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# The sacred art of metallurgy :

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THE SACRED ART OF METALLURGY:  
THE KANAYAKO TRADITION OF JAPANESE IRON AND FORGE WORKERS

by

Heidi Moyer

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

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This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Masters of Arts.

May 13, 1991

Date

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## ABSTRACT

### THE SACRED ART OF METALLURGY: THE KANAYAKO TRADITION OF JAPANESE IRON AND FORGE WORKERS

This thesis presents and interprets the Japanese myth of Kanayako (Child Deity of the House of Metal). The Kanayako tradition is related to early iron refinery workers known as *tatara-shi*. The myth is seen as having a three-phase structure. In phase one Kanayako appears to man and announces her intention to teach iron-making technique, thereby becoming the "culture hero." In phase two and three Kanayako establishes the ritual traditions of iron workers. Phase two includes the establishment of the avoidance of women after childbirth, and the acceptance of death. Phase three further establishes the acceptance of death in the *tatara* and introduces the avoidance of hemp and dogs.

The three phases of the myth are interpreted sequentially, line by line, against a background of common themes and motifs common to the magico-religious traditions of the smith and metallurgy found worldwide, and in Japanese religions. The Kanayako myth and tradition appears to be most closely related to Shinto and shamanism. The major themes discussed are: renewal and fertility, pollution and taboo, sacrifice viewed as necessary for the completion of a work, and the relationship of shaman and smith.

THE SACRED ART OF METALLURGY:  
THE KANAYAKO TRADITION OF JAPANESE IRON AND FORGE WORKERS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is organized into three chapters.

CHAPTER ONE presents an overview of the cultural history of iron metallurgy and smiths in Japan. Comparative theories and themes relating to the smith and his mythico-religious setting are presented. Following this, themes commonly found in Japanese religion are discussed.

CHAPTER TWO presents the myth in three phases. Following each phase is a sequential, line by line, interpretation. The interpretation draws upon themes discussed in Chapter I and introduces new themes when appropriate.

CHAPTER THREE summarizes the findings and interpretations. The findings are evaluated as to how they compare and contrast with themes found in Japanese religion, and with general theories concerning the mythico-religious traditions of smiths. Conclusions are drawn based on the significance of the Kanayako myth to Japanese metallurgy and worldwide smith traditions. Finally, suggestions are made for the direction future research.

This thesis is based on library research and on the interpretation of the

collected information. The information collected falls into two categories: 1) secondary literary sources consisting of translations of Japanese articles on the original texts, interviews with metalworkers and their families made by Japanese investigators, and articles on iron working traditions published since the war in Japan; and 2) personal communication and correspondence, done by myself or Prof. Michael Notis of the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at Lehigh University.

Prior to this, information available on the Kanayako tradition of iron workers was published, almost exclusively, in Japanese.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I relied heavily on the aid of two translators: one a native Japanese with an arts background, Miss Mia Itasaki, and the other an American Chinese, fluent in Japanese and English and familiar with metallurgical terms, Mrs. Sherilyn Twork. One of the contributions of this thesis is the presentation of some of the literature in English.

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<sup>1</sup>The article published in English is by Nobuhiro Matsumoto, "Japanese Metalworkers: A Possible Source for their Legends," Studies in Japanese Folklore, ed. R.M. Dorson, (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1973).

CHAPTER I.  
MYTH AND METALLURGY

The intent of this thesis is to present and interpret the Japanese Kanayako myth. The interpretation is presented in light of themes common to Japanese religion, and themes found relating to the mythico-religious complex that often surrounds the smith.

The Japanese attribute the mythical origin of iron metallurgy to the **kami** (deity/god in Shinto tradition) Kanayako, the Child Deity of the House of Metals (Figure 1). Belief in this female deity was strongest among workers involved with the ancient iron refinery style known as **tatara** between the 7th and 18th century C.E., but she also was honored by blacksmiths, casters, swordsmiths and charcoal makers (Ishizuka, 1941: 83-86). Kanayako was frequently deified at the sites where men collected the iron sands, smelted, and forged iron (Kubota, 1988: 30; Ishizuka, 1950: 2). Charcoal workers associated with iron manufacturing also deified Kanayako at their kilns.

The earliest document recording the Kanayako myth and tradition is thought to date to the Muromachi Period (1338-1339) (Kubota, 1988: 32; Nobuhiro, 1973: 149). It was recorded in a book, edited by Shimohara Shigenka, known as



廣瀬町西比田 井上 明氏蔵

Figure 1. Kanayako-gami. Nishi Hida, Hirose town, by Mr. Inoue.

Source: Abe Masaya. Kera no Mori. Japan, 5.

Tetsuzan Hishiyo (Book of Secret Iron Techniques).<sup>2</sup> The beginning of the tradition is obscure due to the oral transmission of early mythic traditions.

Belief in the deity Kanayako was extensive and evidence exists for it extending from the Chugoku and Kinki regions to the Kanto and Tohoku regions and to Shikoku and Kyushu (Figure 2). Because of this widespread belief, Kanayako has been found to exist under the guise of several names: Kanayago, Kanaigo, Kanae, and Kanoo (Isogai, 1959: 303). There is little doubt that Kanayako played a central part in the myth and tradition of ironworkers during the early period of Japan's history and even today one finds that most iron workers have heard of this deity and are familiar with the tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Kanayako is closely related to the tradition of iron manufacture known as **tatara**. **Tatara**, which originally meant foot bellows and later came to mean a forge, refers to the ancient refineries of Japan which produced pig iron and steel by refining magnetic iron sands. This form of refinery evolved over many centuries.

Possibly, the earliest method of obtaining iron in Japan consisted merely of

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<sup>2</sup>Tetsuzan Hishiyo is believed to have been written in the fourth year of Tenmei (1784) and contains information about iron production, including raw materials, locations, furnace construction and operation, management. It includes a volume on Kanayako and was republished in 1933 as a supplement to Kuniichi Tawara's Kurai no Satetsu Seiren-Ho (Traditional Methods of Iron Refinement (Nobuhiro, 1973: 150 & 164).

<sup>3</sup>In the winter of 1989, Professor Michael Notis attended two iron-working rituals, one held in Gifu at the Nangu Taisha Shrine, and the other at the Yasugi Factory of the Hitachi Corporation. He spoke to many people about the Kanayako tradition and found that, although, they may not observe the rituals and taboos associated with the tradition, they were familiar with Kanayako as a metal deity.



## Prefectures and Prefectural Seats

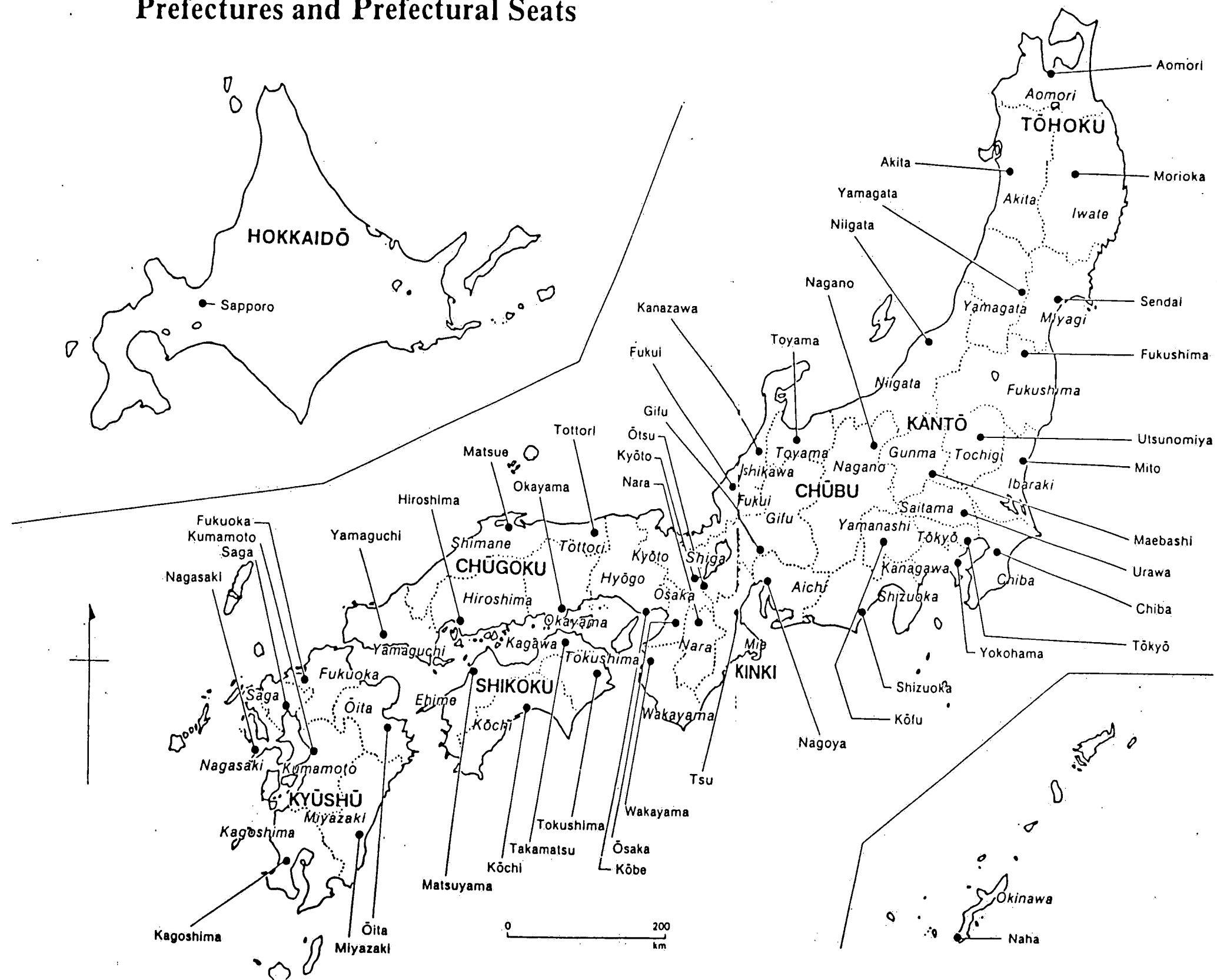


Figure 2. Prefectures and Prefectural Seats in Japan.

piling iron sands with firewood on the floor of a dry river bed and then igniting the pile. This method would have resulted in small lumps of iron that could be picked out after the fire died. It is on record as being practiced in Korea, but no documentation or archaeological evidence exists to verify its use in Japan (Kubota, 1971: 7).

Originally, 6th - 7th century C. E., small furnaces known as pot furnaces were dug into the ground and natural draft was used to ventilate the fire. Over time, bellows were added to aid in combustion and increase the temperature inside the furnace. The furnace also changed in shape to become rectangular and had a collar that stood above ground level. Tuyeres, or openings in the sides of the furnace collar, allowed air to be forced into the furnace by bellows (Kubota, 1971: 8-11).

From the mid-16th century to the late 17th century **tatara** underwent a number of changes. Iron smelting was originally performed outdoors, during this time it moved inside. A method to separate the iron sand utilizing water current was developed and a bellows that worked on the see-saw principle replaced the foot bellows (Figure 5). Finally, the furnace was improved to preserve the heat by preventing its escape. By the mid-1800's **tatara** came to an end when the European style blast furnace was introduced (Iida, 1973: 4 & 8).

It is uncertain where **tatara** originated, but it is thought to have come primarily from Korea, although elements of iron technique from Southern Manchuria and the Okinawa isles can be seen (Kubota, 1971: 3). **Tatara** also bears similarities to Fukien and Cambodian metallurgy (Nobuhiro, 1973: 148). Hundreds

of **tatara** existed throughout Japan, wherever the natural resources of iron sand, and timber for charcoal were available. There are numerous place names, such as **Kajiya-shiki** (forge sheeting/paving/laying) and **Kanakuso-Tsuka/Kinfuncho** (Mound of Metal Excrement) that still remain to give clues to the locations of iron smelting activities (Isogai, 1959: 302).

The last remaining area for **tatara** workshops and **sannai** (metal workers' village) and stronghold of the **Kanayako** tradition was in the Izumo-Hoki borderline region in Chugoku. Today, only remnants of the **Kanayako** tradition remain (Figure 3 & 4). The modern Hitachi factory in Yasugi, Shimane, still maintains a shrine in honor of the deity **Kanayako** and holds occasional ritual ceremonies.

During the Nara Period (645-783 C. E.), a great number of Korean craftsmen immigrated to Japan from the continent and spurred development of the arts and crafts. So numerous were these immigrants that they accounted for one-fourth of the population by the end of the 8th century (Hori, 1966: 9). These people brought with them their own metalworking techniques and traditions which the indigenous iron working people adapted and took on for their own.<sup>4</sup>

Iron workers of the Nara Period wandered from place to place in search of iron sands. By this period smiths had begun to specialize in their craft and over the next hundreds of years honed their skills and increased their production potential.

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<sup>4</sup>Many craftsmen migrated to Japan during the Nara Period. These foreigners quickly attained free status and spread their skills and knowledge among the native craftsmen. Frequently, it was the women who introduced and improved on the arts of dyeing, cookery, brewing, weaving, embroidery, and midwifery (Warner, 1958: 16).



Figure 3. Sannai landscape, metal workers village.

Source: Kubota Kurao. "Tatara" Old Iron-making in Japan. Japan, 1982, 63.

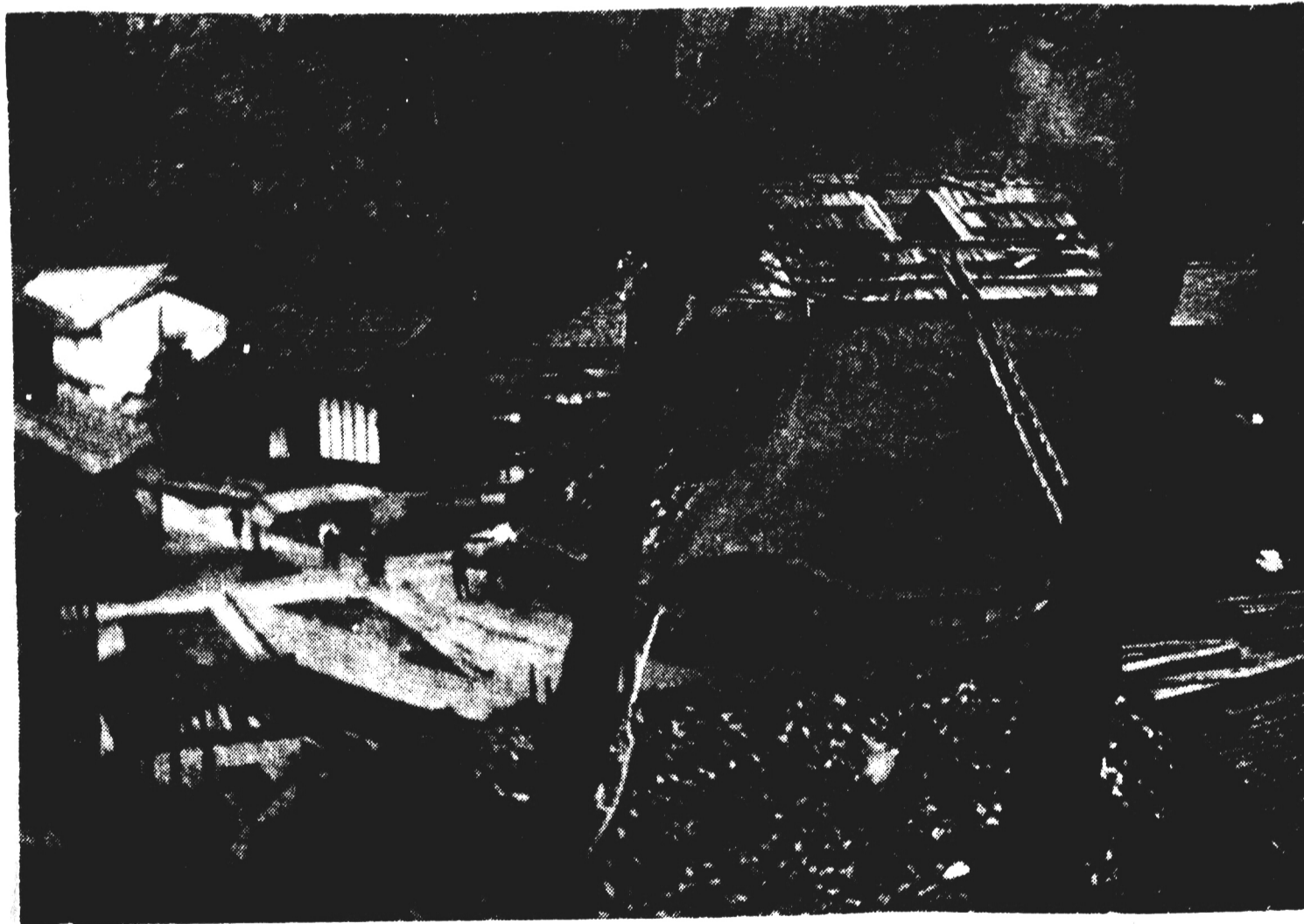


Figure 4. Landscape of takadono (1910 - 1925). Itohara family tatara, Yokotatown, Nita-district, Shimane-Prefecture (old day Izumo).

Source: Kubota Kurao. "Tatara" Old Iron-making in Japan. Japan, 1982, 48.

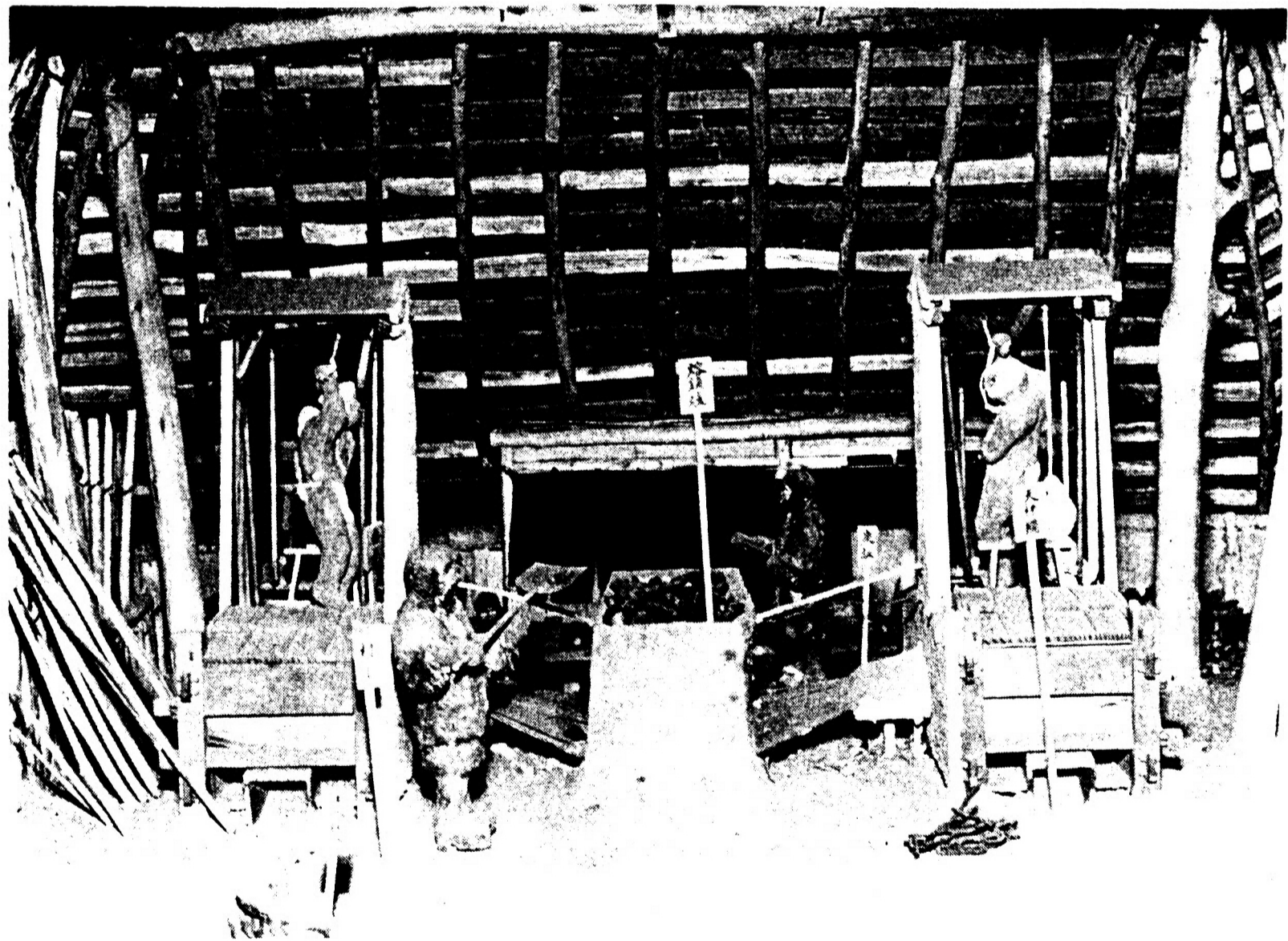


Figure 5. Interior of **tatara** workshop.

Source: Hitachi Metals, Ltd. Brief Description on Old Japanese Iron Making.  
Yasugi Works, Pamphlet, 4.

By the 12th century, with the rise of the feudal clans and development of castle towns, the demand for iron and ironware had greatly increased. The itinerant smiths of the past, now settled close to castle towns that were headed by **daimyo** (lords) who maintained large armies of warriors. The smiths ran the forges, produced iron and ironware for the powerful clans, and received the patronage of the **daimyo**. Smiths became important members of this stratified society. They ranked below the samurai and farmer, but above the merchant, and could amass large sums of wealth (Isogai, 1959: 296-97).

Iron was always an important commodity to the Japanese. Items such as swords hold a significant place in their history and were often worshipped. In the oldest extant books of Japan, the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) and its sequel, the Nihongi (Chronicle of Ancient Japan) almost no other metal object is mentioned. The swords in these books had magic power, and gods transformed themselves into swords and spears. Thus, the sword became a symbol for the god, one of the three treasures designating divine rulership in Japan.

## Methodology and Comparative Theories

The interpretation of the Kanayako myth is important because it is related to a culturally significant institution, iron metallurgy. Throughout history anthropologists have evaluated cultures by their tools. We only need to look at the ages of man to verify this -- Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age -- all named for the materials used in the surviving tools of the time. Furthermore, we have come to measure another culture's worth and its people's intelligence by their use of tools, for example, the culture of Benin is valued most for its bronzes, China for its Shang and Chou bronze cauldrons, and the Hittite Empire for the use and innovation of iron and steel objects.

Cross-cultural examination and comparison of myths highlights the fact that all people are fundamentally alike. When dealing with issues of creation and the sacred we find we are not much different than the Africans or the Japanese, common themes and motifs appear repeatedly.

This fact does not detract from the importance of the continual collection and interpretation of myths. Nor does it imply that there is only one approach to the interpretation of myth. Myth is an extremely complex cultural reality, which can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints. Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates events that took place in a sacred time, at the beginning of the formation of the world. It explains how, through the deeds of supernatural beings, a reality came into existence. This reality may be all encompassing, or only a fragment (Eliade, 1963). The Kanayako myth deals with

the fragment of reality concerning the origin of iron metallurgy. It relates the sacredness of the force of creation and becomes the model by which man can manipulate that force.

Ritual is often closely related to myth. There are no apparent closely linked rituals to the Kanayako myth. However, the myth does establish the taboos which are part of the iron workers' rituals. Furthermore, the Japanese **matsuri** (ritual/festival) found throughout the country, in similar form, and associated with many different **kami**, is also found for the **kami** Kanayako. It is known as the **Fuigo Matsuri** (Forge/Bellows Festival) in some areas, but goes under different names in other areas of Japan. **Matsuri** is the ritual way in which **kami** are invited annually to the community for the renewal of blessings and good luck. While the **Fuigo Matsuri** is not a one-to-one re-enactment of the Kanayako myth it is clearly related.

To understand the Kanayako myth in comparison to other cultural mythic traditions related to metallurgy I turn to the classic work, The Forge and the Crucible, written by the prominent historian of religions, Mircea Eliade. In this work, Eliade has established many of the common mythic themes and ritual motifs associated with metallurgy and the smith.

Eliade uses the term "culture hero" or "civilizing hero" when referring to the smith. The primordial or divine smith was accredited with imparting to man the knowledge of metallurgy. This knowledge enabled man to create the tools needed



to better his existence. In some cases, primordial smiths brought these tools with them when they came to earth (Eliade, 1978: 96).

#### a) Technician of the Sacred: Shaman and Smith

The phrase "technician of the sacred" has also been used to refer to the smith and shaman. This is based in the smith's and shaman's mutual ability to experience, manipulate, and interpret the sacred. People of the society in which the smith and shaman reside frequently acknowledge this relationship. The aboriginal people of Siberia have a proverb that says: "The blacksmith and shaman are of one nest"<sup>5</sup>. This view bestows the smith with equal status of the shaman and is common to many societies (Eliade, 1978: 81).

As "technicians of the sacred" both the smith and shaman are endowed with ritual duties. In many cultures they hold seats in the men's society and play a role in the "rites of passage" which demarcate the phases of life.<sup>6</sup> There is evidence that in regions of Japan smiths participated in the men's society ceremonies, along with the doctor (Eliade, 1978: 102-5).

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<sup>5</sup>V. L. Sieroszewski, The Yakuts (St. Petersburg, 1896), 632, as quoted by M. A. Czaplicka, Aboriginal Siberia: A Study in Social Anthropology (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 211.

<sup>6</sup>The term "rites of passage" was coined by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957). The ritualized periods of life crisis most often include birth, puberty, marriage and death, but may also include naming, first cutting of the hair, and other "firsts" considered significant in particular cultures.

Langdon Warner, in The Enduring Art of Japan, 1958, noted the ritual duties of Japanese craftsmen, including the smith, when he observed that:

In traditional Japan all the craft and trade guilds had special religious rituals and formulas used in their commerce with the world of nature as they carried on their particular industry or commerce. Thus the craftsmen really had priestly functions in their vocations (Warner, 1958: 19).

These "priestly functions" included the performance and observance of religious rituals necessary for dealing with the sacred.

Smiths and shamans as "masters over fire" share further similarities. Both are viewed as having the ability to manipulate fire and heat. The smith's practice of transforming ore into metal, and metal into artifact, requires the manipulation of fire and the control of heat. The shaman's ability in some parts of the world to walk on hot coals, hold hot irons, or generate body heat demonstrates his mastery over fire (Eliade, 1974: 473).

Being endowed with ritual duties and the ability to manipulate fire are two points of comparison between the smith and the shaman. There are many other elements of the smith's craft that brings him in contact with the world of the shaman. Some of these will be discussed in the section on Japanese shamanism.

#### **b) Furnace and Womb**

Frequently, there is a symbolic relationship between the operations of mining and smelting, and those of gynecology and obstetrics. This view stems from a belief

that the natural growth of ores in the earth is similar to the gestation of embryos in the womb. In this way mountains, from which ores are frequently mined, and the resulting cave created from the mining process, are often symbolically viewed as the womb of mother earth. Likewise, furnaces become the womb in which the transplanted ore grows into metal (Eliade, 1978: 34-78; 1938: 112-24).

In certain cultures therefore, the entire procedure of metallurgical production may be viewed as a gynecological operation in which the removal of the embryo (ore) from its mother's womb (earth/cave) is then transplanted into another womb (furnace) where its growth and development are accelerated by the heat of fire and guided by the smith to its eventual rebirth as metal. In this procedure the craftsman is a kind of midwife, who controls and improves on nature in the creation of metal.

The image of the furnace as a womb is seen in societies where the furnace is modelled in the shape of a woman, many times complete with clay breasts. Furthermore, the flow of metal is sometimes likened to the flow of menstrual blood. In Africa, the Nyakyusa say that "the molten metal is flowing, the blood to procreate children has come" when referring to a woman's menstrual period.<sup>7</sup> In both cases the image of the furnace as it relates to female physiology is apparent.

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<sup>7</sup>Monica Wilson quoted in Laura Makarius, 1968: 37.

### c) Sacrifice to the Furnace

For life to be created it is sometimes necessary for a sacrifice to be made. This conclusion is attributed, in part, to an agrarian society's observance of nature. Each spring people would observe plants being "reborn," issuing forth from seemingly dead seeds and bulbs, or, in the natural process of decay, maggots magically appearing from a dead animal's carcass.

Another reason that sacrifice may be considered necessary for the completion and success of a new project is found in those societies whose cosmogonic myths view the birth of the world as taking place from the body of a giant or god. In these cases, the god is viewed as sacrificing himself so that the world can be born. The god's body becomes symbolic of the primary matter from which the world and all things are born (Eliade, 1960: 179-185).

There are several mythical traditions in which this is the case. In Japan the creation of the world was augmented by the death (sacrifice) of the goddess Izanami. At the time Izanami gave birth to the god of Fire, her private parts were burned. In agony, Izanami gave birth from her own body to the other gods, among whom were the deities of metal. In this way, Izanami became both a goddess of the dead and a divinity of fecundity (Eliade, 1960: 185).<sup>8</sup>

Examples of sacrifice to complete and insure the success of new

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<sup>8</sup>The myth is found in the Kojiki, Record of Ancient Matters, translated by Basil Hall Chamberlain, 1932: 34-35.

undertakings are found worldwide. Dams, bridges, great walls, and castles have been successfully completed because of sacrifice. Evidence for the sacrifice of humans to the furnace is found in the folklore of many primitive societies. Symbolic replacement for the human body included fetuses, placentas, nail clippings, and hair. When a human was not used, substitutionary sacrifices, such as a chicken or calf, were acceptable (Eliade, 1978: 65-70; Lanciotti, 1955: 106-114).

Examples of sacrifice in Japan are found in a group of legends known as the human pillar legends. In one myth a woman is sacrificed as an offering to the serpent presiding over a lake or river so that a dam may be successfully repaired. Carmen Blacker, author of The Catalpa Bow, an important work on Japanese shamanism, interprets the chosen sacrificial woman as having been a **miko** (female shaman) and sees the symbolism invoked as a marriage of the **miko** to the deity (Blacker, 1986: 120-23). The symbolic union of sacrifice and deity is seen again in a myth from China that tells of killing a girl and marrying her to the genie of the furnace for the successful completion of a sword (Makarius, 1968: 29). The gender pairing of deity and sacrifice enhances the probability of successful creation. In the smelting process, already viewed as a form of creation, the union of male and female elements is thought necessary (Eliade, 1978: 60).

Because of sacrifice to the furnace the smith is brought into close contact with death. Contact with the dead is generally considered polluting and most societies have taboos concerning the proper conduct of those associated or brought into contact with the dead. But in the case of the smith we find quite frequently

that contact with the dead is not taboo. This unusual relationship of death and the smith places him outside the normal order of society (Makarius, 1968).

The ambiguous position of the smith is further supported by his product. As producer of artifacts that are both beneficial to society (the hoe, sickle, fishhook) and detrimental (the sword, halberd, and knife), the smith elicits an antithetical attitude from his society. He may be feared or despised, while concurrently respected and regarded with awe by those around him. This seemingly contradictory attitude toward the smith was not unusual and existed in many societies worldwide (Makarius, 1968; Cline, 1937: 128-139).

The themes discussed above are found worldwide in relation to metallurgy and the smith. They have been discussed in length by Mircea Eliade in The Forge and the Crucible, and are found throughout the literature pertaining to smiths and their religious traditions. They are also found in Japan and will be discussed in the Chapter Two. In the following section themes common to Japanese religion and shamanism are presented and discussed.

## Themes in Japanese Religion

There is no single Japanese religion. Shinto, (literally, **kami** way) is considered the native religion of Japan, and it varies substantially in its regional folk beliefs and practices. It consists of a collection of rituals appropriate for inviting and interacting with the **kami**, for the purpose of invigorating and infusing the community with sacred forces and prosperity. It is composed of elements of shamanism and animism that developed during the early formative years of the Japanese culture. Shinto continues to influence the thought of the Japanese people (Dunn, 1983: 4).

The term Shinto was first coined in the 6th century A.D., in response to the more formalized and newly-introduced traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, along with the Chinese cosmological system of yin and yang. The introduction of these traditions also gave rise to the anthropomorphic, iconographic representation of **kami**, which previously had no anthropomorphic image. Eventually, there was a pairing or syncretic blending of **kami** with Buddhist deities, especially Bohdisattvas.<sup>9</sup>

Shinto is a tradition associated with nature and creativity. Its deities, **kami**, were intimately associated with trades and crafts. The 8th century C.E. anthology, Manyo-shu (Collection of Myriad Leaves), helps us to understand how important the **kami** were in the everyday life of the Japanese people. Langdon Warner

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<sup>9</sup>The scheme of Buddhist-Shinto co-existence lasted until the nineteenth century and became known as "Ryobu (Two Aspect) Shinto.

includes this passage from the Manyo-shu in his book, The Enduring Arts of Japan.

No tree could be marked for felling, no bush tapped for lacquer juice, no oven built for smelting or for pottery, and no forge fire lit without appeal to the Kami residing in each (Warner, 1958: 19).

Even today, most carpenters, potters, and other craftsmen will know their craft's patron **kami**, and some symbol of this deity will appear in their shop.

In the following sections I will discuss three major themes of Japanese Shinto that will help us to understand the Kanayako myth and its associated ritual. These themes are: a) descent of the semi-divine kami being, b) renewal and fertility, c) pollution and taboo. To this list I add a fourth theme found associated with Shinto, folk and Buddhist beliefs, that is, d) Japanese shamanism.

Many of these themes and their ritual symbols were established in the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Things)<sup>10</sup> and Nihongi (Chronicle of Ancient Japan)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup>The Kojiki (Record of Ancient Things) is one of the oldest extant books in Japan. It was written in order to legitimize the rule and origin of the Imperial Throne, and to establish clan lineage. Emperor Temmu (672-686) set up a committee to put the old traditions in writing. Unfortunately, before its completion he died and work stopped. It wasn't until 711 A.D. that Empress Gemmyo (707-715 A.D.) ordered O-no-Yasumaro to continue the compilation, and in 712 C.E. the work was completed and presented to the Empress.

The compilers of the Kojiki used as their sources myths, folktales, folksongs, songs of the court, and now-lost chronicles. These were compiled into a mythological-historical narrative which provided an account of Japanese history down to the year 628 C.E. It was written in Chinese ideographs because the Japanese syllabary was not in existence at the time. The style is said to reflect the earlier oral transmission (Ono, 1986: 10).

<sup>11</sup>In 720 C.E., O-no-Yasumaro and Prince Toneri compiled another history of Japan, the Nihongi, also called Nihon Shoki. This record brings Japanese history



Although Shinto has no official scripture, the Kojiki and Nihongi are considered to have reached near-canonical status, and it is through these texts and the rituals they describe that we come to understand Shinto tradition.

#### a) Descent of the Kami

The concept of **kami** is complicated, and probably the word should not be translated simply as "god" or "deity." Explanations have been forwarded on the etymology of the word, but these prove confusing and fail to capture the true breadth of the term. For instance, **kami** has been viewed as a homonym meaning "upper" or "the head", the **kami** being superior beings. It has also been interpreted as relating to a word meaning "to see," or as derived from the fusion of two words meaning "a hidden body or person" (Bownas, 1963: 24). The relationship of **kami** to the Ainu word **kamui**, and to the Mongolian word **kami** or **kam**, which means shaman, is similarly limiting (Hori, 1966: 202).

One of the better definitions of **kami** was given by Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), an 18th century Shinto scholar, who described **kami** as "anything at all beyond the ordinary, or with superior power, or anything awe-inspiring."<sup>12</sup> This

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up to the year 697 C.E. It is also written in Chinese and was presented to Emperor Genso (715-726 C.E.).

The first part of the Nihongi, entitled "Jindaiki" (records of the age of the gods), deals with mythology and legends. The Nihongi is more detailed than the Kojiki and gives several mythologies or versions of some events (Ono, 1986: 10).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Bownas, 1963: 24.

definition will bring to mind the Polynesian concept of "mana", which may be defined as an impersonal force beyond the ordinary that one needs to be ritually prepared for and free of pollution in order to approach (Bownas, 1963: 24).

If we adopt Motoori's definition, then anything may have **kami** nature, but unlike "mana," **kami** is personal. These spirits periodically descend to earth to bestow their blessings and invigorate the community. Themes of descent found in myth and ritual relate to the **kami**'s arrival and appearance on earth. Trees, pillars and mountains are preferred places of descent and inhabitation for the **kami** while on earth.

Descent of the **kami** was established in the Kojiki, when in the sacred time, during the formation of the Japanese islands, the deities, Izanami and Izanagi descended upon a pillar at the world's center. As a result of their descent and circumambulation of the central pillar, the islands of Japan were formed (Kojiki, 1.4-7).

#### **b) Renewal and Fertility**

Hori Ichiro, a respected Japanese ethnologist and historian of religion, speculates that observations of nature's forces and cycles led to religious themes of renewal and fertility for the Japanese people. Based in a need for security and a feeling of control, agrarian people, dependent on nature, established certain rites and rituals. The **matsuri** was established as the ritual celebration during which

time the **kami** would be invited back to the community to renew the creative forces and bring prosperity the following year (Hori, 1966: 19-21).

Historically, the **matsuri** marked cyclical points in the growing season, particularly, planting time and harvest. Its form is similar throughout Japan, consisting of purification rites in preparation for the **kami's** arrival, calling the **kami**, offering food, incense, and candles, the ingestion of the food offerings by the priests and officials overseeing the festival, and finally the performance of traditional dance (Ishikawa, 1984: 9-12). The ritual form of the **matsuri** was established in the Kojiki, during the time of Amaterasu's enticement out of her cave. **Matsuri** are still celebrated in Japan today and continue to create a sense of solidarity with nature, **kami**, and people.

### c) Purification: Pollution and Taboo

One of the most important aspects of **matsuri**, and Shinto, is the stress on purification. Rites of purification are well defined in Shinto. Any area or person about to receive or meet the **kami** needs to be purified and free of pollution (Blacker, 1986: 41-2). There are three great purifiers in Shinto tradition: water, salt, and fire (Bownas, 1963: 143).

Water washes away impurities, particularly salt water. Before a woman could return home to her family, after seclusion in a hut during her menstrual period, she was required to wash her clothing, body and hair to prevent

contamination of the household. Priests and those officiating over rituals would perform a ceremonial washing, called *misogi*. At one time a priest might travel miles to the coast in order to bathe in salt water. Priests still practice a modified form of ceremonial washing; people visiting a shrine simply rinse their mouths at the water basin before entering (Ishikawa, 1984: 10). Salt is a purifier, probably because of its preservative powers. The Japanese also considered it the basic material of all creation (Bownas, 1963:25). It is used in many Shinto rites to purify the shrine and altar area. Finally, fire is thought to cleanse through burning. In some areas of Japan if a woman broke a menstrual taboo and there was a threat of contamination to the hearth fire, the villagers would take their flint stones to the smith who would burn the stones for purification (Segawa, 1973: 248).

All those attending a ritual, shrine, or the family altar were expected to be free of pollution. Temporary restrictions on foods, such as meat and strong vegetables, along with sexual abstinence were observed prior to rituals and encounters with the sacred *kami*. Taboos connected with death, blood, and childbirth, were observed at all times. Transgression of a pollution taboo is probably the closest counterpart to Western sin in Shinto religion.

#### **d) Japanese Shamanism**

A shaman is a person who receives a supernatural gift from the spirit world. This gift is usually bestowed by a single spirit who later becomes his guardian, guide, and spiritual mate. Before making contact with the spiritual world the

shaman generally suffers symptoms of sickness or hysteria. After his initiation, he has the ability to put himself into a trance or altered state of consciousness at will, during which time he travels to other realms inaccessible to the physical body (Blacker, 1986: 24).

Eliade has defined the ability to go into trance as the most important characteristic of the shaman (Eliade, 1974: 4-6). Second, is the ability of possession, a state in which the shaman's body hosts other spirits. Other common characteristics of the shaman are mastery over fire, and the tendency to have helping spirits, magic clothes and instruments (Blacker, 1986: 25; Eliade, 1974). Frequently the shaman's work requires a traditional cosmology in which the earth lies at the middle and a tree joins the planes lying above and below, at the center. The tree serving as the center is the **axis mundi** and symbolic of the source of ever-renewing life.<sup>13</sup>

Japanese shamanism is mostly a technique of possession and is practiced almost exclusively by women known as **miko** or **miko-gami** (spirit woman-god). Many Japanese **miko** were blind from birth. Their initiation was arduous and exhausting. Upon completion of her initiation the **miko** would don wedding garments and was considered married to the tutelary god (Blacker, 1986: 147). Until recent times coitus between a **miko-gami** and the priest of the shrine was part of the program of initiation.

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<sup>13</sup>See Mircea Eliade's Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy for an in depth study of shamanism worldwide.

In the book, The Catalpa Bow, Carmen Blacker, describes the Japanese **miko** as a bridge between one world to another. **Miko** were called upon to summon the souls from beyond and speak for them. Frequently, their service was employed to answer questions, tell good and bad fortune, discern illness and locate lost objects (Blacker, 1986: 19-34).

Shamanism in Japan was probably present in some form from the prehistoric period. There are two sources of influence generally acknowledged; 1) the "arctic hysteria type" found in Siberia or Northern Asia, and 2) the Polynesian type from the south. **Miko-gami** are documented in the Chinese Wei Chih chronicles and the Japanese Kojiki and Nihongi, where great shamanesses played important parts in the ancient history of Japan (Blacker, 1986: 138). Later, shamanism commingled with Shinto, and Buddhism, and many elements are found in folk religion (Hori, 1966: 181-215).

Themes of shamanism, **kami**, and pollution are common in Japanese religion. These themes also play an important part in the tradition of iron workers and appear throughout the Kanayako myth. The following chapter contains the interpretation of the myth. It is structured into three phases and each phase is interpreted line by line. New themes and motifs are introduced where relevant. Variations to the myth found in other sources, while slight, will be considered.

## CHAPTER II

### THE KANAYAKO TRADITION OF IRON AND FORGE WORKERS

The earliest recorded reference to specific metal deities in Japan can be found in the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters, 712 C. E.), and the Nihongi (Chronicle of Ancient Japan, 720 C. E.). The deities named in these records are Kanayama-hime-no-mikoto (Princess Metal Mountain) and Kanayama-hiko-no-mikoto (Prince Metal Mountain).

The Kojiki describes the birth of the two deities from Izanami-no-mikoto (Her Augustness the Female Who Invites) as follows:

...through giving birth to this child (Hinokagutsuti-no-mikoto/Deity of Fire) her august private parts were burnt, and she sickened and lay down. The names of the Deities born from her vomit were the Metal Mountain Prince and the Metal Mountain Princess. The names of the Deities that were born from her faeces were the Deity Clay Viscid Prince and next the Deity Clay Viscid Princess. The names of the Deities that were next born from her urine were the Deity Mitsuhanome (Spirit Princess Water) and next the Young Wonderous Producing Deity...<sup>14</sup>

Although the Child Deity, Kanayako, is not mentioned in either of these

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<sup>14</sup>From the Kojiki, Record of Ancient Matters, and translated by Basil Hall Chamberlain, 1932: 34-35.

records, the three **kami** - Kanayako, Kanayama-hime-no-mikoto, and Kanayama-hiko-no-mikoto - are sometimes combined to form the trinity known as Kanayako-daimyoojin.

It is not clear whether Kanayama-hime-no-mikoto and Kanayama-hiko-no-mikoto are the parents of the Child Deity; they are, however, considered a married couple. A document written by Ishida Haruritsu in 1825, Kanayako Engi Shiyo (Story of Kanayako), states that Kanayako's mother was the offspring of the Mountain god and Sea-dragon goddess. This kami married Kanayama-hiko-no-mikoto to produce Kanayako (Hori, 1959).

The earliest written account of the Child Deity occurs in a document known as Tetsuzan Hishiyo (Book of Secret Iron Techniques), 1784. The first volume, "Kanayako-gami saibun" (Kanayako Story), is believed to have been written in the early Muromachi Period, 1338-1339 C.E. It recounts Kanayako's appearance to man and her deeds on earth. It is the basic text used by all the post World War II Japanese authors regarding Kanayako.

This text is not available for direct translation, although it was republished by Tawara Kuniichi in 1933 as a supplement to Kurai no Satetsu Seiren-Ho. My compilation of the myth is based on the post-war literature that has recorded sections of the myth from the Tetsuzan Hishiyo. I have organized and divided my interpretation of the myth into three phases. A careful analysis sequentially, line by line, follows the presentation of each phase of the myth. A structural diagram of the myth's contents and the **kami's** movement is presented in Figure 6.

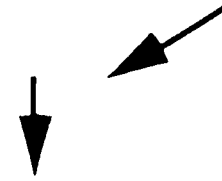


## Kanayako Myth/Structure

## Movement/Basic Dialectic (descend/travel/ascend)

### I. a. Origins (Culture Hero Phase)

Kanayako descends 4pm, July 7th to Iwanabe  
Makes 1st pot (called Iwanabe)  
Says will teach iron making,  
peace and prosperity



### b. Movement (because of lack of mountains)

Goes to Izumo  
Travels on white heron  
Lands on katsura tree  
Seen by hunting dogs of Abe Masashige  
She speaks to Abe  
wants to teach iron making



### c. Iron Making made Human via Abe

Abe builds shrine & becomes 1st priest  
Kanayako requests takadonnno (tatara house)  
Kanayako becomes murage (chief iron worker)  
works at forge & produces iron



### II. Further Establishment of Ritual Tradition

Another day (Kanayako descends)  
requests to stay at home  
refused because of childbirth  
asks at another house  
accepts relation with death



### III. Final Establishment of Ritual Traditions

Another day (Kanayako descends)  
travels from tatara to tatara  
places apprentices  
chased by dog (Abe's?)  
entangled in hemp -- falls to death  
apprentices lost will  
pray to Kanayako (her corpse?)  
tie dead body to pillar of tatara  
iron grows hot and flows  
death not a blemish  
no dogs or hemp allowed in tatara

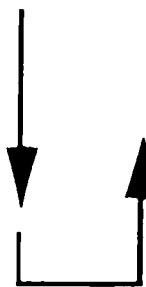


Figure 6. Structural Diagram of Contents and Movement in Kanayako Myth

## The Kanayako Myth

The following is a brief description of the myth's contents. The myth begins with the descent of the deity Kanayako to an area in Japan known as Iwanabe. While in Iwanabe, Kanayako casts an iron pot. After casting this pot she moves to Izumo where she is discovered by Abe Masashige's hunting dogs. Abe becomes the first priest of the Kanayako tradition, building a shrine to honor the deity and then constructing a **tatara** called a **takadono** where Kanayako, transformed into a **murage** (chief iron worker) begins to teach the technique of iron smelting.

In phase two of the myth Kanayako descends to earth on another day and travels among the people. Stopping at a home, the deity asks to stay for one night, but is turned away because of recent childbirth. Next, she requests to stay at a home where there has been a recent death, and is welcomed.

In the third and final phase of the myth, Kanayako descends once more and travels about placing apprentices in the different **tatara**. During one of her travels she is chased by a dog and while trying to escape falls to her death. At this point the apprentices loose their will and pray to her corpse. Her corpse is tied to a pillar in the **tatara**, all is set right, and the iron begins to flow.

The myth of Kanayako answers how, where and why the deity came to earth. The customs, taboos, and rituals of iron workers are established through the deity's travels, mishaps, and teachings. Elements of binary opposition are operating throughout the myth. Death and life, male and female, descent and ascent vs. lateral movement are prevalent themes.

a) Phase One: Origins (Culture Hero Phase)

Kanayako descended at 4pm, on July 7th, to Iwanabe, Shisou district, Harima county. At Iwanabe, Kanayako made the first iron pot; this pot they called 'Iwanabe.' Kanayako said she would show people the art of iron making so that they would prosper and there could be peace.

But because of the lack of mountains around Iwanabe, where the goddess could reside, she went to Izumo, Nogi district, Kuroda Hida village. She travelled there on a white heron and landing on a branch of the Japanese Judas tree she was spied by the hunting dogs of Abe Masashige. Abe approached the goddess and asked who she was. She responded "I am Kanayako-gami and would like to live here and teach man tatara iron making techniques." Abe built a shrine for her and became the first Shinto priest for Kanayako-gami. Kanayako requested that a takadono be built so that she may teach iron making. She begins to work at the tatara and produces an abundance of iron (Ishizuka, 1941: 84).

In the first phase of the myth I will examine themes relating to: the deity as "culture hero" and creative force, descent of the *kami*, symbolism of mountains, trees, birds, and dogs, and the gender pairing and relationship of deity and priest.

The first section of phase one of the Kanayako myth reads like a preamble. Kanayako descends to Iwanabe and casts the first iron pot. She says she will show people the art of iron making so that they may prosper and live in peace.

The deity is at once recognizable as a creative deity and "culture hero." Her casting of a pot, which is symbolic of the vessel and womb, demonstrates that she embodies the creative forces involved with iron metallurgy. The result of the knowledge she transmits to man will improve his life on earth.

Following this opening section, Kanayako moves to Izumo (a horizontal movement) and descends -- albeit, a lesser descent -- a second time. The reason given for the move is the lack of mountains in Iwanabe where the deity may reside.<sup>15</sup>

This line is interpreted by the Japanese art historian and researcher of the Kanayako tradition, Kubota Kurao, as a great move of a skilled technician's group to the Izumo area (Kubota, 1982: 18). If true, then history is encoded in the mythic record.

The deity Kanayako, attributes her move to the lack of mountains found in the Iwanabe area. Therefore, mountains are considered the desired dwelling place of the **kami**. They are also a place where the **kami** may ascend and descend. In Japan, mountains became associated with the meeting grounds of the **kami**, as well as the dwelling places of the souls of the dead or ancestors. This view developed from a shift in consciousness that had originated in a two directional space perception, where beings not only resided above or below, -- vertically, but also beyond -- horizontally. An explanation for this basic spatial perception is presented by the Japanese ethnologist, Oka Masao. Oka argues that the original people of Japan came from China, Micronesia, or Melanesia. These people were agrarian and matriarchal and brought with them a system of female shamanism. They believed in a horizontal cosmology, in which the dead dwelled across the sea.

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<sup>15</sup>Izumo is historically a place of descent among many of the gods in the Kojiki when the world was being created.

Later, during the 3rd or 4th century C.E., with the introduction of patriarchal tribes from southern Manchuria or Korea, a cosmology of the vertical type with beliefs in deities that descended from above onto trees, pillars and mountain tops, was introduced and synthesized with the existing world scheme. The resulting syncretic view presented a double structure - horizontal and vertical - in myth and world scheme.<sup>16</sup>

**Kami** were seen as descending from above, or beyond as in the case of **marebito** (sacred visitors; spirits of the ancestors), a special class of **kami** who were thought to reside in the land of the dead, Tokoyo. Tokoyo was thought to be located somewhere far across, and possibly below, the sea. Hori Ichiro believes that eventually a shift in perception took place in the mind's of the Japanese people. As they moved inland away from the sea they began to identify the home of the ancestor and kami with the mountains around them.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the mountains became the meeting grounds, as well as dwelling places of the souls of the dead and were important in the development of ancestor worship in Japan (Hori, 1966: 144-51). Therefore, for the Japanese, while on earth the kami and the ancestors are viewed as dwelling in the same direction and place.

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<sup>16</sup>Oka Masao et al., present this theory in Nihon Minzoku no Kigen, pp. 59-68. A discussion of it can be found in Waida, The Religions of Japan, p. 1-2, and Blacker, The Catalpa Bow, 1986: 29, 69-84.

<sup>17</sup>This theory of Hori Ichiro is discussed by Carmen Blacker in The Catalpa Bow (1986): 69-79. It is from Hori Ichiro's Waka kuni minkan shinkoshi no kenkyu, vol. 2, p.239.

Mountains were also viewed as embodying **kami** nature and recognized as the source of the sacred water needed for agriculture and subsistence. They were considered to be able to manifest life itself and were imbued with all the qualities of the Great Mother Goddess -- birth and rebirth, renewal and fertility. The symbolism of the mountain as the Great Mother Goddess is thought to have been introduced by early nomadic hunting people and later became incorporated into the agrarian world view (Hori, 1966: 161-74).

Another view of mountains drew upon the symbolism of the mountain and womb found in the Buddhist sects of Tendai and Shingon. During the Muromachi Period (1333-1573 C. E.), mountains became inhabited by Buddhist priests and ascetics. These philosophical sects were influenced by earlier traditions in Buddhism and by elements of Shinto and shamanism (Hori, 1966: 179). Therefore, mountains are pregnant with symbolism in the minds of the Japanese, and this symbolism has existed a long time in association with many elements of shamanism, animism, Shinto and Buddhism.

The theme of mountains, their importance and symbolism, is well documented in other parts of the world.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the world, not only in Japan, these cosmic mountains have frequently been associated with the gods, ancestors, and shamans, as places where other planes of existence, above and

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<sup>18</sup> Some of the more famous mountains of worship are the five sacred mountains in China (Wu-shan), Sumeru or Meru in ancient India, Mt. Kenya in Kenya, Sinai from the Old Testament and Olympus in Greece.

below, could be accessed (Eliade, 1974: 266-69; Hori, 1966: 143-46). In this way, mountains became viewed as the center of the world, known as the **axis mundi**.

In the second section, line two, Kanayako flies to the Izumo district on the back of a white heron. Upon arriving in Izumo she lights on the Japanese Judas tree (**katsura**) and is discovered by the hunting dogs of Abe Masashige.

The flight of Kanayako to the **katsura** tree on the back of a bird, the white heron, reinforces her image as deity and spirit. In Indo-European belief, souls take the form of birds. The Latin *aves* meant both "bird" and "ancestral spirit". World mythology is filled with legendary birds symbolizing this theme, examples are the Egyptian Horus, and the Phoenix (Walker, 1983: 101).

These great mythological birds were also symbolic of rebirth, a theme relating to the shaman and his spiritual rebirth at the time of his initiation. Shamans in Siberia, Central Asia, Indonesia, and the South Pacific, professed to transform themselves into birds (Walker, 1983: 101). More importantly, birds were also considered to be both messengers and helping spirits to the shaman; aiding him in his magical flight to the other world (Eliade, 1974: 156-58). From this perspective, the white heron is Kanayako's helping spirit, accompanying her from the other world.

Birds as helping spirits are not uncommon to shamans in Japan. In The Catalpa Bow, Blacker's informant, Miss Ishida, a clairvoyant medium, conveys the belief that some birds are seen as more spiritual than others. Her examples are

shiny black birds and white birds (Blacker, 1986: 36). The white heron falls in the latter category.

The Japanese anthropologist, Nobuhiro Matsumoto has compared the Kanayako myth with metal workers' myths of ancient China. He found that in southern and central China a legendary one-legged ghost bird was associated with the foot bellows.<sup>19</sup> This creature is seen as the antecedent of the white bird that Kanayako-gami rode (Nobuhiro, 1973: 149). Nobuhiro believes that over a period of time the Chinese myth became incorporated into the Kanayako myth of Japanese iron workers.

Along with the mountain, as a place of descent and residence of the **kami**, the tree is also charged with similar symbolism. Trees, and the related pillar, were possible pathways of travel from one plane of existence to another for the gods, and the shaman. The symbolism and worship of the tree and pillar are common to the Shinto tradition, drawing on elements which can be traced back to early animism and shamanism in Japan. The pillar as a vehicle for the **kami**'s descent was established at the time of the creation of the Japanese islands and was recorded in the Kojiki (Kojiki, 1.4-7).

Originally, **kami** had no shape or form, they required a vessel in order to manifest themselves and temporarily reside in while in this world. One of the

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<sup>19</sup>Marcel Granet discusses the association of this legendary ghost bird with the Japanese one-eyed smith gods, Ame-no-ma-hitotstu-no-kami and Hitotsu-me-tatara in his Danses et Legendes de la Chine Ancienne, II, 1926: 516-537.



preferred vessels was the **yorishiro** (object of temporary residence of the **kami**), which was frequently a long slender object, particularly a pine tree.<sup>20</sup> Through the use of special sounds or chants the **kami** would be enticed to enter the vessel. At first **kami** only inhabited the **yorishiro** for the length of the ritual, but over time **kami** began to prolong their stay. Eventually, it was believed that a **kami** might stay for almost the entire year. In these cases, **kami** were believed to dwell in a vessel known as a **goshintai** (Blacker, 1986: 38-40). The **goshintai** of Kanayako is known to have been a small mountain shape between four pillars erected outside the **tatara** area (Ishizuka, 1941: 83-90).

Carmen Blacker sees a connection between the **yorishiro** and the branch that a shaman holds to induce possession. These objects, sometimes called **kuru**, take their name from the place name Iwakuru (rock-seat). The branch or wand used by the shaman is called a **miteguru** (hand-seat) (Blacker, 1986: 38). Therefore, **kuru**, **miteguru**, and **yorishiro**, may be viewed as objects for temporary residence or transmission of the **kami**.

For the **kami**, Kanayako, the **katsura** tree was the place of descent and vessel for temporary residence. The **katsura** tree is deciduous. It shimmers in the

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<sup>20</sup>**Yorishiro** were frequently long and thin shapes such as trees, stone pillars, or wands. Honda Yasuji believes the oldest forms of **yorishiro** were probably a combination of two forms: a pole, flag, spear standing upright on a rock or mound. Many place names survive to suggest such ancient sacred sites: **hoko-iwa** (spear rock), **hatazuka** (flag mound), etc. Honda also recognizes these shapes as the combining of two sexual symbols. Discussed in Blacker, 1986: 39.

The Shinto practice of erecting a pillar of stone or tree (**yorishiro**) at a sacred site is ancient.

wind like a quaking aspen. In fall, its foliage turns intense with color. The particular significance of the **katsura** to the Japanese is unknown to me, but I might suggest that its outstanding beauty alone may qualify it to be the vessel of a **kami**.

Of course, **kami** could also take up its abode in objects without being invoked. Objects of an unusual or awesome nature were marked as places of **kami** inspiration, the stone of unmistakable phallic form, or a tree of massive size or with tangled roots. These objects were marked by a **shimenawa**, a straw rope hung with strips of white paper and some pieces of straw, designating the sacred power contained within.

This image of the marked and decorated tree is conjured up in the Kojiki, where the **sakaki** tree is described as decorated with strings of **magatama** beads, cloth and mirror. This **sakaki** tree became the temporary abode of the **kami** and has continued to be an important symbol in Shinto (Kojiki, 17.11).

After lighting on the **katsura** tree, Kanayako is discovered by the hunting dogs of Abe Masashige.<sup>21</sup> The dogs may be interpreted as a sign of the forthcoming initiatory death of Abe Masashige, the hunter, and his subsequent rebirth as the first Shinto priest of the Kanayako tradition. Dogs have come to be symbolically linked with death in many ways. The association of canines with death

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<sup>21</sup>One of the similarities between Japanese and Korean (Paekche dynasty, 18-663 C. E.) descent myth is the theme of hunting. Royal hunts are recorded in both Korean and Japanese texts and were one of the major activities of visitant emperors to Japan. Obayashi sees these royal hunts as being re-enactments of the original hunts of the primordial ancestors. Over time these hunts lost their sacred meaning and degenerated into a pastime activity of the aristocracy. Obayashi, 1984: 171-184.

may be a result of their image as carrion eaters. Because of this they are sometimes viewed as carrying souls to the world of the dead. They are also believed to be the guardians of the entrance to the world of the dead. Shamans may encounter these funerary dogs during their descent to the underworld at the time of initiation (Eliade, 1974: 466-67).

The symbolic interpretation of the dogs suggests that Abe is about to go through an initiation similar to that of a shaman. Furthermore, it may be argued that as a Shinto priest, he is the latter-day development of the shaman. Both shamans and priests have experience with the sacred and ritual duties that qualify them as "technicians of the sacred."

When Abe approached the deity to ask who she was, Kanayako responded that she was Kanayako-gami and had come to teach man **tatara** iron making techniques. Abe then built a shrine for the **kami** and became the first Shinto priest of Kanayako-gami. This is the beginning of the Kanayako tradition.

It seems plausible to me that the first shrine to Kanayako was probably the **katsura** tree marked with the **shimenawa**. Small offerings, such as cooked food, candles and incense, may have been placed at the foot of the tree. The **katsura** tree where Kanayako was thought to descend still stands in Izumo, marked in a similar fashion (Figure 7). Kanayako was also deified at the local **katsura** tree within each **sannai** (Kubota, 1988: 30).

If we refer to the painting (Figure 1) of Kanayako, we can begin to interpret its meaning. Kanayako sits in the **katsura** tree, above her head stretches the

**shimenawa**, the Shinto straw rope that indicates an area to be sacred. The deity sits in a typical Buddhist posture, across her back is strung the bow. In Buddhist iconography the bow is usually seen in combination with the arrow and represents a weapon against evil. It is thought to chase away forgetfulness which is composed of carelessness and neglect (Saunders, 1985: 148). In her hands, Kanayako holds what appears to be the jewel or **nyo-i shu**. The jewel, sometimes portrayed as being divided into three parts, or with three flames represents the Three Jewels of Buddhism which are; the Buddha, the Dharma (Law) and the Sangha (Community). It symbolizes all good things and is the jewel which grants all wishes.

The figures seated below Kanayako are more puzzling. My feeling is that they are Abe and Kanayako. The deity revealing her purpose on earth to the hunter. At the foot of the tree appears a bowl filled with something (perhaps iron sand) as an offering to the deity. The entire picture is an artist's interpretation of the mythic event of Kanayako appearing on earth and Abe receiving divine guidance.

There is also a main and formal pavilion shrine of Kanayako located in Nishi Hida, Shimane (old day Izumo). The current Shinto priest, Abe Masaya, traces his lineage to Abe Masashige and the time of Kanayako. He is the 86th descendent of the Abe line (Figures 8 & 9).



Figure 7. Katsura tree where Kanayako-gami descended.

Source: Abe Masaya. Kera no Mori. Japan, 9.



Figure 8. Kanayako Main Shrine in Nishi Hida.

Source: Abe Masaya. Kera no Mori. Japan, 9.



Figure 9. Abe Masaya standing outside of the Kanayako Mani Shrine in Nishi Hida.

Source: Abe Masaya. Kera no Mori. Japan, 166.

It was not uncommon for the position of priest, shaman, and smith to be hereditary, in Japan, or the world. Once a contract was formed with a god it continued to be honored by the descendants. In this way, ritual and technical knowledge was passed down from father to son, throughout the generations.

One of the functions of Japanese myth was to establish ties between the gods and their descendants on earth. The Kojiki was written, in part for this reason, to establish the legitimate right to rulership by the emperor based on his descent from Amaterasu, the sun goddess.

In Japan, shamans were traditionally women, chosen from either Shinto priest families or from those who had undergone arduous training and ordeals. One category of this magico-shamanic system included male and female shamans that were chosen by their guardian spirit, deity, or ancestral shaman (Hori, 1966: 181-83).

The gender pairing of female or male deity, with male priest or female **miko**, was typical. The idea that one became wed, in a way, to a guardian deity, is shown in the custom of the **miko** donning wedding garments at the culmination of her initiation. This practice is derived from the belief that a spiritual union has taken place. This symbolism is manifest in the Kanayako and Abe union.

Finally, in the last lines of phase one, Kanayako has requested that a **takadono** (type of **tatara**) be built so that she may begin to teach iron making. When she begins to work at the **tatara**, she produces an abundance of iron.

Slight variations in the myth exist, regarding who worked in the **tatara**. In

some cases, it was thought that Kanayako brought a **murage** with her (Nobuhiro, 1973: 150), in other instances, it was said that she transformed into the **murage** (Ishizuka, 1941: 84; Kubota, 1988: 33). The fact that there are different versions is not discordant with the interpretation of Kanayako as a creative deity and force. As a creative force, Kanayako was traditionally viewed as always present and necessary in the **tatara** at the time of smelting, regardless of who was performing the actual labor.

This completes phase one of the myth. Kanayako has established herself as a creative deity and "culture hero." The pot she has cast can be viewed as symbolic of the vessel and womb which in turn is symbolic of the creative forces and potential she embodies. The importance of mountains as the desired dwelling place of the kami is made known by Kanayako herself. In her magical flight from Iwanabe to Izumo, she is accompanied by a white heron, her spirit helper. When in Izumo she descends, a second time, to the katsura tree, which is viewed as both vessel for residing and vehicle for transmission. Her arrival is discovered by the hunting dogs of Abe Masashige. The dogs are interpreted as an omen of the impending spiritual death and rebirth of Abe. Abe's first act as Shinto priest is to build a shrine to honor Kanayako. This is considered the formal beginning of the tradition. The **takadono** is built, and Kanayako, transformed into the **murage**, begins work at the **tatara**, where an abundance of iron is being produced, and all is considered well.



## b) Phase Two: Further Establishment of Ritual Tradition

On another day Kanayako descended to earth and asked to stay at a home for one night. She was refused because of a recent childbirth at that house, for that reason she hated childbirth. She then asked at another home if she could stay and was told that there had been a recent death, but she was welcome if she did not mind that people were in mourning, for that reason Kanayako did not mind death.<sup>22</sup>

In phase two of the myth, Kanayako begins to establish the ritual tradition. The predominant themes deal with taboo and pollution. The two ritual observances established are the observance of taboo surrounding women after childbirth and the abolition of taboo practices surrounding death.

Not mentioned explicitly, but implied by "on another day" is the ascent and subsequent descent of the kami. In the first lines of phase two Kanayako travels the land (horizontal movement) and, needing a place to stay for one night, she inquires at a home where there has been a recent childbirth. She is turned away and for this reason it is said that Kanayako hates childbirth. The refusal of Kanayako's request indicates that the period after childbirth was already viewed as polluting. During the period after childbirth, a woman was regarded as if menstruating. Both circumstances fall into the larger category of taboos that surround women and the flow of blood. The belief that women were polluting during these times can be found in most cultures.

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<sup>22</sup>This section of the Kanayako myth which was originally recorded in the Tetsuzan Hishiyo, can be found in Horii, 1959: 122-23; Ushio, 1941:77-83; and Ishizuka, 1941: 86.

The Tetsuzan Hishyo, goes into further detail concerning the pollution of women, menses, and childbirth. It is recorded that "Menstruating women do not enter the tatara for seven days. A woman who has given birth does not enter the tatara for 33 days. Her husband does not enter for 17 days, and for 30 days cannot have his meals cooked in the same fire as the woman who bore the child." Similar instructions are given for those who work the foot bellows (Ishizuka, 1946: 245-50).

In a report, compiled of interviews with **tatara** and charcoal makers and their families taken in 1946, and written by Ishizuka Takatoshi, the number of days designated for restriction from the **tatara** and forge had been greatly reduced. General consensus was either three, five or seven days, important numbers in Japanese thought. This view of women as detrimental to the **tatara** and forge tradition was held until quite recently, indeed, until the post-war years, when the restriction was finally lifted.

Tanabe Ishino Ritsuko, a Japanese ethnographer, has researched the casting tradition in Ohmi. She reported that the forge workers of Ohmi also remarked that women were forbidden in the old days to enter the **tatara** or forge once the fire was lit because it would bring bad luck (Tanabe, 1986, 1:102).

What, then, is the reason for banning women from the **tatara**? I see at least two possible reasons for this attitude toward women; first, the flow of blood is viewed as the draining away of life; and second, the symbolism of the fire as a pure and creative force.

The view of menstrual blood, childbirth and the period immediately after childbirth as taboo is related to the ambiguity that surrounds these conditions. Menstrual blood may be seen as both, the flowing away of life, and the undeniable visual evidence of a women's creative potential. Karen Smyers, also sees the early concept of taboo and women in Japan as two-fold. She says a thing may be taboo because it is perceived as holy, or because it is unclean or polluted. In early Shinto, where fertility was at the core of all beliefs and purity at the core of all ritual, women held an important position. Originally, women may not have been considered polluted at the time of their menstrual period, but sacred and unapproachable. The once held belief that when a woman was menstruating she was being purified and becoming the wife of a **kami** indicates this position. According to Smyers this attitude changed after the introduction of Buddhism and Confucianism, which introduced the polarity of purity and pollution (Smyers, 1983: 7-12), along with the lower status of women.

There is plenty of evidence of beliefs in both the good and bad luck brought by menstrual blood. The Ainu saw menstrual blood as a talisman and would rub it on their chests in hopes of good luck (Smyers, 1983: 9-10). In Shimane, menstrual taboos were observed, but at the same time, it was also thought that a house built on the spot where a **kari-ya** (hut for the seclusion of women during menses and after childbirth) stood, would prosper. Furthermore, throughout Japan, families celebrated the onset of menses in a young girl by preparing a special rice and bean dish known as **sekihan**. This was presented to the girl, and placed on

the family altar, before introducing her to the village society as a woman (Segawa, 1973: 248).

Fire was considered one of the great purifiers of the Shinto tradition and therefore, subject to the pollution taboos imposed on the sacred. Fire was considered pure and a creative force. Fire also possessed ambiguity. It could destroy as well as create. It could be contaminated by external pollution, therefore, women were forbidden to cook at the household hearth during those times when they were considered polluting. In some areas, during a women's menstrual period, all the fires in her house were extinguished and rekindled (Segawa, 1973:240). It is likely, that the view of fire being contaminated by the pollution of women was carried over to the forge and *tatara* fires.

It is interesting to note that in Kohoku and other areas, if a woman aborted a child, or did not observe the menstrual taboo, villagers took their flint stones, used for fire making, to the local smith. The smith would burn the stones for purification and sweep the villagers' hearths to prevent fire contamination (Segawa, 1973: 247).

An explanation for the prohibition of women in the *tatara*, as seen from the worker's point of view, is that women are jealous of other women, therefore female deities dislike other females because they are jealous and do not want any other women around (Bernier, p.110; Ishizuka, 1946: 150; 1941: 89). Similar beliefs are held for other female deities, such as, Shygyoku, the deity of the boat, and

Funadama, a water deity. This argument is simplistic and may reflect a man's point of view.

After being turned away from the house in which there had been a birth Kanayako stopped at another home and asked to stay. She was told that there had been a recent death, but that she could stay if she did not mind people mourning. Kanayako did not mind death. Within the Shinto tradition, death taboos are normally observed, but as we have seen, smiths throughout the world are associated with death and generally exempt from death taboos (Makarius, 1968). One of the reasons for this is that sacrifice is viewed as necessary for creation.

Death, and contact with the dead, is dangerous because of the nature of death. It is a condition viewed as abnormal and definitely unlucky. The Japanese term **kegare** which is used in reference to death also means "abnormality" or "misfortune" (Ono, 1986: 108). Furthermore, death may be seen as the lack of life force, resulting in the depletion of power and as such, is antipathetic to sacred power. Those who come in contact with death risk the associative or sympathetic effect of the depletion of their own life forces and would not visit a shrine or attend a ritual celebration, such as **matsuri**, where the **kami** and creative forces are concentrated.

Kanayako established what is, and is not, to be considered taboo and polluting to the **tatara** process and iron workers. As pointed out previously, taboos are generally constructed around those situations and things that hold ambiguity and dissonance (Douglas, 1968: 196). Objects of taboo fall outside the realm of the

normal and, if considered polluting, may result in a flowing away of, or diminution, of the creative life forces. Kanayako's dislike of childbirth, which is actually a dislike for flowing blood, is based in the view that the loss of blood is the loss of life force, and therefore threatening to sacred and creative acts. The establishment of taboos around this period in a woman's life is found in most cultures throughout the world. On the other hand, death, which commonly carries its own taboos, was embraced by Kanayako and was not considered harmful to the **tatara** process. The abolition of death taboos for the smith is found in other cultures, also (Makarius, 1968). The smith's relationship to and acceptance of death will be expanded on in phase three.

### **c) Phase Three: Final Establishment of Ritual Traditions**

On another day the goddess Kanayako traveled from tatara to tatara, placing apprentices. She was chased by a dog on the road. While trying to escape she became entangled in hemp and fell to her death. The apprentices lost their will and prayed to Kanayako for the continued prosperity of their work and the continued glow of iron as they tied her dead body to the pillar in Motoyama called the 'motoyama oshitate (teaching) pillar' of the tatara and the iron grew hot and they prospered. Her death was not a blemish. It was said that for this reason no dogs were allowed in the tatara and no hemp was used in any tool in the tatara. There was no dislike of death, but an intense dislike of blood (Ishizuka, 1946: 245).

In the final phase, the sacred time comes to an end. The deity has accomplished her task on earth and departs to the realm of the gods. Her death

and departure from man is not to be considered a problem, because she leaves with man the knowledge of ritual, by which means he may recall the **kami** and be reinvigorated by the creative power she embodies. The themes addressed in phase three deal with the spread of tradition and technology, the symbolism of dogs, and foxes, plants and the **kami**, and worshipping the dead.

Again, the section begins with "on another day," implying Kanayako's ascent and subsequent descent. Traveling from **tatara** to **tatara** (horizontal movement), and placing apprentices the **kami** disseminates both the knowledge of iron smelting and the knowledge of religious and ritual tradition. Her position as the "culture hero" is reinforced.

Historically, in Japan the spread of folk religion and knowledge is known to have been facilitated by the movement of religious fraternities called **ko**. **Ko** were composed of a religious leader and his followers. A **ko** might be composed of **miko**, Shinto priests, mountain ascetics, or religious-magico technicians, such as blacksmiths. They were generally warmly received by villagers. In this way, not only was religion spread, but technology as well (Hori, 1966: 38-40).

During her travels Kanayako is chased by a dog. The dog, again, may be viewed as the representative of imminent death. In her attempt to escape she becomes entangled in hemp and falls to her demise.<sup>23</sup> For this reason it is believed

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<sup>23</sup>Other sources report that Kanayako's death was a result of being bitten by a dog or that she attempted to escape by climbing an ivy vine, which broke (Ishizuka, 1946: 245-250).

that Kanayako disliked dogs (or dogs disliked Kanayako?). Furthermore, in line six of phase three, we learn that no dogs are allowed in the **tatara** and no tools are made using hemp. Both dogs and hemp are considered taboo by **tatara** workers.

It is thought that Kanayako especially did not like four-eyed dogs -- that is, dogs with two black spots on their face above their eyes that cause them to appear to have four eyes. Craftsmen also mentioned this four-eyed dog belief to Ishizuka, in 1946, when he collected information from **tatara** workers concerning their beliefs. Whether Kanayako's hatred was confined to four-eyed dogs is not clear, however.

There are many explanations given for why Kanayako hated dogs. In some regions of Japan, both dogs and foxes are thought to be witch animals. Some of these regions, such as Shikoku, Chugoku, and Shimane, were traditional iron producing areas. Carmen Blacker discusses the tradition of ostracizing families who were believed to keep witch animals. One of the reasons she cites is jealousy on the part of poorer families of the *nouveau riche* which occurred in the middle of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) (Blacker, 1986: 60). The Tokugawa Period saw a highly stratified society in which blacksmiths and iron workers were third in rank, falling below samurai and farmers. This stratification system had little to do with wealth. Farmers were poor, while blacksmiths and merchants who ranked below farmers, could amass great fortunes.

The belief in witch animals may have grown out of the Chinese tradition of **ku** magic, which can be traced back to 1500BC. The character **ku** was found on oracle bones and gives its name to one of the hexagrams in the I Ching. **Ku** magic



was not understood until the 6th century when it was recorded that if you took a pot and put in snakes, lizards, toads, and other venomous creatures, the creature that survived would be the **ku**. This creature was thought to be able to change its appearance and bewitch people, and could be used by its master for enriching himself or killing his enemies, similar to the fox or dog belief of later days (Blacker, 1986: 61).

On the other hand, there is evidence that foxes were thought to be benevolent protective deities of village and family (Blacker, 1986: 51-68). One example is the worship of Inari and his messenger, the fox. In fact, Inari is honored as a metal worker's deity and was enshrined as a forge god during the Kyoto (1333-1573, Muromachi) and Tokugawa (1615-1868) Periods (Ishizuka, 1946: 245-250).

Inari is frequently represented by his messenger, the fox. It is plausible that the belief in Inari as a forge god resulted in the portrayal of Kanayako riding a fox. One commonly held folk belief is that dogs and foxes do not get along. In 1946, Ishizuka reported that metal workers believed this attributed to Kanayako's dislike of dogs (Ishizuka, 1946: 245 & 250).

Figure 10 shows Kanayako riding a white fox that holds in its mouth a **tatara** forging hammer. On the tip of the fox's tail is a round disk. When I compared this image with other similar images of Kanayako riding a fox, I found that the disk was either depicted as a yellow and red flame or as the Buddhist jewel without the flame. In Japan the jewel frequently takes the form of a pearl, symbolizing the

granting of all wishes, riches and generosity (Saunders, 1985:154-56).

The jewel is generally held in the left hand of the deity, and in fact, we see that Kanayako is holding a pearl object in her left hand. The other object that Kanayako holds is the sword. In Buddhism, the sword symbolizes the protection of the Doctrine, knowledge over ignorance, and the defeat of evil. The sword is commonly carried in the right hand (Saunders, 1985: 182-3). Kanayako's dress and turned up slippers are similar to Chinese dress styles.

The dog was not the only element to contribute to Kanayako's demise. Her becoming entangled in hemp (thread) also contributed to her death. Geoffrey Bownas has pointed out that "almost every area (in Japan) has its plant or tree which, according to popular tradition, has at some time caused injury to the local *kami* and which, in deference to this tradition, is not grown generally" (Bownas, 1963: 146). The current version of the Kanayako myth names this taboo plant as hemp. In some villages, metalworkers interviewed by Ishizuka in 1946 reported a belief that ivy was the cause of her fall. Because of the taboo of hemp, no tools in the tatara were made with it (Ishizuka, 1946: 245-46).

On the other hand, some local variations of this tradition say that a vine once saved Kanayako. In these cases, the goddess escaped with her life by climbing a wisteria vine. In some areas of Izumo Province workers would make offerings of wisteria to Kanayako before lighting a charcoal furnace (Ishizuka, 1946: 245). It is not clear how Kanayako met her death in the regions where she was believed to have escaped from the dog.



平田市平田町 木村定吉氏蔵

Figure 10. Kanayako-gami. By Mr. Kimura, Hirata-City.

Source: Abe Masaya. Kera no Mori. Japan, 6.

After the **kami's** death, the apprentices lost their will and prayed to Kanayako for the continued prosperity of their work. Her corpse was tied to the "motoyama oshitate (teaching)" pillar in the **tatara** and the iron grew hot and they prospered.<sup>24</sup> Tying the corpse of the **kami** to the pillar in the **tatara** is symbolic of the sacrifice of the **kami** to the furnace. Sacrifice has been discussed as necessary for the completion of a new work, and the view that out of death comes rebirth. The sacrifice of the **kami** results in the creation (birth) of metal.

The paradox of life from death is seen symbolically in the smelting process. Metallurgy is a death of one form of matter (ore), and rebirth into another form of matter (metal). When interpreted in Eliadian terms, the act of transformation through fire and rebirth as metal may be seen as relating to the initiation of the shaman, with whom the smith is thought to share many characteristics. Among these shared characteristics is the view that both are "technicians of the sacred," holding ritual knowledge, and mastery over fire.

Regulating furnace heat and reaching the required temperature for smelting conditions was a difficult task in the early history of iron metallurgy. The general populace viewed this unusual skill, involving mastery over fire, as requiring the help of the **kami**. At the time of smelting, a marriage or union of opposites took place,

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<sup>24</sup>Different sources record the corpse tied to the pillar as belonging to either murage, Abe, or Kanayako. On this point, Nobuhiro reports Kanayako tying the murage's corpse to the pillar; Ishizuka, 1946, and Hori, 1959, report the text, Kanayako Engi (Legend of Kanayako), 1825, by Ishida Haritsu, as saying that Abe's corpse was tied to the pillar.

the spiritual union of **kami** and priest, female and male, death and life, together with fire and ore resulted in the creation of metal. The practice of having a corpse in the **tatara** or praying toward the head of a skeleton by iron workers is mentioned by Kubota Kurao in his classic book, Tetsu no Minzokushi (Folklore of Iron Workers), 1986. It is known that Abe told people's fortunes by praying to a skeleton. Kubota sees this tradition as related to the deer-bone-and-turtle-shell method of divination from the continent (Kubota, 1986: 82-87). This form of divination was practiced in Japan from very early times and involved the roasting of bones. It is mentioned in a 2nd century Chinese document, Wei Chih (Blacker, 1981: 64; Kitagawa, 1971: 31).

As priest and mouth piece for Kanayako, Abe became a powerful and charismatic character. His bones -- ashes in some reports -- along with those of the **murage**, are thought to be buried in pots under the inner precinct of the Kanayako shrine. In this way, people believed they could keep the power of Abe alive (Ishizuka, 1941:89; 1946:248).

Belief in the vital life force residing in bones and skeletons is paralleled by similar ideas on the mainland. In Northeast Asia (Tibet, etc.) a shaman's costume will have iron bones attached to it, symbolically representing one who has been dead and come to life. It was thought that the soul resided in the bones and that resurrection of an individual could be obtained from the bones alone. There are also tales from India that deal with gathering up bones of animals and humans to bring them back to life (Eliade, 1974: 82-87).

The idea that iron workers were strangely involved with the dead was reinforced by their practice of killing cows for their hides, which they made into bellows. They made mounds of the dead carcasses and prayed in the direction of these mounds (Kubota, 1986: 82-87). This made the ironworkers appear very mysterious to the villagers and farmers, who never killed their cows but used them as draught animals, and when they died their skin would be sold. Furthermore, meat eating was not prevalent among the Japanese, who generally disliked handling dead animals and skin (Dunn, 1983:67).

The elimination of taboo surrounding the dead among ironworkers, and the belief that death in the *tatara* was beneficial in some way, was reported as an incentive for one group of iron workers to try to make charcoal from coffin wood in the hopes that it would make a better fire. Other *tatara* groups reported that when a person died, the coffin was made in the *tatara*, or that the funeral ceremony was held at the *tatara* (Ishizuka, 1946: 245-250).

The iron workers' connection with death and the practice of praying to the dead, is generally viewed as foreign to Japanese tradition. This belief causes many scholars to look elsewhere for its origin (Kubota, 1986: 82-87; Hori, 1959; Nobuhiro, 1973). Nobuhiro and Hori believe that because the production of iron was closely related to charcoal production --both requiring intense heat, and iron requiring huge amounts of charcoal -- we may find clues to the origin of corpse worship by comparing the charcoal myths of Japan and China (Hori, 1959: 125).

The legend of Kogoro the Charcoal-maker is found throughout Japan.<sup>25</sup> The Kogoro myth, and the Kamado-gami (hearth deity) myth, have elements in common and may be related. In the Kamado-gami myth, a woman marries a man of poor luck, who drives her away. She wanders about and eventually re-marries, this time to a charcoal maker with whom she finds great wealth. The ex-husband, having lost his wealth and in a miserable state, sees the woman's house and dies of shame. She buries him under the hearth and he becomes deified as the god of the hearth. Matsumoto believes that the origin of corpse worship among ironworkers could have evolved from legends, such as the hearth deity, introduced by people from south China (Nobuhiro, 1973: 151).

Whatever the origin was, Kanayako's death was not considered a blemish in the **tatara**. Her sacrificial death was necessary for man to continue to smelt iron. Kanayako gave to man, through Abe, the ritual knowledge needed to interact with the sacred. The final lines of the myth restate the taboos established by Kanayako. Dogs, hemp, and blood are threatening to the creative process of iron metallurgy. There is no aversion to death.

With Kanayako's death the sacred time on earth comes to an end. From this point on the **kami** will only return through ritual. Should the creative power subside and the iron fail to glow and flow, man need only look to the myth to learn

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<sup>25</sup>Kunio Yanagita, a Japanese folklorist, has studied this myth and suggested that it is connected with the ironworkers' belief in the god Hachiman.

what to do. Through sacrifice and proper ritual the **kami's** creative power will return to man, and he may continue to practice the sacred art of metallurgy with her blessing.



### CHAPTER III.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The interpretation of the Kanayako myth from the perspective of common themes and motifs found in Japanese religion, as well as those related to the mythico-religious traditions of smiths found worldwide, has given new insight into and understanding of the religious tradition of iron workers in Japan. The myth is viewed as being structurally composed of three phases. Within each phase the **kami** descends, moves laterally across the earth, and ascends. Much of the interpretation of the Kanayako myth is based on the symbolism and binary opposition found to operate throughout. The symbols and themes found are, for the most part, those related to Shinto and shamanism. Some themes have been related to and established in the Kojiki, such as descent of the kami, the symbolism of the pillar and tree, and the tradition of **miko-gami**.

Shinto's main concerns are for fertility, creativity, and prosperity. Permeating the Kanayako myth is the theme of creation. From Kanayako's first appearance to man, the **kami** portrays herself as a creation deity. As creation deity and "culture hero" she establishes a new order on earth relating to iron metallurgy.

The **kami's** first act, the casting of a pot (interpreted as symbolic of the vessel and womb) further established her tradition as one concerned with creation.

This interpretation helps us to understand why the deity of iron working is female.<sup>26</sup> The image of Kanayako as vessel of the creative force is seen repeatedly throughout the myth. The **kami's** presence is deemed necessary for the birth of the metal, and she is spiritually united with the male priest, Abe, and all male workers at the time the fire is lit.

In the same manner that opposites attract, likes repel. This is why at the time the fires are lit and the deity is present, no female -- possessor of the same creative powers -- may be present, for fear of aborting the smelting process. Furthermore, if the combining of opposite sexual energy is viewed symbolically as resulting in greater creative energy, then it could be that the male workmen and priest abstain from sexual relations for a period prior to the smelting event to enhance the creative potential.

The image of Kanayako as a creative force is further established at the time of her death. As a result of her death the fire dies out, the iron does not glow or flow. At this point Kanayako reveals the final ritual, the one that will allow man to harness and direct the creative forces.

Another major theme of Shinto is ritual and pollution. Establishing ritual

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<sup>26</sup>Ishizuka, 1946, hypothesized that the wife of a **murage** may have originally enshrined Kanayako, and being a woman, she made the deity female. We will probably never know if this is true.

knowledge is Kanayako's main task while on earth. The "scientific" secrets are not what are recorded in the myth. The knowledge man needs from the kami is how to interact with the sacred, the creative mysteries that permeate the metallurgical process.

The **kami** embodies the mystical forces found throughout nature that inspire awe in man and relate to fertility, creation, prosperity and good fortune. The concern for purity and pollution when interacting with these sacred forces is of paramount concern to the Japanese Shinto tradition. The **kami** establishes what is polluting for iron workers. Blood, childbirth, dogs and hemp should be avoided.

In most cases and many cultures (including the Japanese), taboos relate to those things which are viewed as abnormal or ambiguous (Douglas, 1968). Things that are threatening to fertility, creativity, and good fortune are to be avoided. Menstruation and childbirth relate to the flowing of blood and can result in the loss of life, dogs may be witch animals and omens of death, and breaking of hemp results in the **kami's** death.

One unusual feature of the Kanayako myth, as it relates to Shinto, is the acceptance of death in the **tatara**. There are many examples found throughout the world that report the smith as not being bound by the usual cultural taboos surrounding death. In most cases, this is because metal smelting seems to require a sacrifice in order to achieve the final product (Cline, 1937; Lanciotti, 1955; Makarius, 1968; Eliade, 1978; Richards, 1981). Sacrifice as a means of ensuring the successful completion of a project was practiced in Japan for other endeavors, for

example, repairing a dam. This is recorded in the mythology. The practice is viewed as being closely related to the theme of death and rebirth and the belief that sacrifice is necessary for life. It is this point of view that allowed the Kanayako tradition to accept death and to incorporate it into the ritual traditions of metal workers.

The Kanayako tradition also shows a close relationship to shamanism. Shamanism in Japan has been practiced since prehistoric times and was assimilated into Shinto, Buddhist, and folk traditions. Many of the themes and symbols found in Shinto can be found in shamanism. The importance of mountains, trees, and pillars are the same in both traditions, as conduits of the gods. Other motifs and themes found in the Kanayako myth that relate to shamanism are the transformation of Abe from hunter to priest, the helping animal spirits of birds, and the experience of the sacred and mastery over fire.

The entire myth is charged with shamanistic symbolism. From the magical flight of the **kami** (shaman) on the bird (helper spirit) and descent onto the tree (axis mundi), to the transformation (initiation) of the hunter into the priest and the **kami's** ordeal of crossing the bridge (vine), her encountering the funerary dog, and her resurrection through her bones and fire, we are reminded of the world of symbols belonging to the shaman.

Common to shamanism and Shinto was the belief that a deity or spirit may choose its intermediary. Kanayako picked as her intermediary and first priest Abe. He became the holder and controller of ritual knowledge. In the Abe family, this

ritual knowledge was passed down through eighty-six generations from father to son.

It is likely that originally Abe belonged to a family of smiths, perhaps one of a group of foreign craftsmen who came to Japan during the Nara Period. I believe that Abe's supreme technical skills allowed him to assume the position of a man who was in touch with the gods, resulting in the generation of the myth of Kanayako around him.<sup>27</sup>

Nobuhiro Matsumoto came to a similar conclusion in his article "Japanese Metalworkers," when he compared the story of Ame-no-Hihoko. This man was followed to Japan from Korea by a potter who settled in Ohmi province, and later became the mythical "culture hero" and ancestor of Japanese potters. Nobuhiro believes that the Japanese were awestruck at the superior technical skills that some of the newly arrived people had and that they respected, worshipped, and even built myths around these people.

The Kanayako myth and tradition fits well with the general themes found surrounding the smith and his work in many cultures. The smith, shaman, and priest are all widely considered "technicians of the sacred." They are the holders of ritual knowledge and experience. Abe was probably smith, shaman, and priest, the intermediary and mouth piece for the **kami**. He alone had experienced the sacred and held ritual knowledge and technical skill. He was also a "master over

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<sup>27</sup>Kubota Kurao also discusses the likelihood of Abe being a skilled ironworker (1986:82-87).

fire." When the fire did not grow hot enough and the iron would not flow, the people turned to Abe for the answer. He would divine their fortunes by praying to a corpse or skeleton. It can be speculated that in this way, Abe gained much power over iron working people and became both respected and feared.

This attitude was also held by the general populace, which saw iron working as a magical craft. In Itosantaku-jima at the festival of the Shinto clan god (**ujigami**) which is held on the fourth day of the new year, it was the custom for the smith to sit in the seat of honor along with the doctor. On the other hand, however, in Echigo and Tosa, the work of smiths was despised, and their work cottages were built outside the village (Isogai, 1959: 303).

Antithetical attitudes of a society toward the smith and his work are found throughout Africa, among other places. This may be related to the ambiguous nature of the objects of taboo, those things that are outside the normal realm or have not established themselves in the world. This ambiguity may also apply to the smith (Makarius, 1968).

Originally, iron working and smelting was considered a very mysterious activity. Smiths helped to perpetrate the mystery by surrounding their work with secrecy. This, along with the worship of dead bodies, the handling of hides in making the bellows, and the dual nature of the artifacts produced, put smiths and ironworkers in an uncertain position. It is easy to see why people would be confused and impressed by their work and skill.

Furthermore, metallurgy itself is a process in which one form of matter dies

in order to become another form of matter. This theme is repeated in the **tatara** process. While the smelting process is going on, the inside of the furnace is melting away as part of the flux needed to reduce the iron sands to metal. Not only does the smelting process devour the furnace, but in the end the furnace (womb/mother) needs to be destroyed (sacrificed) in order to release its child, the metal ingot. The theme repeats itself in a continuous cycle of death and rebirth. The same themes and oppositions that were witnessed throughout the smelting operation were confirmed by earlier observations made of nature. Again and again it seemed that life appeared out of death.

The early iron worker performed his task in a universe quite different from ours, one that was filled with mystery and awe, where the sacred and the profane could interact. There is little wonder that it was thought that creation of any kind needed divine inspiration and participation. Kanayako is the divine being and creative force that participates with man in the activity of iron smelting. She is the primordial smith and civilizing hero who came down to earth to work beside man in the **tatara**, teaching the sacred art of metallurgy.

#### **Implications and suggestions for future work**

The interpretation of the Kanayako myth is of value for its contribution to an existing body of myths that relate to the smith and his mythico-religious traditions. It confirms and tends to corroborate that the themes and motifs found in many parts of the world are also present for the Japanese smiths. This is by no

means a definitive study on iron-working traditions in Japan. It is one step in a direction which, one hopes, will open the door to future research.

The next most important step is to complete the translation of original texts and articles presently available. The obstacles to overcome here will be mainly those of time and money. There is also a need for fieldwork to salvage and record what is left of the tradition before it is too late. Interviews need to be conducted with craftsmen who may still recall the tradition. A few *tatara* were still in existence in the early 1900's. The workers may not be alive, but family members may recall some of the traditions.

A clearer understanding of the relationship of the three deities, Kanayako, Kanayama-hime-no-mikoto, and Kanayama-hiko-no-mikoto needs to be discerned. When questioned about the relationship between Kanayama-hime at Gifu, and Kanayako-gami in Izumo, Mr. Utsunomiya, the shrine priest at Nangu Taisha, in Gifu, said that "a long time ago when the iron would not melt, people from Gifu went to Izumo and brought back the emblem of the god, Kanayako-gami and a miracle white powder (salt?) to Gifu."<sup>28</sup> Mr. Utsunomiya thought the gods were the same.

The variations found in the tradition and myth are also of importance. Mapping these differences may help in determining the paths of diffusion the myth took and the time period during which the myth developed. For instance, knowing

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<sup>28</sup>Interview with Mr. Utsunomiya, Nangu Taisha Shrine priest, conducted by Prof. Michael Notis and Miss Mia Itasaki, November 8th, 1988.



that child deities, known as "wakamiya," and the emergence of cults around them became popular in Japan around the medieval period (1185-1573) would lead us to suspect that Kanayako, as Child Deity of the House of Metals, may have developed in the early part of this period. But if we find that in some areas the same myth about Kanayama-hime-no-mikoto, we then may have to conclude that originally the myth may have developed around Kanayama, and that later, when child deities became popular, Kanayako became the central figure in the myth.

The Kanayako tradition appears to have been originally confined to Izumo and surrounding areas. My research uncovered a number of other gods connected with iron metallurgy. How do these different traditions relate to each other? Did different clans have different gods of iron? Some of the gods seem to be attached to the different styles of iron working, for instance, swordsmiths frequently worship Inari (God of Grain and Prosperity). What about different metals? Are there no gods of copper, gold or silver working? More research needs to be done to determine what other traditions exist, and how they compare with the Kanayako tradition of iron workers.

Finally, is the Kanayako tradition related to earlier fire-worshipping traditions established prior to the introduction of iron? Many fire ceremonies were held in the winter around the same time as forge festivals were held. At that time large fires were built to call the sun back into the sky. Is it possible that forge people developed their own festival based on the fire festivals?

These fire ceremonies may have been tied to sun cults, like Amaterasu. In

a shrine paper from Nangu Taisha, Gifu Prefecture, it is stated that the god Kanayama-hiko is Amaterasu's older brother at the Ise shrine. Iron, fire, and the sun are all things that have held great importance in human cultures, all have a wealth of myth and ritual surrounding them.

As said before, man's history is traditionally traced by his tools. Iron does not appear in a natural form like gold, silver or copper; it must be won from its ores. The discovery of iron smelting was a momentous moment in history. The **tatara** method produced a steel of very high quality, one which, some will argue, even today is unsurpassed. Its importance and impact on man is testified to by the elaborate mythico-religious tradition that surrounded it.

We have seen that the Kanayako myth speaks to us through symbols, symbols that help man to interact with the sacred and unexplainable forces of nature. The myth is both an explanation of the iron worker's traditions and a map for him to follow. For the metal worker, Kanayako was the inspiration and creative force behind the **tatara** method of iron production. She established what was to be taboo.

Taboos have been explained as those things that fall outside the normal ordering of society, that which is ambiguous and dissonant to man. The acceptance of death in the **tatara** has been shown to relate to the practice and belief of sacrifice as life giving. Furthermore, the abolition of death taboos has been shown to be found in many other cultures when related to metallurgy and the smith.

Finally, we find that the Japanese iron workers are not alone in their

creation of myth and traditions. Not only in Japan has man constructed myths around the smith and his trade, but all around the world where iron is smelted and fashioned. Not only metallurgy, but many of man's early technological skills - ceramics, weaving, carpentry - developed in some form of mythico-ritual complex. It is not surprising when we realize how the discovery and development of these technologies must have changed man's relationship to nature and the conditions of his existence. Indeed, technology, to this day, continues to change our relationship to nature and everyday existence, for better or worse.

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## GLOSSARY

Axis Mundi. The cosmic center of the world that connects planes of existence lying above and below our own.

Daimyo. Fief lord.

Dharma. There are many meanings to Dharma and it can only be properly determined by context and use. Usually it refers to the teachings of the Buddha, but it may also mean the moral law and truth.

Fuigo Matsuri. Forge or bellows festival held in honor of Kanayako and/or other forge gods, usually on November 8th.

Gohei. The sacred wand with strips of white paper that is offered to Shinto deities or held in the hand of the priest.

Goshintai. The object of worship placed in a main hall of a Shinto shrine. A Shinto shrine ordinarily has no image for worship. Instead, there is only a symbolic representation of the deity consisting in most cases of a mirror, stone, sword or halberd. These objects of worship are never placed in public view.

Imono-shi. A metal caster(s).

Kajiya. A smith or metal worker; also Okaji, chief swordsmith and Kokaji, swordsmith.

Kami. Deity. Also anything beyond the ordinary or awe-inspiring.

Kamidana. A Shinto god shelf.

Kanaya. The old style iron and forge metal smith group.

Kari-ya. The hut for seclusion of women during their menstrual periods and a prescribed time period after childbirth.

Ko. Religious fraternities made up of a religious leader and his followers that traveled about Japan spreading religion and knowledge.

Matsuri. The annual ritual ceremony or festival to call the kami to the community for their blessings.

Miko. Female shaman in Japan; also Miko-gami.

Misogi. Ceremonial purification by washing performed before ritual ceremonies by priests and ritual officials.

Motoyama Oshitate. The teaching pillar. In the Kanayako tradition the pillar in the tatara that Kanayako's corpse was tied to so that the iron would flow. May have originally been a small man made mountain with four pillars around it.

Murage. The chief workman in charge of the skilled people working in the tatara

Nyo-i shu. The Buddhist jewel symbolizing the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It is commonly represented as a pearl with flames.

Sangha. Community of Buddhist monks.

Sannai. A village of iron working people and where the tatara was built.

Satetsu. Magnetic iron sands used in the tatara method for smelting iron and steel.

Sekihan. A special rice and red bean dish.

Shimenawa. In Shinto a sacred twisted straw rope hung with strips of white paper and some pieces of straw signifying sacredness.

Takadono. A type of iron smelting house.

Tatara. Literally forge or bellows; refers to the ancient refineries which produced pig iron or steel (kera) by refining magnetic iron sands.

Ujigami. Shinto clan god.

Yorishiro. The temporary vessel of a kami; usually a long slender object.

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