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| 会議概要（会議名，開催地，会期，主催者等） | ハワイ州マウイ，2000年11月 |
| page range | 85-104 |
| year | 2007-06-01 |
| シリーズ | International Symposium in North America 2000 |
| URL | http://doi.org/10.15055/00001446 |

The Creation of Fabricated Myths in the Medieval Age: An Examination of *Shintōshū*, Histories (*Engi*), Noh Plays, and Other Sources

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Translated by Paul VARLEY

Historians have been slower than scholars of Japanese literature and folklorists to pay serious attention to medieval materials of a historical nature that were compiled for temples and set down in illustrated history scrolls (*engi emakimono*) in a collection called the *Shintōshū* (Anthology of Legends Concerning Deities), and in scripts of noh plays. In this essay I take these materials as my texts and attempt an analysis. I give particular attention to Agui Temple, which, at the request of small and middle-sized temples and shrines in the various provinces, compiled the histories contained in *Shintōshū* and other works, and I look at the writings of Sanjōnishi Sanetaka (1455–1537) and other courtiers who composed the texts for the histories of various temples and shrines and for illustrated narratives. I shall examine the kinds of supplications from people high and low that these gods and buddhas appeared in response to, who created the tales, who recited them, and the kinds of effects they had.

Introduction

Various entertainers in medieval society are said to have narrated the histories of temples and shrines (*engi*). *Shirabyōshi* (female performers of song and dance who dressed in white men's garments) and noh actors were among these transmitters of stories about the past. Just as the *kusemai* passages in noh plays told of the origins of these religious institutions, the *shirabyōshi*, relating the blessings of the sacred images of temples and the details of how the deities of particular shrines came to be worshipped, aroused the religious sentiments of the people. The Christian missionary Luís Fróis (d. 1597),¹ who came to Japan in the sixteenth century, said that the *kusemai* passages resembled the European Romances; and, indeed, the histories of temples and shrines were like the stories in the collections of medieval English Romances.² We no longer know what the genre of histories of temples and shrines, such as the *Jisha no hon'en* (Origins of Temples and Shrines) that the *shirabyōshi* narrated, were like. But among *kusemai* there remains *Mai no hon* (Texts for Kōwaka Dances), which can be regarded as containing representative ballad-dramas (*kōwakamai*). In the noh play *Hyakuman*, the leading actor (*shite*) is made to dance the *kusemai* as the title character, a famous female *kusemai* dancer. She is recreated in the form of one explaining the blessing of the principal deity of the Shakadō of Seiryōji Temple—the Shaka statue brought over from India through China to Japan. In addition, things that have entered the noh theater in slightly altered form and noh plays themselves—god plays—narrate the histories of temples and shrines and recreate the forms of various deities.

Within the *Shintōshū* and these other collections of tales, those that relate the histories of deities are lumped together under the title of medieval myths. Some of the tales were

forgotten over time, and others were discredited or delegitimized during the Meiji period when many shrines were amalgamated. However, even today there exist legitimate histories of temples and shrines based on “truth stemming from falsehood,” and many are those who believe as truth the stories told in the medieval myths. We can regard these as cases of myths created by medieval people that continue to live today.

Scholars of Japanese literature (*kokubungakusha*) have studied these histories of temples and shrines within tale collections (*setsuwa-shū*) based on *Shintōshū*³ and *otogi zōshi* stories.⁴ A good deal of research has also been done on the scripts of noh plays⁵ and *kusemai*.⁶ Folklorists (*minzokugakusha*) have entered into territory that might have been regarded as the preserve of historians, examining the histories as expressions of folk belief. And recently, study of the histories has also been advanced by scholars in the flourishing field of iconography who have “read” the illustrations as sources providing glimpses of actual realities that are not described in the written records.⁷ However, no one has looked at these tales, illustrated histories, and noh plays from the point of view described above—that is, no one has yet considered this rich material as the set the questions raised here. I wish to begin to fill the gap by reconsidering some of the conclusions other scholars have reached.

The Creation of Gods and Buddhas and Myths

During the medieval age there were, of course, deities with established lineages, as found in *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, and temple buddhas worshipped by the country as a whole, the imperial family, and the courtier and warrior elites. But what is of concern here are those nameless *kami*, including local deities (*jishujin*), deities of people’s birthplaces (*ubusunagami*), mountain deities, river deities, and deities who protect children during birth (*ubugami*), that were worshipped separately by the common folk. Of course, there were also the *kami* recorded in the register of shrines in *Engishiki*, but many deities whose lineages had not been maintained from ancient times were revitalized by a renewal of faith in them during the medieval age. Moreover, at great provincial shrines and similar institutions, myths were altered and circulated featuring deities of folk belief that had no connection with the main shrines themselves. There were also many temples that became the objects of pilgrimages because of miracles that occurred at them under odd circumstances.

In *Mineaiki*,⁸ a gazetteer of Harima province compiled in 1348, during the period of the Northern and Southern Courts, one finds a record of the events surrounding the founding of Harima’s Minodera Temple. We read that in 1313 some travelers came to Harima playfully bearing old buddha statues of Yakushi and Kannon from Saidenji Temple and, dressing the statues in straw raincoats, abandoned them on the grounds of the Fukui Estate. The people of the vicinity erected a wooden roof over the statues and worshipped them, whereupon, in response to entreaties, miracles occurred. For example, blind people were able to open their eyes and see. Worshippers flocked to the shrine—from the local vicinity and nearby regions, of course, but also from elsewhere in the province and, finally, from the provinces of western Japan. It got to the point where “the rice and money received for sacred purposes was beyond calculation.” With their eyes on the bearers of these gifts, “hundreds of *dengaku* (field music) and *sarugaku* (monkey music) performers, soothsayers, *kusemai* dancers, beggars and other pariahs” crowded into the shrine. Before long they went so far as to build a great pagoda

three *ken* square, and in 1318 sacred rites led by an eminent priest were performed at it. The priest who compiled *Mineaiki* observed that stories such as this one concerning the statues of Yakushi and Kannon were common. He found this story less than interesting, however, and expressed doubts about its veracity.

A similar story can be found in *Kanmon nikki*.⁹ In an entry in this diary for 1416, we learn that, four days earlier, the stone statue of Jizō at the Tsujidō of Katsura village in Yamashiro province became a real child who appeared in the dream of a man of Awa and possessed another man from Nishinooka. The two men thereupon built a shrine, and blind people opened their eyes and could see. Regarding this as clearly a sign of divine grace, worshippers rich and poor—more than several thousand—rushed clamorously to the shrine. Even servants of the shogun and his deputy (*kanrei*), dressed in costumes and accompanied by music, paraded to the shrine. The author of *Kanmon nikki*, Prince Sadafusa (1372–1456), found the story hard to believe; and indeed, it turned out to be a complete fabrication. The “man of Awa” was actually a local fellow who had concocted the story with a gang of seven others. When this became known, all were arrested by the bakufu.

However, this Jizōdō appears to have continued in existence; and in an entry in *Katsuragawa Jizō ki* (Chronicle of the Jizō of Katsura River)¹⁰ dated 1556.2.6, we read that in 1416.7.4 a shaman was possessed by a deity—identified as Jizō—during a ceremony at the Imanishi-no-miya Shrine. The deity divinely informed the shaman that, on the next day, a stone statue of the bodhisattva Jizō would appear in the upper reaches of the Katsura River. Sure enough, the stone Jizō suddenly manifested itself as foretold. Even today the Jizōdō stands as part of a temple of the Jōdo (Pure Land) Sect. According to the temple’s history, Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181) took one of the six Jizō statues carved by Ono no Takamura (802–852) from Kobata and enshrined it at the Jizōdō. But *Kanmon nikki* and the *Chronicle of the Jizō of Katsura River* both claim that the miracle of the statue’s appearance occurred around 1416, and so it has been believed that that was when the Jizōdō was founded. A completely false version of this tale was recorded in the *Chronicle of the Jizō of Katsura River*—in slightly altered form—forty years after the story’s original concoction.

For a more detailed example, let me cite next the case of an appeal for the shrine of the Awataguchi deity in Kyoto. I will examine the particulars of the appeal made to Ise by lowly itinerant preachers called *shōmoji*, who specialized in entertainment of a religious character. In 1452 the priests of the Grand Shrine at Ise petitioned the court to shut down the shrine of the Awataguchi deity. The priests also requested that the Urabe name be taken from Urabe Kanetaka, who held the office of Tanamori at the shrine. They gave as their reason the following:

The deity of Awataguchi did not appear in response to calls from the court or bakufu or to appeals from the nobility. It was entirely the creation of *shōmoji*. Moreover, the office of Tanamori was established to spread the deity’s glory to town and country. . . . They call it the present-day manifestation of the god of Ise, and have already built many small shrines to the deity here and there on the roadside.¹¹

The *shōmoji* preachers, claiming that their deity was a manifestation of the god of Ise, had established small shrines where they worshipped the deity and called upon Urabe Kanetane,

assistant head of the Department of Rites (Jingikan), to make his younger brother Kanetaka the Tanamori at the Awataguchi main shrine. This was a movement on the part of the *shōmoji* preachers to justify their own religious practices in the name of Ise. To the priests at Ise, the *shōmoji* preachers could only be seen as people trying to diminish their authority. But apparently it was not an easy matter to abolish the movement. There appears to have been no way other than to request discontinuance of the name of the Urabe family, which was under the jurisdiction of the court. According to Seta Katsuya (b. 1942), people in Kyoto at that time placed their faith in Ise as a means of driving away colds and other infectious diseases.¹² As the priests of Ise claimed, there were many cases of the building of small shrines that were designated deity (*shinmei*) shrines. We can observe in this how folk beliefs borrowed the authority of Ise.

The shrine for the deity of Awataguchi provides a case of a shrine whose origins we clearly know. Another example of a shrine with an excellent historical lineage is the Uji Shinmei or Kurikono Shinmei Shrine. This shrine is also called Ima Shinmei or Ima Ise. *Kanmon nikki* (1416.7.26)¹³ states that the earliest designation for the shrine was Ima Ise. The *kyōgen* entitled *Ima Shinmei* speaks of how the shrine flourished and narrates how a deity was caused to fly to Uji. However, in the *kyōgen* entitled *Kurikono shinmei*,¹⁴ the governor of Ise in 904, Hattori Toshiaki, is worshipped as a deity who takes the form of an old man.

The above kinds of *shinmei* shrines appeared in and around Kyoto, and indeed in provinces throughout the country.¹⁵ It has been a principle past and present for the estates of the Ise Shrine to request separate shrines; and in lands other than these estates there also remain today *shinmei* shrines that can be said to have been constructed in a similar manner. If we ask why such shrines were constructed, the Ise Shrine will tell us that it was to obtain the offerings of pilgrims.

The Basis for the Creation of Myths

Who wrote these histories of temples and shrines and why did they write them? First are the cases of those histories that were written as side employment by courtiers, sometimes with emperors also involved. Sanjōnishi Sanetaka, who wrote both the preliminary drafts and polished final versions of histories and assisted in having them pictorially rendered in scrolls, has left detailed accounts in his diary of his involvement in these activities. Many other courtiers were also involved in the production of both histories and scrolls, but did not leave diaries to inform us of the details. I have written about this in a separate essay,¹⁶ but to the extent that it relates to this article, let us look at *Sanetaka-kō ki* (Chronicle of Lord Sanetaka) as a source for examining the writing of history scrolls commissioned by temples and shrines.

Sanjōnishi Sanetaka wrote brief texts to accompany small pictures for Emperor Gotsuchimikado (r. 1465–1500). In addition, he prepared texts for history scrolls and subscription books. At the request of temples and shrines, he also wrote new versions of their histories on occasions when they underwent reconstruction or repair. Let us look at the *Kuwanomidera engi emaki* (Illustrated Scroll of the History of the Kuwanomidera Temple) of Ōmi province, about which we have detailed information. As is well known, the painting of this scroll was requested and commissioned by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshiharu (1510–1550), who fled Kyoto during the disorder of Sengoku period and sought refuge in Kuwanomidera temple.

Sanetaka, who was called upon to write a preliminary draft of the text for the scroll, had the temple provide him with the necessary records. In his diary for 1532.1.21,¹⁷ Sanetaka lamented that “These records are not authentic; hence, I have an extremely difficult problem. What shall I do?” Yet he still completed the draft by the twenty-ninth day of the same month. That Sanetaka was able to write a most plausible preliminary draft for the history is clear when we look at the existing Kuwanomidera Scroll.¹⁸ Once Sanetaka’s draft history was approved by the shogun Yoshiharu, artists were engaged to paint a scroll based on it. The final draft for the scroll’s text was composed by the emperor, Sanetaka, and Prince Shōren’in. Because the scroll was such an elegant piece of work, it would have been improper to use it for the purpose of a temple solicitation. Therefore a copy was made for soliciting. In this way preliminary drafts and final drafts of texts for histories and other type scrolls were written by courtiers and even emperors. And many of the paintings were done by artists of the famed Tosa and Kanō schools.

Of course, many histories were also created for common people. For example, *noh* and *kyōgen* texts containing such histories were written in various places by *noh* masters at the request of local temples and shrines. As for the aforementioned *kyōgen* entitled *Kurikono shinmei*, we can only surmise the background of this play from its existing text; we do not know how it was actually created. There is a *kyōgen* entitled *Shirahige dōja*, which was written as an interlude for the *noh* play *Shirahige*. It is a comedy about the “conscriptio saint” of Shirahige Shrine who manifests his supernatural power by preventing people who have not given him donations from crossing Lake Biwa. We know that this *kyōgen* was written at the time of the reconstruction of the shrine during the Keichō era (1596–1614) to insure the success of its fund-raising campaign.¹⁹ Kan’ami (1333?-1384?) wrote *Awaji*, *Kinsatsu*, *Shirahige*, and other god plays to enhance the godheads of local shrines. Causing gods to appear, he had them recite histories during their *kusemai* dances. We may presume that many of these plays were commissioned either by shrines or by local community groups holding the authority for religious services at temples and shrines.²⁰ Let us look at one example.

Zeami (1363–1443) writes that the *kusemai* dance for *Shirahige* was “written by my late father,” and was “a text of my late father.” Clearly, this *kusemai* is the work of Kan’ami. Zeami claims that it was included within the first text Kan’ami wrote with a *kusemai* dance; that it was blended with a *koutabushi* in the Yamato *sarugaku* style; and that it was entertaining and popular. I would argue that the *noh* play *Shirahige* itself was written by Kan’ami. But the *kusemai* text is the same as a passage from *Taiheiki* that tells how Shaka Buddha and Miroku Buddha learned about the tutelary deity Shirahige and made the land of Mt. Hiei a sacred place for the propagation of the Buddhist law. We must wonder whether Kan’ami borrowed from *Taiheiki* or whether he and the authors of *Taiheiki* used the same source. In any case, it appears that the world of belief in Dual Shintō (*ryōbu Shintō*) was visualized and recreated in *sarugaku* *noh*, producing a popularity aimed at spreading belief in it to the masses.²¹

The logic behind the coming together in a covenant of the tutelary deity Shirahige and the universalistic religious beliefs of Buddhism emerged from the desires of local communal groups known as *sōchō* and *sōson* that had accumulated power at this time. The *sōchō* and *sōson* groups exercised independent territorial administration through shrine guild (*miyaza*)-type organizations centered on connections with their tutelary deities. By elevating the religious

statuses of their tutelary deities, who were at the cores of their respective organizations, the groups sought to make themselves superior to neighboring villages and also to protect themselves against the depredations of warrior power. Moreover, in acquiring exemptions from tribute levies by having their lands classified as “god lands,” they constructed independent bases for themselves.²²

The history of the Kazura River, which is separated by a mountain from the land of the Shirahige deity, is said to have been compiled in the early Kamakura period, but I would argue that it comes down to us from late Kamakura times.²³ *Kazuragawa engi* tells the story of how Shikobuchi Myōjin, the tutelary deity of the Kazura River, appeared before Sōō, the priest of Mt Hiei’s Budōji Temple, and informed Sōō that he was assigning to him the proprietary rights to the river’s land. The residents of the Kazura River area, using this history, asserted that the boundaries of their land were based on divine will and established a superior position in boundary disputes by claiming that people of the region who violated their boundaries would be guilty of sins against the divine.²⁴ The histories and noh plays discussed thus far are different kinds of writings, but both came into being through the demands of local communal groups and promised peace and tranquility for the lands protected by tutelary deities.

Kan’ami’s *Awaji*²⁵ is based on the story of Ninomiya Shrine in Awaji province and tells the tale of how, when an imperial messenger visits Ninomiya, he is met by an old man and old woman who relate to him the shrine’s history. After suggesting that they are the deities Izanagi and Izanami, the old man and old woman disappear. Later in the play, Izanagi reappears and recites the myths of the separation of heaven and earth and the creation of the land and explains why Japan is a divine land. Although it is said that the name Ninomiya derives from the fact it was the second place the governor visited on his tours of the province, those telling the story of Ninomiya offered the far-fetched interpretation that the “two” (*ni*) in Ninomiya referred to the two deities, Izanagi and Izanami. Clearly, the aim of the play *Awaji* was to enhance the divine status of Ninomiya. As for the creation of the land, it was explained as a vow of agricultural fertility based on the divine virtue in the birth of all things. It is important to note that *Awaji*’s *sashi* and *kusemai* were not taken from the eighth-century *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths but were summaries of those myths from Kitabatake Chikafusa’s (1293–1354) *Jinnō shōtō ki* (Chronicle of the Direct Descent of Gods and Sovereigns; written 1339–1340).²⁶ Ninomiya Shrine of Awaji province appears also in the late Kamakura-period scroll *Ippen hijiri e* (*Scroll of Saint Ippen*).²⁷ It is not known who the vengeful deity (*tatari-gami*) enshrined at Ninomiya is, but from the description she sounds like Izanami. In the noh play *Awaji*, the unknown vengeful deity of Ninomiya becomes the two deities Izanagi and Izanami who separated heaven and earth and created the land. Thus was the Ninomiya Shrine elevated to a status clearly superior to that of Ichinomiya Shrine, also in Awaji province. This calls to mind the temple-shrine complex (*jingūji*) known as the “avatar of the Yuzuriha tree,” an active Shugendō temple that showed much vitality during the Muromachi and Sengoku periods. It was clever how the temple styled itself as an imperially-designated temple.

Another play by Kan’ami, *Kinsatsu*,²⁸ is about a shrine in Ishii village, near Gokō-nomiya of Fushimi in Kyoto. The shrine is neighbor to Fushimi village, which has a strong covenant with a local communal organization as described in detail in *Kanmon nikki*.

The above discussion has concerned myths that arose from the solicitations of temples and shrines and in response to the wishes of communal groups. One place where such myths were systematically created was Agui Temple. This Temple had a priestly residence opened by Chōken (1126–1203) and his son Shōkaku (1167–1235) of Chikurin'in Temple on Mount Hiei, who were known for their preaching, and was a place where monks gathered to study preaching and oratory. Many confessions and sermons composed there for Buddhist services have come down to us. In order to clarify the process by which these came into being, let us take the case of Katsuoji Temple at Minoo in Settsu province. At the time of the reconstruction of its original buildings in 1243, Katsuoji paid the Agui temple more than ten *kanmon* to produce a four-scroll illustrated history scroll. In addition, Katsuoji took its main statue to Kyoto to solicit contributions, and applied the revenue of two hundred *kanmon* that it received to the cost of rebuilding its main building and other structures.²⁹

The case of Katsuoji is that of the reconstruction of a great temple. The clearest examples of new tales created as histories for gods and buddhas and used to arouse the faith in people can be found in *Shintōshū*.³⁰ On the title page of this work is written: "Compiled at Agui." As just noted, Agui was where tales and histories were created for Buddhist services. Thus, it is safe to assume that the *Shintōshū* that has come down to us today is based on work done at Agui Temple.

The *Shintōshū* (also known as *Shintō kongen shō*) discussed here bears the dates 1354 and 1358 as the time when it was being written. Hence we know that it was a work of the period of the Northern and Southern Courts compiled at Agui Temple. The contents of *Shintōshū* can be broadly divided into Shintō stories based on the principles of Dual Shintō and history-type tales derived from the idea of *honji suijaku* (the original forms have left traces). The histories can further be divided into official histories that are frequently found at great shrines and romance (*monogatari*) histories.³¹ Let us now focus on the latter. These have as their settings India, China, and Japan, and the original forms (*honji*) of their heroes are buddhas and bodhisattvas. They tell how the heroes of these histories appear in temporary forms in the world of humans and how, after undergoing various sufferings and long periods of wandering, they reveal themselves as deities (*kami*). It is worth noting that many of these histories deal with deities who are geographically located in the eastern provinces. Thus, we can say that *Shintōshū* contains stories that were either created at the request of temples and shrines, beginning with those in the eastern provinces, or came about not through such requests but as the result of solicitations by the holders of Buddhist masses and others not connected with temples and shrines.

For example, in *Suwa dai-myōjin no satsuki matsuri no koto* (The Matter of the Fifth-Month Festival for the Great Deity of Suwa)³² the Great Deity of Suwa is called the Indian Gita Daijin in the Upper Shrine and Kongō-niyo in the Lower Shrine. In *Suwa engi no koto* (The Matter of the History of Suwa), the deity of the Upper Shrine is called Kōka Saburō Yorikata and the deity of the Lower Shrine is called Kasuga Hime. However, the formal deities celebrated at Suwa Shrine have come to be called Takeminakatatomi no Kami in the Upper Shrine and Yasakatome in the Lower Shrine. They are the shrine's field-opening deities.³³

We also have a scroll known as *Suwa dai-myōjin ekotoba* (Scroll of the Great Deity of Suwa).³⁴ This was painted in 1356 at the request of Enchū, an official of Suwa Shrine. With

an introduction written by the emperor and an afterward by Ashikaga Takauji (1305–1358), the scroll was a product of cooperation with both the court and the bakufu. The text was composed by Prince Shōren'in Takamichi and other high-ranking courtiers. We do not know who wrote the final draft of the text, but it was presumably a high-level courtier noted for his skill in calligraphy. It may thus be considered an officially-authorized history. One of the deities enshrined at Suwa Shrine, Ōkuninushi no Mikoto's son Takeminakata no Kami, vowed not to leave Suwa at the time when his father ceded Izumo to the Sun Goddess. We learn this from *Kojiki*,³⁵ but in this text the account of the attempt to kill Takeminakata has been deleted. Neither Takeminakata's name nor his story appear in *Nihon shoki*. Thus the tales of the *Scroll of the Great Deity of Suwa* and the *Suwa engi no koto* that we find in *Shintōshū*, which were compiled at the same time, are completely different. The story of Kōka Saburō Yorikata was disseminated without the approval of the Suwa Shrine. However, there is the story that appears in *Suwa dai-myōjin no Akiyama matsuri no koto* (as found in *Shintōshū*)³⁶ of how Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, with the help of the Great Deity of Suwa, conquered the evil Takamaru. In *Suwa dai-myōjin ekotoba*, Takamaru is identified as Abe no Takamaru. But this scroll does not contain the story of how the daughter of the Takamaru who appears in *Shintōshū* came to serve the Great Deity of Suwa and produced a child who became the forebear of the line of Suwa Shrine officials known as Jin no Sukune. We can imagine that the stories of *Shintōshū*, which served as texts for preachers, were steadily expanded and embellished.

It would appear that lower-order preachers, who claimed to represent a branch of Agui Temple, narrated histories of this kind from *Shintōshū* as itinerant story-tellers. The preachers included *nenbutsu* masters (*hijiri*), blind priests, picture explainers (*etoki hōshi*), female shamans (*miko*), yin-yang masters, and blind women.³⁷ Nishida Nagao (1909–1981), in his book *Kumano yurai* (The Origins of Kumano), has introduced us to *Kasumi no sumai Hato*. Written in the hand of a woman, this work contains material apparently copied down for the narratives of the Kumano priestesses (*bikuni*).³⁸

Just as Sanjōnishi Sanetaka gathered materials and wrote histories, there were people who took locally transmitted stories, the oracles of *miko*, and other materials and composed tales that responded to the demands of the common people, tales that were both amusing and sad. The people then used these tales as scripts for popular sermons, which are thought to have had nothing to do with particular shrines. In Yoshida Shintō we have the text *Fukushima bōrei shinkon* (The Spirits of Dead Souls of Fukushima) of Miyazaki district in Hyūga province, which bears a deity's name.³⁹ It seems that memorials for departed spirits had their bases in myths.

What kinds of people, responding to the calls from what sorts of people, came to relate these myths? Let us approach this question from the standpoint of the contents of the myths.

The Contents of Myths Created by Popular Demand

In the case of the *shinmei* shrines discussed above, we have examples of religious activities directed at the countless believers who visited temples and shrines. The Kumano *bikuni* who traveled about explaining history scrolls, as we find in *Kumano engi no koto* (The Mat-

ter of the Kumano History)⁴⁰ and other works, directed their efforts toward these believers. Thus, we find at the end of *Mishima dai-myōjin no koto* (The Matter of the Great Deity of Mishima)⁴¹ in *Shintōshū* the following: “Upon hearing just once the story of this shrine’s deity in his original form as a buddha, people shed tears of thanksgiving and are deeply moved. It is clearly the story of the deity’s vow to seek to extinguish the fires of the Buddhist hell. Reading the shrine’s history once is the equivalent of visiting the shrine itself three times. How much greater is the effect of hearing about the history five times, ten times, or more.”

Let us look at the world at the commonplace level where the faith of the people is roused by the performance of meritorious deeds through hearing and reading about the “original forms” or “histories.” Here we have revealed the nature of family and morality in the medieval age. One of the typical myths of *Shintōshū* is to be found in *Akagi yama dai-myōjin no koto* (The Matter of the Great Deity of Akagi yama).⁴² It is the story of the persecution of stepchildren by their stepmother. In the story, the stepmother, Sarashina Gozen, and her younger brother, Sarashina Jirō Kanemitsu, kill the stepchildren when the children’s father is away. Later, Fuchina Gozen, the oldest of the stepchildren, and her father become the deities of Fuchina (Fuchina Myōjin); Akagi Gozen, the next oldest stepchild, succeeds Ryū Niyō Onosara Majo of the marsh at Akagi and becomes the Great Deity of Akagi (Akagi Dai-Myōjin); and the wet nurse and her husband, Ōmuro, become the accompanying deities of Ōji no Miya. The third stepchild, Ikaho Gozen, survives and becomes a provincial governor. The husband of Ikaho Gozen’s wet nurse, Ikaho Daibu, serves as her agent.

Why were there so many stories of persecution by stepmothers in the medieval age? In the practice whereby a bride was taken into her husband’s household (in contrast to the earlier marriage pattern in which the husband took up residence in his wife’s family’s household), if the wife died early and the husband took a second wife, a stepmother-stepchild (or stepchildren) relationship was immediately established. In the medieval age, the typical family organization had the parents and children living together. In this arrangement, the wife/mother wielded the power in the home. Such a family was a small universe in itself within medieval society. In medieval times status was more important than gender. Moreover, the ideas that males were to be esteemed and females despised and that the feminine sex was unclean were advanced through the spread of Buddhism. The character of the stepmother was created as a symbol of the embodiment of the evil power of women. However, there were times when the stepmother was drawn as a jewel of goodness. Thus, in *Komochiyama engi no koto* (The Matter of the History of Komochiyama),⁴³ when the provincial governor makes illicit sexual advances, the stepmother fights to protect her stepdaughter. In this case the evil governor is the symbol of evil power in a small realm, and the stepmother fights on behalf of the family.⁴⁴

The family, the basic unit of social organization, was also a unit of work. It needed to train a successor who would learn and take over the family business and provide for the care of parents in their old age. Accordingly, giving birth to and rearing children was a major function of the family. Because of this, stories were created of childless couples who prayed to the gods and buddhas to be granted children. In the above-mentioned *Mishima dai-myōjin no koto*, for example, there is the story of a wealthy couple from Iyo province who, unable to have children because of karma from a previous existence, pray to the Kannon of Hasedera Temple. Willing to part with their great wealth if necessary, they are granted a child in exchange

for that wealth. There is a similar story from this region in the Tokugawa-period *Sekkyōbushi*. In the Mishima Deity story, the cherished child is taken away by an eagle. After many adventures, he appears before the emperor, becomes a provincial governor, and is reunited with his parents who have survived over the years in the mountains. After their deaths, the parents become the Great Gods of Mishima. There are many stories of childless people who pray for children. But in these stories the gods and buddhas do not simply give children to those who pray for them; their prayers are only answered in exchange for valuable or important things. There are also many stories in which children are carried off by eagles. We find stories of those who, having undergone suffering for children, come to be worshipped as deities. These stories reflect the popular moralistic view that there are no jewels superior to children. Children become the family successors. Inheriting their family businesses, they must provide for their aged parents. Because these principles lay at the heart of social organization in the medieval age, the desire of couples that had no descendants to be granted children who could serve as family successors must have been great indeed.

In order for a couple to have children, there must be love for them; and people suffer when separated from the object of that love. In the noh play *Hanjo*,⁴⁵ a woman of pleasure, believing she has been rejected by a man, prays fervently before a god to be joined with him in marriage. Similarly, The deities of Ashigara, Hakone, Tamatsushima, Kibune, and Miwa have pledged to preserve the vows of men and women, husbands and wives; if one prays to them, no further proof of love is needed.

The above *kami* became famous as deities who preserved the vows of couples, men and women. The Ashigara Goddess was designated one of these deities because of the tradition that she was the *kami* who taught the ancient *imayō* verses sung by the itinerant female performers known as *kugutsume*.⁴⁶ The Hakone Avatar, who was originally a mountain deity of Mount Hakone and a dragon god of Ashinoko, came to be worshipped by the *yamabushi* of Shugendō. We know this from the myth in *Nishio gongen no koto* (Concerning the Avatar of Nishio) of *Shintōshū*⁴⁷ of how a stepchild, after suffering persecution by her stepmother, is helped by a prince from a neighboring country. Although Tamatsushima, in the story about Sotoori-hime in *Shintōshū*, is an object of pure love, this of course is contrary to historical fact. The Kibune Goddess was originally a *kami* who prayed for rain to fall and also for it to stop.⁴⁸ But between late Heian and early Kamakura times, she became known as a goddess of love. In the noh play *Kanawa* and elsewhere, she appears as a deity who casts spells. The Miwa Goddess is remembered from *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as the *kami* who accepts the snake deity of Miwa as her husband.⁴⁹ In the medieval age she became the deity/*miko* of the *tsumadoi* pattern of marriage. According to the Miwa branch of Shintō, the Miwa Goddess is one and the same as Amaterasu Ōmikami.⁵⁰ Because of the stories of deities marrying humans, she is counted as one of the famous *kami* who protect love.

Thus these deities did not possess moral standards that would, for example, lead them to protect the beautiful love of a husband and wife. Rather, their special function was to hear and grant the wishes presented to them in prayers. If a wife prayed, then her love would be fulfilled; if lovers and mistresses prayed, their loves would be sustained. These acts by the deities were not based on moral considerations but upon human feelings. We see the zeal of supplicants forcefully—even threateningly—seeking to enlist the support of the deities. In a

medieval society in which one helped oneself, even the deities employed intimidation, refusing to grant wishes when their conditions were not fulfilled. And there were also deities who aided those suffering through mundane, uneventful lives.

Some deities protected people who hunted in violation of the Buddhist prohibition against the taking of life; others forbade the raping of women. In the history entitled *Suwa engi no koto* (The Matter of the Story of Suwa), found in *Shintōshū*,⁵¹ there is the story of Kōka Saburō who wanders the provinces of Japan seeking his wife, is abducted by a Tengu, and finally returns home with her. Going to the land of the underworld to fetch a mirror forgotten by his wife, Saburō is deceived and killed by his older brother and is left to wander the underworld. The wife, Kasuga Hime, is raped by her brother-in-law. Before long, Kōka Saburō, having been revealed as a deity, becomes the god of hunting at the Upper Shrine at Suwa, and Kasuga Hime is installed in the Lower Shrine as the “goddess who prohibits violation of the flesh.” I believe that “violation of the flesh” means rape based on the sentence, “Because she had been harmed by her brother-in-law as an enemy might harm her, she prohibited rape,” and the fact that, because she was a woman, “She had suffered unspeakable shame that locked her heart in grief.” To what extent was the safety of women insured during medieval times? Undoubtedly tribulations like those described in this story occurred frequently. Thus it was essential to have female deities who not only prohibited rape and offered protection against it but also healed women who were seriously injured by it.

Added to the above is a second story in which Saburō, having followed such an arduous path of suffering in quest of his wife, exchanges marriage vows with another female deity and thereby incurs the jealousy of his former wife, now the deity of the Suwa Lower Shrine. What had been a tale of pure love is thus thoroughly spoiled. Why would such a story have been added to the first story?⁵² We may suppose that the second story was necessary to promote salvation and faith for women distressed by the faithlessness of men.

What about the deities involved in giving birth? Kumano engi no koto⁵³ is said to be a history recited by Kumano *bikuni*. It tells the story of the daughter of Minamoto-no-chūjō, the consort of Gosuiden, who was the ugliest of the thousand wives of King Zenzai of the state of Makada in India. Thanks to the intercession of the Thousand-Armed Kannon, the consort's body is transformed into one of golden beauty. As a result, she wins the love of the King and becomes pregnant with a male child. Because of the jealousy of the King's other wives, the consort is killed in the mountains. But in accordance with her final wish, the prince is born at five months before she is killed. Suckling at the breast of his dead mother, the prince is nourished; later, he is guarded and raised by twelve tigers. When he reaches the age of three, his mother's skull turns to water and evaporates. However, when a person called Kiken Shonin preaches, a miracle occurs: the prince, who had been guarded by the tigers, is discovered and taken to King Zenzai. In order to escape his fearful wives, the king boards a flying chariot made of gold and flies to Japan, arriving at Kumano. For 7,000 years he does not reveal himself. Finally, he appears before a hunter named Chiyokane as the avatar Sanmai-no-kagami-jūsansho. The original form of the Shōjōden of the main shrine at Kumano is Amida Nyorai, whose trace is Kiken. The original form of the Musubi-no-miya of the western shrine is the Thousand-Armed Kannon of the Kumano-Nachi Great Shrine; his trace is the Zenbō Nyōgo of the Gosuiden. The Gozen of the new middle shrine is his father, King

Zenzai, whose trace is Yakushi Nyorai of the Hayatama Shrine at Kumano. Prince Nyakuichi is said to be the king's son.

In this myth we have an example of an ugly woman who, through faith, becomes a beautiful woman. The myth illustrates the wish of a woman for beauty in a society that placed high value on that quality. Moreover, we see in the figure of the consort—with blood flowing, giving birth in the mountains—a reflection of the “hunter legend” of ethnography (the legend in which a hunter who assists a mountain deity in giving birth is permitted to hunt in the mountain).⁵⁴ We also recognize a similarity to the hunter legend when the deity later appears as an avatar before the hunter Chiyokane, who becomes the founder of a separate shrine.

There is also a legend about a woman who is killed while still pregnant and who, in the next world, becomes a ghost named Kokkatchō (Ubumechō). Lamenting that the child has been taken from her womb, the woman requests as her last wish that it be born at five months. The Kokkatchō legend comes from China and is about a ghostly bird that inflicts illness upon a child; the bird does not take the child. Hence the Chinese legend is the reverse of the Japanese: Kokkatchō is a male and does not give birth to a child, but instead takes a child and makes it his own.⁵⁵ There are many cases of errors in the transmission of legends. The victim in the Japanese version of this legend may have been intentionally transformed into a woman giving birth because so many members of the legend's audience were women. In Japan a woman who dies in pregnancy, her thoughts still in this world, is said to leave behind a curse. Thus in *Konjaku monogatari* (Tales of Past and Present)⁵⁶ we read of the spirit of a woman who died in childbirth demanding that a person crossing a bridge take the child. This is an example of a woman becoming a spirit after dying while giving birth. Shintōshū provides us with an early example of how this kind of story fed into the Kokkatchō legend.

Thus the focal point of the Kumano “history” is the shocking picture of the rearing of the child of a court lady who died giving birth. While describing the great vengefulness that motivated the killing of the lady, the history tells us that she was later celebrated as a deity. Unfortunately, however, it does not record what kind of succor the deity offered people. Although the lady, having become the object of jealousy, suffered a violent death, she had, through her faith, become beautiful, been loved by a man, and given birth to a child—and a male child at that. Thus her story illustrates the happiness of a medieval woman, a woman who became a deity for those who prayed for easy deliveries.

Shintōshū endows various deities—mountain deities, nature-worshipping deities, and the ancestral deities of local places—with both fictional and real life natures. They are caused to suffer, like humans, the ordeals of life and the agonies of separation from loved ones. In this sense, they are molded as deities who understand the true sufferings of the world of mortals. Medieval men and women were not satisfied simply with normal deities. They demanded deities like those of their own families and those who understood suffering from having experienced such things as the agonies of separation from loved ones, birth, old age, sickness, death, and poverty. People awaited salvation from deities such as these.

Conclusion

It is said that the deity of birth descends to a “board of parturition” that the mother provides in advance in the birthing house.⁵⁷ The deity, who is always expected to appear at the

place of birth of this kind of child, is endowed, like the deity of the Kumano “history,” with both a fictional nature and the nature it had when it was human. But deities of this sort who appear from among the folk must, to enhance their authority, be associated with the ancestral deities of the imperial family.

There were, for example, women known as Katsurame who originally sold sweet fish (ayu) sushi at the Katsura River but later became prostitutes. These women also followed along to the battlefields of warriors and offered prayers for easy deliveries among the warrior families. Invoking the name of Empress Jingū (trad. r. 201–269), whose authority was enhanced from the time of the Mongol invasions, and relying on the legend of the Empress’s expedition to Korea while pregnant, they claimed to be the descendants of Iwata-hime, the Empress’s lady attendant. In addition to offering prayers for easy deliveries, they also served as midwives.⁵⁸ Even today the bellyband used in pregnancies is called an Iwata band. Already in the early Muromachi period, there was a boat-shaped float in the Gion Festival that at some point offered guarantees of easy deliveries. In towns and villages throughout the country there are nameless deities of birth that are associated with Empress Jingū.

The myth of the tsumadoi marriage was created from the banished god of plague, and he became a family tutelary deity. He thus evolved into a deity who prevented misfortune, protecting people who performed good deeds from the plague. Gozu Tennō of the Gion Shrine, gathering faith to him, was identified with Susanoo no Mikoto sometime during the early to middle Kamakura period. In the Meiji period the many branch shrines of the Gion Shrine all worshipped Susanoo no Mikoto. The origins of this date back to medieval times.⁵⁹

In contrast to his father Kan’ami, who wrote noh plays to enhance the deities of various villages, Zeami in his plays avoided the local deities of particular towns and villages and focused instead on the country’s universalistic kami. The way Zeami’s god plays contributed to national unity has already been discussed.⁶⁰

The above kinds of fabricated stories created during the medieval age have been rejected by Suwa Shrine and other religious institutions. But they have been advanced as valid traditions by the great majority of temples and shrines, and many are accepted as such today. The process of the formation of fabricated myths in the medieval age remains an important desideratum for scholars.

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- 47 "*Nisho gongen no koto*," in *Shintōshū* 1959, pp. 58–75.
- 48 Kibune Myōjin was a dragon deity. Originally, he was a deity that prayed for rain and for rain to cease.
- 49 In *Kojiki* 1958, pp. 181–82, there is recorded the story of the *tsumadoi* marriage of the Miwa God to Ikutamayorihime; and in *Nihon shoki* 1967, pp. 246–48, we find the story of the *tsumadoi* marriage of Ōmononushi no Kami (in his true form as a snake) to Yamato Totohi Momosohime no Mikoto. Translator's note: In *tsumadoi-kon* as it was practiced in ancient and early medieval Japan, husband and wife did not reside together. The husband visited the wife (and their children) in her family's residence or her own residence. William Wayne Farris touches on this institution in the Nara period in an essay originally presented at the Maui Conference from which this volume is descended; he mentions husbands' "nocturnal visits" and "conjugal visits" in discussing the work of Takamura Itsue. William McCullough, in a classic piece of Western scholarship on premodern Japan (McCullough 1967), analyzed literary and historical sources that document the lives of the Heian aristocracy and identified three main residence patterns from the tenth through twelfth centuries: "duolocal," in which man and wife lived in separate residences, and he visited her; "uxorilocal," in which both husband and wife lived with her parents; and "neolocal," in which the married couple occupied an independent house of their own. He found that "virilocal" marriage—in which husband and wife make their residence in or near the husband's parents' home—never occurred among Heian aristocrats. These various forms of marriage did not determine descent reckoning, he remarked, and his sources cover only a small fraction of the whole society. The term *tsumadoi-kon* refers to the situation that McCullough labeled "duolocal."
- 50 *Ōmiwa jinja shi*.
- 51 "*Suwa engi no koto*," in *Shintōshū* 1959, pp. 295–335.
- 52 Kawamura 1991. The point of *Shintōshū* is not so much to relate interesting stories as to clarify the histories of deities.

- 53 “*Kumano gongen no koto*,” in *Shintōshū* 1959, pp. 45–57.
 54 Chiba 1975, pp. 298–302.
 55 Yamada 1990, pp. 1–51.
 56 *Konjaku monogatari* 1962, p. 541.
 57 Bouchy 1985.
 58 Wakita 1994.
 59 Wakita 1999a, pp. 210, 234.
 60 Wakita 2000.

GLOSSARY

- Agui 安居院
Akagisan dai-myōjin no koto 赤城山大明神
 の事
 Akagi Gozen 赤城御前
 Amida Nyorai 阿弥陀如来
 Ashigara myōjin 足柄明神
 Ashikaga Yoshiharu 足利義晴
Awaji 淡路
Bikuni 比丘尼
 Budōji 無動寺
 Chikurin'in Temple 竹林院
 Chōken 澄憲
Dengaku 田楽
Engi 縁起
engi emakimono 縁起絵巻物
Engishiki 延喜式
etoki hōshi 絵解き法師
Fukushima bōrei shinkon 福島亡霊神魂
 Fuchina Myōjin 淵名明神
 Gosuiden 五衰殿
Hanjo 班女
 Hattori Toshiaki 服部俊章
Hijiri 聖
honji suijaku 本地垂迹
Hyakuman 百万
 Ikaho Daibu 伊香保大夫
Ima Ise 今伊勢
Ima Shinmei 今神明
Imayō 今様
Ippen hijiri e 一遍聖絵
 Jingikan 神祇官
Jingūji 神宮寺
Jinnō shōtō ki 神皇正統記
Jisha no hon'en 寺社の本縁
Jishujin 地主神
kami 神
 Kan'ami 観阿弥
Kanawa 鉄輪
Kanmon nikki 看聞日記
kanrei 管領
Kasumi no sumai Hato 霞御住居はと
Kazuragawa engi 葛川縁起
Katsuragawa Jizō ki 桂川地藏記
kinsatsu 金札
 Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房
Kojiki 古事記
 Kōka Saburō Yorikata 甲賀三郎諷方
Kokubungakusha 国文学者
Komochiyama engi no koto 子持山縁起の
 事
Konjaku monogatari 今昔物語
koutabushi 小歌節
kōwakamai 幸若舞
kugutsume 傀儡子女
Kumano bikuni 熊野比丘尼
Kumano engi no koto 熊野縁起の事
 Kumano-Nachi 熊野那智
Kumano yurai 熊野由来
Kurikono shinmei 栗隈神明
kusemai 曲舞
Kuwanomidera engi emaki 桑実寺縁起絵
 巻
kyōgen 狂言
Mai no hon 舞の本
miko 巫女
 Minamoto-no-chūjō 源中将
Mineaiki 峯相記
minzokugakusha 民俗学者
Mishima dai-myōjin no koto 三島大明神
 の事
monogatari 物語
nenbutsu 念仏

Nihon shoki 日本書紀
 Nishida Nagao 西田長男
Nishio gongen no koto 西尾権現事
otogi zōshi おとぎ草紙
 Prince Sadafusa 貞成親王
ryōbu Shintō 両部神道
 Ryū Nyo Onsara Majo 竜女オンサラ魔女
 Sakanoue no Tamuramaro 坂上田村麻呂
Sanetaka-kō ki 実隆公記
 Sanjōnishi Sanetaka 三条西実隆
 Sarashina Gozen 更級御前
 Sarashina Jirō Kanemitsu 更級次郎兼光
sarugaku 猿樂
 Seiryōji 清涼寺
Sekkyōbushi 説教節
setsuwa-shū 説話集
 Shakadō 釈迦堂
 Shikobuchi Myōjin 志古淵明神
Shinmei 神明
Shintō kongen shō 神道根源鈔
Shintōshū 神道集
shirahige dōja 白髭道者
shirabyōshi 白拍子
 Shōkaku 聖覚
Shōmoji 声聞師
Sōchō 惣町
Sōson 惣村
 Sotoori-hime 衣通姫
Suwa dai-myōjin no Akiyama matsuri no koto
 諏訪大明神の秋山祭りの事
Suwa dai-myōjin no satsuki matsuri no koto
 諏訪大明神の五月祭りの事
Suwa dai-myōjin ekotoba 諏訪大明神絵詞
Suwa engi no koto 諏訪縁起の事
Taiheiki 太平記
 Tamatsushima 玉津島
tatarigami 崇り神
tsumadoi 妻訪い
ubugami 産神
ubusunagami 産土神
 Uji Shinmei 宇治神明
 Urabe Kanetane 卜部兼種
Yamabushi 山伏
 Yoshida Shintō 吉田神道
 Zeami 世阿弥