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“O-take Dainichi Nyorai, an Unlikely Shugendo Icon”
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In 1849 a degaichō (public display of a religious artifact) at Ekōin in Edo drew enormous crowds. The object of the display was a statue of O-take Dainichi Nyorai, which had been brought from Hagurosan in the province of Dewa (now Yamagata prefecture). The event spawned a vast output of woodblock prints, notably by Kuniteru, Yoshitora, Sadahide and Kuniyoshi among others, as well as popular literature and even a kabuki play. This deity was no traditional divinity however, but a simple servant woman noted for her piety, frugality and generosity to the less fortunate. She is said to have died in 1638 and buried at a small sub-temple of Zōjōji called Shinkōin. How this essentially Edo figure became connected with Haguro Shugendo is the theme of this talk.