Dai-tengu and Shō-tengu in the Iconography

As we have mentioned above, the tengu appear in Japanese literary texts from the late-eleventh century but they do not seem to feature in the iconography until the mid-fourteenth century. As stated earlier, this study focuses on the proposed origins of the tengu set against the introduction of shamanism into early Japan, its metamorphosis and partial assimilation into the Buddhist mikkyō amongst the proto-yamabushi, and finally, the forms of the tengu as otsukai of Marishi-ten in the martial sphere. It is the iconography that is of interest here.

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In order to find a wide range of tengu images we must turn to the illustrated honzon, or ‘prayer images’, that are purchased by devotees at some shrines in order to assist them in visualizing the deity during prayer. Some of these honzon are quite spectacular and contain many figures of both dai-tengu and shō-tengu. While these images are not strictly within the proper martial compass, they are of a great help in understanding the wide range of visual concepts once current in Japan; at the same time, these images are only partially within the field of the folklore. However, they do form, collectively, a basis for evaluating the tengu visualizations that appear in the tora-no-maki scrolls of a good number of classical ryū-ha. While they have a clear connection with the Buddhist mikkyō, these honzon are to be found at Shugendō-associated shrines, but are they linked to the cult of Marishi-ten? A close examination of the symbols carried by the shō-tengu, in particular, reveals a number that are directly
Fig. 25 Spectacular Honzon. A large honzon replete with Shugendo tengu figures including the sun, new and full moon symbols, the gōma blazing up in the centre, two dai-tengu and many (fifteen in total) shō-tengu; curiously, most of the shō-tengu exhibit strong connotations with esoteric Buddhism (Haguro-yama, Yamagata-ken). This honzon will provide the devotee with ‘seven thousand days of protection’. It is a charm against misfortunes related to fire and water. The dai-tengu on the right is named Sankō-bō and his hawk-headed companion with the staff is ‘Water-tengu’ Dankō-bō. He will banish ill-fortune.