

[« Oppenheimer rehearsal Japan | Blog home | Oppenheimer plot summary »](#)

14
AUG

Fudô Myô-ô ▶

by [Professor Allan Marett](#)

Images of Fudô Myô-ô are commonly encountered by the Henro pilgrim walking in Shikoku. Fudô means literally 'not moving' and it is a direct translation of his name in Sanskrit, Acala. Fudô is an agent of the Cosmic Buddha, Vairocana (Dainichi in Japanese). He sits or stands unmoving in the midst of flames. In one hand he holds a sword with which he cuts off impediments (*bonno*) to enlightenment. In the other hand he hold a snare with which he catches delusive thoughts.



Shourenin, Kyoto ca.1150

Although his countenance and demeanour is incredibly fierce, he is fundamentally kind, because the ultimate purpose of his weapons is to free us from delusion and clear the way to liberation.

You can see something of this fundamental kindness in these images of a Fudô that I met behind the Iwayaji Temple on the Shikoku Henro pilgrimage.



Fudô plays a key role in Oppenheimer. It is he who sets the whole play in motion by sending the pilgrim to Hiroshima on a quest to find the source of the grief with which he is burdened. And it is Fudô who ultimately comes to the aid of the tormented ghost of Oppenheimer, handing him his weapons so that Oppenheimer can atone for his crimes by dancing for the liberation of all beings. Here is how the play begins.

The *waki* (secondary actor, played by David Crandall), appears and announces himself thus:

“ I am a pilgrim visiting the eighty-eight sacred places of Shikoku. In the course of my journey, a great weight of sadness has descended and lodged itself within my heart like an iron ball. Last night the Great Unmoving Wisdom King, Fudô Myô-ô, appeared to me in a vision. He told me that I must leave this pilgrim-path and go instead to Hiroshima. There I will find an ancient temple associated with foxes and an ancient priest, and that is where the root of my suffering will be revealed. Since no one here knows of this temple, I must now leave Shikoku and travel across the waters of the Inland Sea to Hiroshima.

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ABOUT THE BLOG

The Oppenheimer Noh Project focuses on the creation and performance of a new English-language Noh play, Oppenheimer, in the Music Workshop Theatre at 6.00pm on Wednesday 30 September and Thursday 1 October 2015.

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The pilgrim then sings:



He who dwells unmov'd midst flames, the great Wisdom King
Wields his sword and snare to liberate all beings
From the wheel of birth and death. Ferocious of face.
And threatening in his manner; yet to me he spoke
With fundamental kindness.

"Forever walking,
The mountains of Shikoku will always hold you
Go now to Hiroshima. Seek out a temple
Where you will find two foxes. Only in this place
Can you be liberated from your heavy heart."

At Fudô's command
I cross the dark'ning waters of the Inland Sea.

Fudô appears again towards the end of the play when he reveals himself to Oppenheimer after he has entered the flames of Hiroshima. The *tsure* (companion actor) played by Akira Matsui will wear a Fudô mask made by Hideta Kitazawa (who is also making a new mask for the main character (*shite*), Oppenheimer).



Photo by Sohta Kitazawa.

Fudô declares:



I wield the sword of freedom. I liberate all beings.
I wield the rope to ensnare all mistaken views.
By my power this humble pilgrim brought you to me
Take now these weapons that all may be freed from pain.

Oppenheimer takes the weapons and dances ("Unmoving midst the flames I dance to save you all.")
The dance continues through the following text, which is sung by the chorus.



One stroke of Fudô's sword:
Cuts away five hundred lives of error.
Snared by Fudô's rope:
Foxes and demons lose their power.
Each flash of sword
Cuts off ignorance.
Each cast of snare
Brings peace to tortured hearts.
Dancing for all beings,
The great unmoving one
Dancing for all beings,
The great unmoving one.

And so the play ends.

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