statues and pictures depicted before the story of the Mother and Infant was introduced into Japan in the 16th century held no child. It is interesting to note that the sex of the baby held by Child-rearing Kwannon is always male as far as I have ever seen.

Namo Buddha!



Child-rearing Kwannon statue (replica)
in Hakkosan-Koushouji Temple,
Tachikawa Town, Yamagata Pref.
(15 February 2004)



The approach path to the main hall in
Kouyasan-Kinshouji Temple, Chichibu
(27 November 2007)

(裏面邦譯)

子育て観音

私が2002-2004年の米澤滞在中に巡禮した東北地方の禪寺の中に、境内にユニークな赤子を抱いた母の像のある白狐山光星寺(山形県立川町)がありました。方丈の前田照雄師は不意の客を親切に茶で遇しながら、其の像は遙か遠方埼玉県秩父の金昌寺にある子育て観音の複製品であると話されました。前田師によれば幾十年か前、彼の前任者であった尊父は秩父に旅行された折に元の像を見て魅せられ、立川の隣町余目の石の藝術家に正確な複製を造るやうに依頼されました。

問題の子育て観音は切支丹(16世紀に葡萄牙人によって日本に傳へられた基督教、又は當時の基督教徒)研究者の間で関心が持たれ、立教大學高田茂教授著、1970年立教大學出版會刊行の「石のマリア観音耶穌佛の研究」ではマリア観音と見做されてゐます。

11月の末、漸くにして私は東京の西北70軒、冬めいて霽掛った大氣に満たされた秩父盆地西斜面の高谷山金昌寺に詣でました。山門を潜ると目前には様々な大きさやデザインの無数の石像が歩道の両脇、傾斜地や平地の至る所に立つ目を見張る光景が現れました。振返ると山門の樓上にも澤山の羅漢(釋迦の弟子)像が置かれてゐるのが見へました。境内には、地藏(梵:クシティガルハ)等の立派な菩薩像を納めた御堂も幾つかありました。本堂の縁側にあった子育て観音の像は、お尻を着いて座り、上體を胸まで開けて授乳してゐて、冠を着けてゐる以外、とても宗教的な御像らしくは見へないものでした。臺座の下部には「寛政四年(1792)、吉野屋半左衛門、云々」と刻まれてゐました。

方丈の中井隆吾師は兼務する近くの別の寺、向嶽山光明寺の庭で冬支度に御多忙でしたが、私が伺ふと、手を休めて傳承を話して下さいました。子育て観音を含む金昌寺の石像は天明、寛政年間(1781-1801)に市井の人々によって寄せられたもので、3800體もの多くが寺の門前に工房を構へた石工によって造られ、千數百體が現存してゐます。吉野屋半左衛門は江戸の豪商でした。彼と彼の妻の間には結婚以來子供がありませんでしたが、夫婦で此処に詣でて本尊の十一面観音に御参りしたところ、夫が50歳過ぎ、妻が47才の時に男兒に恵まれました。しかし、間もなく子と母は相次いで亡くなりました。半左衛門は亡くした妻子追悼のために特別の像を奉ずることを決め、お金に糸目をつけることなく或る浮世繪師に原圖を描くやうに頼み、其れを秩父の石工の親方ところへ持参しました。徳川幕府の切支丹禁令(1614)から180年近く経ってゐましたが、浮世繪師は基督教について幾許かの知識を有してゐて、亡くなった半左衛門妻子のイメージを處女マリアと幼いイエスのそれに重ねたものと想像されます。中井師は私の質問に答へて、切支丹に纏はる傳説は秩父地方では聞かれないうと仰せられました。

子育て観音なるものをマリア観音と見るかどうかは、人それぞれの信ずるところに依るといふのが私の見解であります。観音(梵:アヴァロ-キテー-シュヴァラ)は元來は單に慈悲の女神であつて、中井師も同意されたやうに、聖母子の話が日本に傳はる16世紀以前の作の彫像や繪畫に子供を抱いたものはありません。興味あることに、子育て観音が抱いてゐる子供は、私の見た限り、全て男の子です。



山形県立川町、白狐山光星寺
子育て観音像(レプリカ)
(2004/2/15)



秩父市、高谷山金昌寺
本道に向ふ参道
(2007/11/27)