

# The Vanishing Goddess: A Transformation of a Symbolic National Image in Imperial Japan

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## ABSTRACT

This presentation attempts to evaluate the visible Japanese national identity through the analysis of images of a representative goddess. The goddess, *Yamato-hime*, created in Meiji 35(1902), was depicted in various media, such as advertising posters, the pattern of kimono fabric, and, of course, in academic paintings, until the Pacific War. Since then, Japan has used no specific icon to personify the nation-state, whereas the United Kingdom has Britannia, France has Marianne, and Germany has Germania. Why has the Japanese goddess vanished? To answer this question, I begin by taking a closer look at the strategy the Meiji Government exerted to integrate the nation. In this presentation, my purpose is to clarify the direct and indirect involvement of *Naimu-shō*, the Department of the Interior, in the creation of modern images of the goddess. Furthermore, this presentation will argue the extinction of this visualized goddess was caused by the dissolution of *Naimu-shō* that GHQ/SCAP ordered in Shōwa 22 (1947).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to clarify the historical context of the vanishing of the Goddess as a national icon after World War II, in spite of the fact that the image repeatedly appeared in fine art or commercial art during the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa eras.

The author already published a research paper about this goddess, *Yamato-hime*, and the representation of Japan's national identity. (Hayashi,2016) *Yamato-hime* was a novel figure of a goddess that caricature cartoonist Rakuten Kitazawa had created to commemorate the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902. (Figure. 1)The concept of *Yamato-hime* was imagined equal to the goddess *Britannia*. The outlook of *Yamato-hime* is evocative of an ancient goddess, and her hair style and dress follow the manners and customs of the *Jōko* period, the ancient time of Japan. As a visual equivalence with the British goddess, *Britannia*, who wears a helmet and carries arms and a shield, the Japanese goddess, *Yamato-hime*, has a halberd. Both these goddesses were seen as iconographically symbolic of war.

The most famous goddess of war in Japan is undoubtedly *Jingu-Kōgō* (Empress Jingu), who was the mother of *Ōjin-tenno* (Emperor Ōjin, reign: 270-310 C.E.). *Jingu-Kōgō* was known to have invaded Korea, and to be the *Hachiman* deity, a goddess of war. She was not only depicted in paintings and prints, but also used in designs as an icon on paper money and postal stamps after the Meiji Restoration.

On the other hand, the Imperial Princess of the 11<sup>th</sup> Emperor, *Suinin* (reign: 29- 70 B.C.), *Yamato-hime* was known as a *Mitsueshiro* (a supreme priestess who supports the divine spirit) to lead *Amaterasu-Omikami* (the Goddess of the Sun and ancestor of the Imperial House) toward the Ise district for the construction of the *Ise Jingū* Shrine. In addition, there was a legend that *Yamato-hime* aided her nephew, *Yamato-takeru*, in battles.

We know the popularity of *Yamato-hime* and *Jingu-Kōgō* from a table of ranking, *Kokon Teijyo Bijin Kagami* (A Ranking of Chaste and Beautiful Women Past and Present) (Figure.

2) The two goddesses were represented in various commercial media, such as tobacco posters and kimono patterns.



Figure 1: Kitazawa Rakuten,  
“The Anglo-Japanese Alliance  
Britannia and Yamato-hime” 1902



Figure 2: Kokon Teijyo Bijin Kagami  
Ranking of Chaste and Beautiful  
en Past and Present)

## 2. METHOD

The visualization of *Jingu-Kōgō* and *Yamato-hime* was a parallel event with the systematic implementation of State *Shinto* by *Naimu-shō* (the Department of the Interior). In this study, I am using two other approaches by analysis of official documents. The first is about the foundation of *Yamato-hime no Mikoto* Shrine as a *Betsugū* (associated shrine) of the Ise Shrine, after a petition adopted by the Imperial Diet. The second is the so called *Shintō Shirei* issued by GHQ/SCAP, the official notification of the “Abolition of Governmental Sponsorship, Support, Perpetuation, Control, and Dissemination of State Shinto” after the defeat in World War II.

By examining these official documents, I hope to find the reason for the extinction of visual images of this goddess as a national icon. This investigation will also clarify the transition of images of goddesses from Meiji 35 (1902) to Shōwa 20 (1945).

### 2.1 The foundation of the shrine for *Yamato-hime no Mikoto*

*Yamato-hime* is now enshrined in the *Yamato-hime* Shrine in Ise city as one of *Betsugū* (associated shrine). Originally, the establishment of this shrine was requested once in the Meiji era, but it did not happen. After entering the Taishō era, the Mayor of Ujiyamada City, Noriyuki Fukuchi, submitted a petition to the Imperial Diet, and the shrine was finally established. According to the *Seigan Kengi Kankei Bunsho* (Petition and Proposal Documents) of National Archives of Japan, the opinion “The enshrinement of *Yamato-hime*” written by Noriyuki Fukuchi, was submitted by the chairman of the House of Lords, Iesato Tokugawa, to the Prime Minister, Shigenobu Ōkubo, and attributed *Yamato-hime* as a *Mitsuetsuhiro* (supreme priestess) for *Amaterasu Ōmikami* (the Goddess of the Sun).<sup>1</sup> Reading through the congressional document, this petition was deliberated on in the second session of the petition council in the 36<sup>th</sup> Imperial Diet, Taishō 4 (1915), but suspended under consideration. Three years later, this petition was discussed in the 40<sup>th</sup> Imperial Diet on 14<sup>th</sup> March, Taishō 7 (1918), again. After lively discussion, “The proposal for the enshrinement of *Yamato-hime*” from Ikuzo Ōoka was presented to Prime Minister, Masatake Terauchi (in office: 9 October 1916 – 29 September 1918), on 20<sup>th</sup> March, Taishō 7 (1918). In response to this, the Minister of the Interior (*Naimu-shō*), Takejiro Tokonami, declared the establishment of the *Yamato-hime* shrine to the new Prime Minister, Takashi Hara (in office: 29 September 1918 – 4 November 1921). It was later approved by the government on 4<sup>th</sup> January, Taishō 10 (1921), and a ceremony of enshrinement was held.

<sup>1</sup> “*Yamato-hime no Houshi no ken*”, *Seigan Kengi Kankei Bunsho* (Petition and Proposal Documents), JACAR: A14080694600, National Archives of Japan.

## 2.2 *Shintō Shirei*, Abolition of Governmental Sponsorship, Support, Perpetuation, Control, and Dissemination of State Shinto, 1945 by GHQ/SCAP

After the defeat in World War II, the GHQ/SCAP declared the “Abolition of Governmental Sponsorship, Support, Perpetuation, Control, and Dissemination of State Shinto (*Kokka Shinto*, *Jinja Shinto*)” on 15<sup>th</sup> December, Shōwa 20 (1945), which is now known as *Shintō Shirei*.<sup>2</sup> The main point of this instruction was the prohibition of support for Shinto by the nation, in particular prohibiting the use of public resources and forbidding the teaching of Shinto doctrine in state education, and forbidding research on Shinto. The Ise Shrine was also forbidden for use at national events, as follows:

1-d. The Religious Functions Order relating to the Grand Shrine of Ise and the Religious Functions Order relating to the State and other Shrines will be annulled.

It also instructed the Ministry of the Interior (*Naimu-Shō*) to dissolve state-sponsored Shintoism, especially via abolishing the *Jingi-in* (the Institute of Divinities).

2-e. The Shrine Board (*Jingi-in*) of the Ministry of Home Affairs will be abolished, and its present functions, duties, and administrative obligations will not be assumed by any other governmental or tax-supported agency.

Particular attention potentially relating to the goddess, can be seen in the following two paragraphs:

1-k. God-shelves (*kamidana*) and all other physical symbols of State Shinto in any office, school, institution, organization, or structure supported wholly or in part by public funds are prohibited and will be removed immediately.

2-b. The provisions of this directive will apply with equal force to all rites, practices, ceremonies, observances, beliefs, teachings, mythology, legends, philosophy, shrines, and physical symbols associated with Shinto.

In the first Japanese translation the word used for *Symbol* was *Hyōshō* (a symbol appearing on a surface) and in the final text *Shōchō* (an abstract symbol). As an example of a physical symbol, this instruction listed God-shelves (*kamidana*), but this symbol would of course contain a goddess image as well as a more abstract image as an icon.

### 3. DISCUSSION

From the discussion in the Imperial Diet about the *Yamato-hime* Shrine, it can be seen that *Yamato-hime* was quite well known to people in the Meiji and Taishō eras. For example, the congressman Katsu Kawasaki from Mie prefecture, which contains the Ise Shrine, made a statement asserting that “Speaking of Ise Jingu shall recall *Yamato-hime*”.<sup>3</sup> What we can see from this proposal is that in celebrating *Yamato-hime* as an associated Ise shrine, the *Yamato-hime* legend was restricted to the position as a *Mitsueshiro* (supreme priestess) that led *Amaterasu* (the Sun Goddess) to Ise. In the proposal, it is not mentioned that there is a genealogy of a “fighting goddess” that supported the wars of the legendary Emperor, *Yamato-takeru*. Kitazawa Rakuten's idea that the association of a fighting goddess—*Yamato-hime*—is clearly denied by both citizens of Ise and the state during the Taishō era.

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<sup>2</sup> SCAPIN-448:1945/12/15, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers Directives to the Japanese Government (SCAPINs), National Diet Library Digital Collections / translation for Japanese: Privy Council document 20<sup>th</sup> December 1945, JACAR: A06050896400.

<sup>3</sup> “Special government office concerning the god dispute settlement agenda”, The 40<sup>th</sup> Imperial Parliament House of Representatives, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

After that, and until the present, *Yamato-hime* has been honored only as a *Mitsueshiro*. As already mentioned in the *Kindai Gasetu* (Hayashi, 2016), *Yamato-hime*'s image is held in copyright by Rakuten himself, who severely insisted on his copyright and sole attribution, such that expansion in commercial art is hardly seen. The goddess *Ryūyō Machida* painted as a poster in Taishō 7 (1918) is not a *Yamato-hime*, but a figure reminiscent of *Toyosukiiri-hime* wearing a moon icon. In the oil painting, *Yamato-hime* was depicted during the Pacific War. Sanzō Wada's "Kōa Mandala (Mandala of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere)" Shōwa 15 (1940) represented as a goddess who holds the *Yata no Kagami* (the eight-span mirror; part of the Imperial regalia) that is a shinto embodiment of *Amaterasu*. However, since this painting, there are no works depicting *Yamato-hime*.

As mentioned above, the *Shintō Shirei*, imposed after the defeat, banned the visualization of national Shinto. The state was also prohibited from participating in the festival of the Ise Shrine. However, after that, the administration of Shinto moved to the *Kunai-chō* (the Ministry of the Imperial Household) after the dissolution of the Ministry of the Interior (*Naimu shō*), and the Ise Shrine survived as a private sanctuary of the Imperial Family. According to Loo's argument, the *Shintō Shirei* imposed by SCAP restricted the political function of Ise, but did not mention the relationship with the Emperor. (Loo, 2010)

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The goddess symbolizing Japan was explored in the Meiji era and *Yamato-hime* with a weapon was imagined by Rakuten Kitasawa as a "fighting goddess" to stand alongside British *Britannia*. At the same time the Ministry of the Interior (*Naimu-Shō*), established the State religion of Shinto institutionally. In the Taishō era, the momentum to make a *Yamato-hime* Shrine in Ise Jingu intensified, and it was actually built over eight years after the petition was submitted to the Imperial Diet. However, in this shrine *Yamato-hime* was treated as a servant of *Amaterasu*, and any association with war was omitted. During the Taishō and early Showa periods, *Jingu-Kōgō* and *Yamato-hime* were drawn mainly in commercial art and on kimono patterns. During World War II, *Yamato-hime* appeared momentarily in a painting as a symbol of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, but among the general population the impression of *Yamato-hime* was fixed as an image of a decent, non-martial Princess. After the defeat of World War II, GHQ/SCAP's *Shintō Shirei* policy clearly prohibited symbols related to Shinto. Because this goddess, in either martial or non-martial form, was clearly a symbol that commingled Shintō and the state it fell under this new prohibition and thus could no longer be tasked to represent State Shintō. The image of *Yamato-hime*, could thus no longer be used to represent the country or personify Japan in the form of a goddess.

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