

kafusa, writing just over a century later, drew rather different conclusions from the *kamiyo* accounts. He saw those accounts as conveying a body of eternally valid principles that should serve to keep ruler and subject alike on an unchanging, correct path. Unlike Jien, who in his references to the *kamiyo* focused on a single episode, to clarify those eternal principles, Chikafusa provided a much fuller summation of the events of the *kamiyo*. Drawing largely from *Nihon shoki* but from other sources as well, in *Jinnō shōtōki*, his history of Japan until his own time, he composed a new overarching narrative of the *kamiyo* beginning with the origin of the cosmos. He did not deny the *kamiyo*'s dimensions as another world, but, again differing from Jien, he stressed its sequential linkage to the reigns of the human emperors from Jinmu on. Like Jien, however, Chikafusa, too, enlarged the significance of the *kamiyo* as a repository of universal teachings (in his case derived largely from Confucian political thought), while simultaneously affirming its meaning as something specific to the Japanese historical experience.

Chikafusa signals his concern to frame the *kamiyo* accounts in universal terms by first summarizing descriptions of the origins of the cosmos found in Buddhist and Chinese texts and relating these to the later history of India and China. He notes that there are some similarities between these descriptions and the Japanese accounts, and he affirms as well that propagation of works of the Buddhist and Chinese traditions has served to support and sustain awareness of the inherent way of Japan.³³ He also declares, however, that what sets Japan apart from other countries is that “only in our country has the sun lineage of rulers continued unbroken from the beginning of heaven and earth down to this moment in the present age.”³⁴ Having established this crucial point, in his subsequent narrative of the *kamiyo*, he proceeds to clarify the basis for this distinctive feature of Japanese history.

Chikafusa begins his description of the *kamiyo* with a brief reprise of the formation of the cosmos as depicted in the preface and first segment of the main text of *Nihon shoki*. Noting that what *Nihon shoki* identifies as “the seven generations of the *kamiyo*” were not, strictly speaking, “generations” in a chronological sense, he, like Ichijō Kaneyoshi a little over a century later, interprets them allegorically. Elaborating on the yin-yang cosmological ideas already present in the main text, he describes Kuni no Tokotachi as incorporating, like the Supreme Ultimate of Song Confucian thought, the five elements. These, generated from Kuni no Tokotachi, took form as the following five generations of deities; with the next generation, Izanagi and Izanami, the interaction of the five elements and yin and yang came into full operation, resulting in the production of the myriad phenomena.³⁵

In the following pages, combining elements from the different variants of *Nihon shoki*, *Kogo shūi*, *Sendai kuji hongū*, and Watarai Shinto texts, Chikafusa reviews the main events of the *kamiyo* up to Ninigi's descent. This, as the key to the establishment of the unbroken line, is the focal point of his analysis of the meaning of the *kamiyo*. Not only was it the foundation of the divine origins that set the Japanese imperial line apart from the rulers of other countries, it served, Chikafusa emphasizes, as the occasion for the promulgation of teachings that would underwrite the eternal preservation of the imperial line and the polity it ruled. Chikafusa develops this interpretation by expanding upon the significance of Amaterasu's command to Ninigi and grant to him of the regalia. Conjoining aspects of the first and second variants of the ninth segment, he describes Amaterasu as declaring to Ninigi that he should found an everlasting dynasty, “coeval with heaven and earth,” and as also instructing Ninigi to keep the mirror ever beside him, telling him that “when thou lookest upon this mirror, let

it be as if thou wert looking upon me.”³⁶ Chikafusa goes on to explain that in granting the regalia to Ninigi, Amaterasu did not bestow upon him simply tangible symbols of authority. More importantly she provided him with teachings as to “the correct way to govern and preserve the country.” The mirror represented the font of uprightness (*shōjiki*), the jewel the font of compassion, and the sword the font of wisdom. “Unless the ruler manifests all three virtues, proper government of the realm will be difficult indeed.”³⁷

In the remainder of *Jinnō shōtōki*, Chikafusa goes on to argue that individual emperors’ adherence to these teachings or failure to uphold them was a decisive factor in shifts of the legitimate succession within different branches of the imperial line. The weight of those teachings also explained why, in order to retrieve the governing authority lost to the warrior class at the beginning of the Kamakura period, the court had to demonstrate superior qualifications as rulers. “The gods have taken the succoring of the people as their original vow. The multitudes of the realm are all bespoken to the gods. The ruler should be an object of reverence, but heaven will not allow and the gods will not favor one person enjoying happiness while the multitudes suffer.”³⁸ These teachings applied not just to the ruler. Quoting the oracles from Amaterasu that Watarai Shinto texts claimed to have been transmitted through Yamatohime, Chikafusa declared that it was incumbent upon all to serve the ruler and the gods by “not contravening their innate mind-god” and by “taking uprightness as the basis.”³⁹ When ruler and subject alike lived up to these teachings, Amaterasu’s mandate to Ninigi would be truly fulfilled.

Through such interpretations Chikafusa imbued the *kamiyo* accounts with a moral orientation and endowed Amaterasu with attributes analogous to those of the Confucian heaven. The legacy of these operations was long lasting. It is apparent in Ichijō Kaneyoshi’s mid-fifteenth-century commentary on *Nihon shoki*, and it continued to shape early modern views of the *kamiyo*. The transition from the medieval to the early modern period also saw, however, the emergence of several new approaches to defining the relationship between the *kamiyo* and later history.

Separating History and Allegory

From the Heian through the Muromachi period, Buddhist ideas were a major impetus for the rethinking of the *kamiyo*. The effort to read the events and *kami* figuring in the *kamiyo* accounts in light of Buddhist theories broadened and reshaped perspectives on the meaning of those accounts. It also helped naturalize interpretive strategies founded on linking identifiably native phenomena to structures of thought assumed to be of universal relevance. The impulse to situate the *kamiyo* within a universal context remained strong in the following early modern period as well, but it was accompanied by an increasing inclination to remove Buddhism from the framework of reference.

Tendencies to disavow Buddhist-inspired *honji suijaku* readings of the *kamiyo* can be seen already in Watarai Shinto texts and the writings of Kitabatake Chikafusa, who hints at the possibility of a recasting or even reversal of *honji suijaku* relationships. Using the language associated with such relationships, but without any reference to a Buddhist *honji* (original ground), Chikafusa notes, for instance, that the existence of different accounts of Amaterasu’s name and origin attest to “her vow to manifest herself in various forms appropriate to the circumstances” (*wakō no onchikai*).⁴⁰ The rejection of awarding primacy to a Buddhist frame

of reference became explicit in the writings of Yoshida Kanetomo (1435–1511). The scion of a court ritualist family active a generation after Ichijō Kaneyoshi, Kanetomo wrote a commentary on *Nihon shoki* himself and formulated ideas about Shinto and the *kamiyo* that were to be of substantial influence in Tokugawa intellectual and religious life. While keeping the orientation towards esotericism and expansive allegorical interpretations that were one of the legacies of the medieval Buddhist tradition, Kanetomo sought to establish a “pure (*yuiitsu*) Shinto” free of the contamination of Buddhist-oriented *honji suijaku* associations.⁴¹

In the early modern period, a new degree of involvement in Confucianism, which in its Song and later forms came armed with an anti-Buddhist rhetoric, further spurred the turn away from Buddhist readings of the *kamiyo*. Deeper commitment to Confucianism as a system of thought had other repercussions as well. Intersecting with changes in the social and political environment, greater familiarity with the cumulative traditions of Chinese scholarship stimulated an interest in rethinking the evolution of Japanese history. Jien and Chikafusa had looked at historical developments up to their own time from their perspective as members of the court aristocracy, for whom the rise of warrior power vis-à-vis the court was an inherently negative development. They thus had tried to explain how best to cope with the crisis of the time, or to set out the principles that would ultimately ensure a return to the correct path. By contrast, those who in the Tokugawa setting were drawn to review the history of the polity by and large were linked to the warrior class. Taking the ultimate triumph of warrior power as a given, they sought to legitimate warrior rule as well as to define appropriately the political forms of their own time relative to what had preceded them. Adherence to the norms of Chinese historiography, they assumed, would be the most effective means of achieving this end. These developments brought various questions about the *kamiyo* to the fore. For one, the *kamiyo*, particularly in the expanded, multifaceted form it had assumed in the medieval period, could not be accommodated easily within the highly time-conscious annalistic framework of classical Chinese historiography. For another, warrior dominance suggested a need to rethink the special relationship that earlier writers had presumed to link the events of the *kamiyo* to a polity centered on the court aristocracy.

Confronting these issues, Tokugawa historians took two broad approaches to the interpretation of the *kamiyo*. One was to push further the allegorical reading of the *kamiyo* in cosmological or metaphysical terms while simultaneously separating it from history as such. The second was to strip away the cosmological accretions and historicize the *kamiyo*. Among major Tokugawa historians, those who followed the first course included Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) and his son Gahō (1618–1680). The Mito scholars who, beginning in the latter part of the seventeenth century and continuing into the early decades of the eighteenth, took part in the first stages of the compilation of *Dai Nihon shi* (History of the August Realm of Japan) also may be put in this category. Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725) and the Mito scholars who from the end of the eighteenth century undertook to revise and complete the *Dai Nihon shi* project exemplify the latter approach.

Razan’s concern to set the *kamiyo* apart from history proper is evident in *Honchō tsugan* (The Comprehensive Mirror for This Court), the comprehensive history of Japan that he began in the 1640s and that his son Gahō ultimately completed and presented to the Shogunate in 1670. Following the example of comprehensive histories of China, such as Sima Guang’s *Zizhi tongjian* (The Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), *Honchō tsugan*

was organized chronologically by reign. For the early centuries, the two Hayashi, *père* and *filis*, drew extensively from the six national histories, beginning with *Nihon shoki*, but, unlike the compilers of *Nihon shoki*, they began the central narrative with Jinmu, not the *kamiyo*. Razan, indeed, wrote elsewhere that Jinmu, rather than a descendant of gods, was probably a scion of Wu Taibo of the Zhou dynasty.⁴² Having sought out a precedent in Chinese histories that included separate sections on divine entities, Gahō eventually decided to add to the main body of *Honchō tsugan* a prefatory review of the *kamiyo* accounts as found in *Nihon shoki* and other early works.⁴³ But he continued to make Jinmu's reign the starting point for other parts of *Honchō tsugan*. He headed a chronology of major events organized according to the sexagenary cycle, for instance, with the note that he was beginning it with the reign of Jinmu because the age of the *kamiyo* deities "is one of inchoate vastness and distance for which there is no indication of time."⁴⁴ And while at the end of the prefatory chapters on the *kamiyo*, Gahō made a point of mentioning that he had not "taken up here" foreign legends such as that concerning Wu Taibo, that story is introduced in an appendix addressing various problematic historical questions. There it serves to explain why the *kamiyo* accounts describe Ninigi as having descended from Takamagahara to Kyushu rather than the central region. Kyushu was the logical point of access for the successor of the virtuous Taibo, who had gone to live in southern China; likewise, it was understandable that those who encountered Taibo's successor, being still in a primitive state of development, should take him to be of divine origin.⁴⁵

The effort to separate history from the *kamiyo* did not mean, however, that the Hayashi dismissed the *kamiyo* as being of little significance. To the contrary, Razan showed great interest in shrines as sites of ritual and belief. Parallel to his history of Japan, he compiled *Honchō jinja kō* (Treatise on the Shrines of This Court), an account of the major shrines of Japan in which he reviewed the sources of information about their origins and the deities to which they were dedicated. He further referred to the *kamiyo* accounts in developing his own interpretation of Shinto, set forth in such works as *Shintō denju* (Transmissions on Shinto). His discussion of the *kamiyo* in this context shows him both elaborating upon the allegorical interpretations formulated by medieval figures such as Yoshida Kanetomo and taking the implications of those interpretations in several new directions.

In his reading of the *kamiyo*, Razan sought systematically to eliminate the Buddhist elements that had become associated with the *kami* and the events of the *kamiyo* in the course of the medieval period. At the same time, picking up individual elements of the *kamiyo* accounts, he continued to situate them in a framework of larger metaphorical meaning. While many aspects of that framework can be traced to the medieval Shinto tradition, Razan reshaped it in a far more explicitly Confucian form. W. J. Boot points out that Razan, identifying analogies between the account of the *kamiyo* in *Nihon shoki* and the *Yijing* (Classic of Changes), asserted that "the Way of the Changes and the Way of the Gods are one [and the same] *li* [principle, KWN]."⁴⁶ Pursuing the same line of thought, in *Shintō denju*, Razan linked various *kamiyo* entities to the propositions of Song Confucianism. One instance is his characterization of Kuni no Tokotachi, whom the *Nihon shoki*'s main text presented as the first deity to appear after the initial formation of the cosmos. As we have seen, medieval interpretations had already depicted Kuni no Tokotachi as the source of all phenomena, something comparable to Vairocana or the Supreme Ultimate. Building on such conceptualizations, Razan suppressed the analogy with Vairocana and brought out more sharply the

dimensions of Kuni no Tokotachi as a homology of the Supreme Ultimate. A single entity, Kuni no Tokotachi is simultaneously the source and the “total form” of the myriad deities, just as the single moon, shining in the heavens, is reflected in myriad pools of water. As such Kuni no Tokotachi is also present in the human heart, for “deities” (*kami*, *shin*; Ch. *shen*) are both the spiritual force (*rei*; Ch. *ling*) of heaven and earth, and each individual’s guiding spirit. “If the body is likened to a house, the heart is the master of the house, and the *kami* is the master’s soul.” Received by all human beings as their spiritual-moral endowment, the presence of Kuni no Tokotachi within the human heart is the reason why it, “while yet one, is able to penetrate all things.”⁴⁷

As Razan’s interpretation of Kuni no Tokotachi indicates, his approach to the *kamiyo* emphasized its dimensions as a timeless “other world.” But this other world was not so much one of divine interventions as a metaphysical inner world of the spirit situated within the individual. As he observed at the conclusion of *Shintō denju* in regard to Takamagahara, “Takamagahara is heaven, is principle, is the great vacuity. In the realm of the formless, *kami* naturally exist. The miraculous light of *kami* bases itself in the realm of principle. In *Nihongi* it states that the *kami* residing in Takamagahara is Ame no Minakanushi. This *kami*, too, exists within, not without, the heart.”⁴⁸ Such a reading broadened and reoriented the *kamiyo*; rather than the site of the origins of the imperial line and the aristocracy closely associated with it, or the source of interventions specifically relevant to the Japanese polity, the *kamiyo* became something of universal significance. Razan’s interpretation of Ninigi’s descent illustrates this reshaping. He noted that the *kamiyo* accounts traced ten generations of deities from Kuni no Tokotachi through Amaterasu to Ninigi, that the emperors up to the present were the descendants of Ninigi, and that the enthronement ceremonies were said to reenact the significance of Ninigi’s descent. But he went on to suggest a somewhat different reading of the symbolism involved. The “ten generations” between Kuni no Tokotachi and Ninigi could be seen as analogous to the ten months of human gestation, and the descent as representing the birth of a child, endowed with both body and spirit. It was thus another expression of the process that linked each individual to Kuni no Tokotachi “in an eternal circle, without beginning and without end.”⁴⁹

While the consequences of the move are less sharply defined, the Mito scholars of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries showed a similar inclination to separate history from allegory. The second daimyo, Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628–1700), devoted a considerable portion of his domain’s resources to a project to compile a history of Japan that would include all the features of the Chinese dynastic histories, comprising biographies and various topical appendices and charts as well as the main annals. Mitsukuni, too, expressed reservations about beginning the annals with the events of the *kamiyo*. Noting that “the *kamiyo* is full of strange things” (*kaii no koto bakari*), Mitsukuni told his retainers that it would be difficult to append an account of these things to the annals of Jinmu. Instead he proposed creating a separate section devoted to the *kamiyo*.⁵⁰ What form Mitsukuni envisioned this section taking is not known. *Dai Nihon shi* went through a number of revisions and reorientations during his lifetime, and a provisional draft of the annals and biographies was not completed until after his death. The initial compilers were also unable to undertake the appendices, one of which was intended to be devoted to deities and shrines.

Together with sponsoring the compilation of a definitive history, Mitsukuni also encouraged the gathering of materials on Shinto. Ultimately titled *Shintō shūsei*, the resulting

collection, like *Dai Nihon shi*, went through several revisions, and the initial complete draft was not finished until shortly after Mitsukuni's death. It does offer a view, however, of the early Mito approach to the *kamiyo*. Including records of rituals, liturgies, and shrines, *Shintō shūsei* began with a section devoted to "oral transmissions" (*kuketsu*) about the meaning of various key events of the *kamiyo*. The compilers indicate certain reservations about the reliability of these transmissions, which are drawn by and large from the traditions of Yoshida and Watarai Shinto. They note, for instance, that they have omitted matters that are open to doubt and acknowledge that various speculative and questionable elements remain nevertheless.⁵¹ While retaining a form associated with the transmission of a secret tradition, the explanations included in *Shintō shūsei* show less of the taste for esoteric interpretations characteristic of medieval Shinto and still present in Hayashi Razan's *Shintō denju* and the works of other proponents of early modern forms of Shinto, such as Yamazaki Ansai (1618–1682). But overall the transmissions indicate considerable common ground with Razan. Demonstrating the same determination to eliminate overtly Buddhist elements from the interpretation of the *kamiyo*, they likewise are inclined to read the events of the *kamiyo* in light of Confucian theories of the cosmos and human nature and to treat those events as pertaining to an inner spiritual realm.⁵²

Historicizing the *Kamiyo*

A commitment to appraising the course of past events according to the criteria of Confucian historiography continued to shape the major historical works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reflecting a general turn away from metaphysical/cosmological speculation within the Tokugawa intellectual world, however, those who addressed the early stages of Japanese history questioned the efforts of figures such as Razan to read the *kamiyo* as a spiritual or cosmological/metaphysical allegory. Instead of detaching the *kamiyo* from history, they reduced, in some cases radically, the dimensions of the *kamiyo* as another world and attempted to recover from the *kamiyo* accounts a record of human events relevant to the ongoing evolution of Japanese history.

Perhaps the boldest of the efforts to historicize the *kamiyo* was that of Arai Hakuseki. Unlike the Mito historians and Hayashi Razan and Gahō, Hakuseki did not compile a comprehensive annalistic survey. Rather, in a series of separate works, he attempted to apply the premises of Chinese Confucian historiography to an evaluation of the forces shaping the course of Japanese history. This appraisal led him to the conclusion that in Japan, as in China, the locus of legitimate authority and power had shifted over time in accordance with the operation of the mandate of heaven. Most notably, between the mid-Heian and the early Muromachi period, the court had lost heaven's trust, leaving the warrior ruler as the proper heir to the substantive and symbolic authority that, united in one figure, was the defining attribute of the true king. Hakuseki's approach to the *kamiyo* sought to situate it within the same framework of politico-historical ideas.⁵³ Underlying the *kamiyo* accounts was, he held, a record of human history—that is, a record of rulers and events passed down orally from a time when there was as yet no system of writing. The information about this ancient period might have become blurred and distorted in the process of transmission, but, correctly deciphered, it should yield evidence that even then Japanese history had been shaped by the principles of the way of heaven. Hakuseki signaled his intention to provide such a reading by

naming his review of the *kamiyo Koshitsū* (An Explication of Ancient History). The explicit identification of the subject of investigation as “ancient history” pointedly affirmed his determination to locate the *kamiyo* within the context of this world and human time.

The so-called deities of the *kamiyo*, Hakuseki posited, must actually have been human rulers. The native word *kami* meant something like “upper” or “revered,” not simply “deity” or “spirit.” The apotheosis of human rulers—the “revered”—into “deities” had come about because of errors by those who had converted the original oral transmissions about those rulers into accounts written in Chinese characters. Because they had chosen to transcribe the native term with a character that carried the meaning “god,” later generations wrongly came to understand the *kamiyo* accounts as records of something qualitatively different from human history. Something similar had happened with Takamagahara, which originally was a toponym meaning “Taka-on-the-Sea.” Because the words for “sea” and for “heavens” or “sky” were pronounced in much the same way, the transcribers had confused the latter with the former and had used the Chinese character for “heaven” rather than that for “sea” to record this name. As a consequence, Taka-on-the-Sea, located on the eastern seaboard, had become transformed into the “high plain of heaven,” and people of later times, assuming that the inhabitants of Taka-on-the-Sea must be deities, had ascribed to them various mysterious and supernatural doings.⁵⁴

Pursuing such assumptions, in his deciphering of the traces of the historical record underlying the *kamiyo* accounts, Hakuseki reconstructed several central events of the *kamiyo* as human activities. According to his interpretation, for instance, Izanagi and Izanami neither gave birth physically to the land nor were allegorical representations of the cosmological forces of production. They were rather two human rulers who, setting out from Taka-on-the-Sea, extended “civilizing rule” over the central area much as the *Book of Documents* described the early Chinese rulers Yao and Shun as bringing the various regions of China under the sway of their kingly authority. Ninigi was another representative sent out from Taka-on-the-Sea. He, too, did not descend from the heavens, but set out from the eastern seaboard across the sea.⁵⁵

Through the claim that the *kami* of the *kamiyo* were human rulers, Hakuseki undercut the premise of divine origin that had served to set the imperial line and court aristocracy apart from other political figures. He thereby established the ground for the corollary argument that the warrior rulers of later ages might properly inherit the mantle of undivided sovereign authority once held by the emperors. In his “explication of ancient history,” he provided further support for such an argument by presenting Ninigi’s “descent”—the climax of the *kamiyo* accounts—not as the occasion for the establishment of an eternal dynasty, but as an instance of dynastic change in accordance with the mandate of heaven. To this end, he made the most of the multiplicity of versions of the first shadowy generations of *kami* contained in the *kamiyo* accounts. These first generations of *kami*, Hakuseki argued, could be sorted into two lineages, one beginning with Ame no Minakanushi and leading to Takamimusubi, and the other with Kuni no Tokotachi and leading to Amaterasu. With this interpretation, he transformed Kuni no Tokotachi, long the focus of allegorical exegesis as a first-principle-like entity, into the distant founder of one of several lineages of rulers. He also set the stage for a new construction of the important role played by Takamimusubi in many of the versions of Ninigi’s descent. Just as Yao, according to the *Book of Documents*, had yielded ruling authority to Shun, Takamimusubi’s dispatch of his maternal grandson Ninigi

to rule the central land of plentiful reed plains marked the “yielding” of kingly authority by the Ame no Minakanushi-Takamimusubi line to that of Kuni no Tokotachi-Amaterasu-Ninigi.⁵⁶ Through such interpretive strategies, Hakuseki brought the *kamiyo* within the scope of history; simultaneously he found within this historical record evidence of the operation of the principles of heaven.

Hakuseki was not the only figure to adopt a historicizing approach to the *kamiyo*. Others who did so included the Mito scholars who, reviving the domain intellectual projects at the end of the eighteenth century, developed a distinctive native form of Confucianism. To be sure, these scholars, such as Fujita Yūkoku (1774–1826), Aizawa Seishisai (1782–1863), and Yūkoku’s son Tōko (1806–1855), were animated by concerns quite different from those that drove Hakuseki. They did not share Hakuseki’s vision of unifying the “name” and “substance” of political authority in the person of the shogun. Even less did they sympathize with his parallel attempt to diminish the aura setting the imperial line apart from other potential claimants to the position of national ruler. Worried about growing social divisions within the country and potential threats from outside, the late Mito scholars sought in the emperor a bulwark against such dangers. To this end they tacitly accepted the principle of a division between the “name” and “substance” of political authority, despite the precariousness of such a stance according to Confucian theory. The shogun, they agreed, might properly exercise the substance of national authority. But social and political stability could best be ensured by affirming the eternal claim of the imperial house to the name of ruler and by establishing the emperor as the focus of a dynamic of reverence comparable to that centered on heaven in the Chinese context.⁵⁷ Drawing from the classic *Book of Rites* (*Liji*), the Mito scholars termed this dynamic “recompensing the source and holding to the origin” (*hōhon hanshi*); its inculcation, they held, should inspire those living in the present to seek spontaneously to repay the current ruler for benefits received since the distant past.⁵⁸

These considerations led the late Mito scholars to question the approach to the *kamiyo* that their predecessors had taken in the initial stages of the domain-sponsored historical and other compilation projects. For the dynamic of “recompensing the source and holding to the origin” to be activated, the effective governors of society and the populace had to realize why the emperor was owed loyal service. To understand that idea, they had to grasp the special nature of the emperor’s position within the polity established by Amaterasu’s command that her descendants should rule eternally. But delving into the *kamiyo* accounts required caution, the late Mito scholars recognized. While fully agreeing with Mitsukuni that “the *kamiyo* is full of strange things,” they had serious doubts about the strategy of transmuted those “strange things” into allegorical representations of an inner world of the spirit. In their view, the Song Confucian emphasis on metaphysical argumentation and spiritual self-reflection, no less than Buddhist forms of such things, served to divert attention from the crucial matters of this world. Instead the late Mito scholars favored an approach to the *kamiyo* that was both selective and historicizing. On the one hand, they treated as “historical” those events of the *kamiyo* that served to establish the imperative of showing reverence to the emperor. Simultaneously, they discreetly suppressed as much of its “strangeness” as was feasible.

Rationalizing this approach, Tōko likened it to the circumspect attitude adopted by Confucius in dealing with Chinese antiquity. Confucius, he pointed out, was deeply committed to the study of history, yet in relating the events of the past he spoke with certainty only

of things that had occurred from the time of Yao and Shun on. “When referring to Fuxi, he always took care to qualify his words by saying ‘it may be’ (*kedashi*; Ch. *gai*).” In the case of Japan, the events of antiquity had become so obscured by the passage of time, that it was “not appropriate to discuss each of them in detail.” The essential matter was to clarify the fundamental circumstances pertaining to the origin of the imperial line and its sacrosanct position as sovereign ruler. Were one to go beyond that, engaging in groundless speculation about the past and “recklessly expanding upon what is mysterious and rarified,” the consequences would only be detrimental.⁵⁹

In line with this proposition, the late Mito scholars maneuvered delicately to present a view of the *kamiyo* appropriate to their own time and later generations. Following the recommendation of Yūkoku, Mitsukuni’s policy of not including the *kamiyo* in the main annals of *Dai Nihon shi* was eventually reversed, and a prefatory passage setting out what Tōko described as “the major features of the *kamiyo*” was appended to the annals of Jinmu. This passage in fact consisted of little more than a genealogy tracing Jinmu’s descent from Amaterasu and a statement that Amaterasu had bequeathed the regalia to Ninigi, together with the command that her descendants should rule Japan eternally.⁶⁰ Its inclusion, however, set the stage for linking Amaterasu’s command to the necessity for later generations to seek to “recompense the source and hold to the origin.”

Some of what this linkage entailed can be seen in *Tekiihen* (Exhortations about Adhering to Moral Norms), a short work that Aizawa Seishisai wrote for popular edification. In this work Aizawa indicated that to explain why the emperor was to be revered as heaven, he would quote from the “correct account” of the origins of the imperial line set out by Kitabatake Chikafusa in *Jinnō shōtōki*. This he indeed did. Yet Aizawa also excised many of the elements basic to Chikafusa’s synthetic *kamiyo* narrative. Among these were the account of the state of primal chaos prior to the separation of heaven and earth and the description of the initial generations of deities. Of this section, Aizawa kept Chikafusa’s statement that the first deity at the beginning of heaven and earth was known as Kuni no Tokotachi, but he added the cautionary note that, “although there are various theories about [this name and the relationship with other deities], it being a matter of the distant past, the details of the situation are not clear.” Aizawa omitted as well the majority of the details of the Izanagi and Izanami sequence, and most of the episodes concerning Amaterasu and Ninigi and his descendants after the descent from the High Plain of Heaven. As with the prefatory passage to the Jinmu annals in *Dai Nihon shi*, what remained was primarily the birth of Amaterasu to Izanagi and Izanami, the entrusting to her of the rule of heaven, her command to Ninigi that the imperial line should endure forever, her bequest to Ninigi of the regalia, and the imperial genealogy from Ninigi to Jinmu.⁶¹

Aizawa presumably chose to base his abbreviated account of the *kamiyo* on that of Chikafusa because of the latter’s elaboration of the moral implications of Amaterasu’s grant to Ninigi of the regalia. Aizawa quoted in extenso the passage from *Jinnō shōtōki* concerning the regalia and its citation of the first and second variants of the ninth segment of *Nihon shoki*. Yet, through the omission of certain phrases and the modification of others, he also reshaped its depiction of these matters. While retaining, for instance, the emphasis that Amaterasu conveyed teachings to Ninigi together with the regalia, Aizawa downplayed the more mystical or inward-looking aspects of Chikafusa’s interpretation of what this involved. Notably he

omitted Chikafusa's description of the regalia as the "font" (*hongen*) of uprightness, compassion, and wisdom and the statement that the ruler must realize in his own actions all three virtues.⁶² The consequence was a reorientation of the thrust of Amaterasu's teachings. Rather than serving to instruct the emperor in the proper way to govern the country, the focal point of those teachings became the emperor's obligation to uphold his filial duty to Amaterasu through preservation of the unbroken imperial line and ongoing devotion to her. The reception of such instruction simultaneously implied the necessity for the populace to assist the sovereign in fulfilling that duty by loyal service to the throne. Aizawa reinforced this point by bringing in an aspect of the second variant not mentioned by Chikafusa: Amaterasu had not only granted Ninigi the mirror, but "with her own hands" had bestowed upon him sheaves of rice from her sacred field, thereby providing the means for the populace to sustain life.⁶³ The imperative for both the emperor and populace to "recompense the source and hold to the origin" was thus directly traceable to Amaterasu's beneficent gifts and commands.

The historicizing approaches to the *kamiyo* sketched above took shape in the course of the eighteenth and the early to mid-nineteenth century, that is, the same period that saw the rise of the Kokugaku (National Learning) school. A review of this latter development and its relationship to the perspectives on the *kamiyo* evident among Confucian scholars must wait another occasion. In closing, however, we may note some points pertinent for future consideration. Compared to Confucians such as Hakuseki and the late Mito scholars, Kokugaku scholars such as Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) and Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843) were far more affirmative of the dimensions of the *kamiyo* as another world. This is evident, for instance, in the interpretation, developed particularly by Atsutane, of Ōkuninushi (Ōnamuchi) as a god of the other world who judges and rewards the spirits of the dead. The elaboration of notions of this sort shows that the Kokugaku scholars both continued to draw inspiration from medieval readings of the *kamiyo*, such as that of Ichijō Kaneyoshi, and engaged in their own expansion of the meaning of the *kamiyo* texts. Yet, like the Confucian historicists, the Kokugaku scholars also explicitly rejected the orientation to metaphysical and cosmological homologies central to the medieval tradition. In that they called for a focus on events held to have happened and criticized allegorical readings of those events, the overall tone of their approach to the *kamiyo* might be termed "literalist." Symbolic of this shift was Norinaga's brusque dismissal of the hermeneutics that had accumulated around the name of Kuni no Tokotachi over the preceding half millennium "as a particularly egregious example of forced readings."⁶⁴

While differing in many regards, the historicizing approaches of Confucian scholars and the Kokugaku literalist perspective thus acted alike as a dissolvent of the long medieval interpretative tradition. In rejecting allegory, those who employed such approaches did not necessarily seek to limit the frame of reference that gave the *kamiyo* texts meaning. Unquestionably, though, their efforts led to an increasing focus on the *kamiyo* as the source of the particularity of Japanese tradition. Reappraisal of the function of the *kamiyo* in post-Meiji representations of Japanese history consequently might well start from the implications of the eighteenth-century turn in the trajectory of views of the age of the gods.

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NST 1967–1982

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NOTES

1 *Kojiki* notes the total years for the age for each emperor, and for the emperors from Sujin on, it generally links the year of death to a calendar year. See, for instance, Philippi 1968, pp. 185 (for Jinmu) and 209 (for Sujin).

2 See *Kojiki* (Philippi 1968, pp. 82–85, 139–40) and the first and second variants of the ninth segment of *Nihon shoki* (Aston 1972, vol. 1, pp. 76–77, 82–83). See below for a discussion of the place of the variants within *Nihon shoki*.

3 John Brownlee has considered from a different perspective some of the issues raised below; see Brownlee 1991 and Brownlee 1997.

4 The two *kamiyo* chapters of *Nihon shoki* comprise eleven segments; the variant *issho* appended to these segments range in number from one appended to the brief segment three to eleven appended to segment five (the account of the birth of Amaterasu and her siblings). The characters for *issho* are commonly glossed today as *aru fumi*. There are also important stylistic differences between *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, with *Kojiki* paying more attention to the pronunciation of various names and terms and *Nihon shoki* employing Chinese characters and their embedded meanings more straightforwardly. The question of the relationship between the written text and possible purposes of recitation is highly complex,

however. For a brief discussion of some of the issues involved, see Philippi 1968, pp. 8–12.

5 Kōnoshi 1999b, pp. 109–33; Kōnoshi 1999a, pp. 294, 382. For an overview in English of his argument, see also Kōnoshi 2000.

6 A work of the third century C.E., *Sanwu liji* is no longer extant in complete form today, but fragments survive in other works.

7 Kōnoshi 1999a, pp. 112–25.

8 Takamimusubi is a figure of substantial importance but somewhat ill-defined provenance in the *kamiyo* accounts. Some modern scholars hold that Takamimusubi was the original solar deity, later displaced by Amaterasu. *Kojiki* and one of the *issho* include Takamimusubi among the initial group of single deities who appear at the beginning of the universe, and in *Kojiki* he acts together with Amaterasu in the events surrounding Ninigi’s descent. The main text of *Nihon shoki* simply introduces him at this point as Ninigi’s maternal grandfather. See Aston 1972, vol. 1, pp. 64, 70.

9 *Kogo shūi* has been translated into English by Katō Genchi and Hoshino Hikoshirō and more recently by John Bentley. See Katō and Hoshino 1926 and Bentley 2002.

10 John Bentley has recently published a translation of *Sendai kuji hongi*. He also presents his own interpretation, rather different from the more general view, of the text’s provenance. See Bentley 2006.

11 Mujū Ichien 1966, p. 59. For an English translation, see Morrell 1985, p. 73. In *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, it is Izanagi and Izanami rather than Amaterasu who stir the brine with their spear. The substitution of Amaterasu here illustrates another mode of modification that added to the variation within the stories associated with the *kamiyo*. For other examples of related stories involving Dainichi, see Yamamoto 1998, pp. 84–94.

12 *Yamatohime no mikoto seiki* 1977, p. 30. For a translation and cogent analysis of the oracles and their place within the medieval Shinto tradition, see Teeuwen 1996, esp. pp. 99–126. See also Teeuwen 1993, pp. 225–45.

13 The preface of another commentary, *Jindaikan kuketsu* (Oral Transmissions on the Chapters on the Age of the Gods), far less syncretistic in orientation than Kaneyoshi’s work, claims it to date to 1367, which would make it earlier than *Nihon shoki sanso*. The more Confucian tone and relative absence of Buddhist elements suggest, however, that it was in fact of considerably later vintage.

14 *Nihon shoki sanso* 1988, p. 149; Kōnoshi 1999b, pp. 40–41. In the latter work, Kōnoshi provides a lucid summary of Kaneyoshi’s premises and approach. See pp. 34–41.

15 Kōnoshi points to the absence of the heavenly deities in this segment of the main text as one of its distinctive features.

16 *Nihon shoki sanso* 1988, pp. 173–75.

17 *Nihon shoki sanso* 1988, pp. 186–87.

18 *Nihon shoki sanso* 1988, pp. 184, 220–21. As noted above, the *Nihon shoki* main text does not include any reference to Yomi or Izanagi’s escape and subsequent purification, but they are introduced in the sixth and other variants appended to segment five. Kaneyoshi makes his observations about purification in his commentary on the sixth variant.

19 *Nihon shoki sanso* 1988, pp. 280–81; Kaneyoshi refers here to Hononinigi, the second element of Ninigi’s full name: Amatsu Hikohiko Hononinigi.

20 *Nihon shoki sanso* 1988, pp. 304–305.

21 *Nihon shoki sanso* 1988, pp. 292, 311.

22 On these points, see Ishida 1979. Ishida provides further elaboration of the background of Jien’s historical outlook in Ishida 2000. See particularly part 2.

23 *Gukanshō* 1967, p. 41; Brown and Ishida 1979, p. 245.

24 In the English translation of *Gukanshō* by Delmer Brown and Ishida Ichirō, the order of these sections is reversed, with the chronological lists placed after the narrative sections.

25 *Gukanshō* 1967, p. 129; Brown and Ishida 1979, p. 19.

- 26 In fact, in *Nihon shoki*, Amaterasu addresses this command to Futodama, the ancestral deity of the Inbe, as well. Jien, however, elides the reference to Futodama and makes Ame no Koyane the sole recipient of the charge.
- 27 Ishida 2000, pp. 124–25. Jien speaks of the “pledge” or “agreement” (*ichidaku*) between the deities, a term analogous to the “commitment” (*yakudaku*) of the bodhisattvas.
- 28 *Gukanshō* 1967, pp. 140–41, 265, 304, 329, 332, 333, 347; Brown and Ishida 1979, pp. 29–30, 144, 182, 210–11, 213, 214, 228.
- 29 At some points Jien refers to Kashima no Daimyōjin rather than Kasuga no Daimyōjin (for instance, *Gukanshō* 1967, pp. 155, 347). As the Kashima deity was incorporated within the Kasuga complex, these were two aspects of the same divine entity.
- 30 Ishida 2000, pp. 130–31.
- 31 See, for instance, *Gukanshō* 1967, pp. 200, 347. Ishida emphasizes the character of the three as lineage deities (*ujigami*) committed to protecting the welfare of their descendants. In that the Minamoto came to claim a special relationship with Hachiman, Ishida also argues that Jien sees Hachiman acting as the lineage deity of the Minamoto in the establishment of the Shogunate. Ishida 1979, pp. 426–27, 437; Ishida 2000, pp. 131–32. Jien, however, clearly presents Hachiman as the ancestral deity of the imperial line. Hachiman’s association with martial matters gives him a special importance in arranging matters in the increasingly unstable latter stages of history, but he acts as a protector of the imperial line and polity, not as a representative of the interests of the Minamoto.
- 32 According to *honji suijaku* (original ground-manifested trace) notions, *kami* were immediate, accessible manifestations of universal Buddhist forces. For Jien’s adherence to *honji suijaku* ideas, see Ishida 2000, pp. 116–22.
- 33 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, pp. 45–49, 61; Varley 1980, pp. 55–60, 78.
- 34 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, pp. 48–49; Varley 1980, p. 60.
- 35 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, pp. 49–50; Varley 1980, pp. 61–62.
- 36 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, pp. 59–60; Varley 1980, p. 76; for the *Nihon shoki* variants, see Aston 1972, vol. 1, pp. 77, 83.
- 37 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, pp. 60–61; Varley 1980, p. 77.
- 38 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, p. 163; Varley 1980, p. 230.
- 39 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, p. 82; Varley 1980, pp. 108–109.
- 40 *Jinnō shōtōki* 1965, p. 54; Varley 1980, p. 68.
- 41 On Yoshida Kanetomo, see Grapard 1992, pp. 27–58; and Scheid 2000. Bernhard Scheid provides a fuller account of Kanetomo’s thought in his *Der Eine und Einzige Weg der Goetter: Yoshida Kanetomo und die Erfindung des Shinto* (Scheid 2001). More recently Scheid has discussed medieval esoteric interpretations of *Nihon shoki*, particularly of the Ōkuninushi episode. See Scheid 2006.
- 42 Hayashi Razan, *Jinmu tennō ron*, in Hayashi Razan 1918, vol. 1, pp. 280–81.
- 43 *Honchō tsugan* 1918–1920, vol. 3, p. 45.
- 44 *Honchō tsugan* 1918–1920, vol. 2, p. 735.
- 45 *Honchō tsugan* 1918–1920, vol. 3, p. 45; prefatory volume, pp. 173–74. Razan makes the same points in *Jinmu tennō ron*.
- 46 Boot 1992, p. 174, quoting Razan’s *Shin-Eki gō kan*.
- 47 Hayashi Razan 1972, pp. 12, 35–36. For a fuller discussion of Razan’s efforts to construct a Shinto theology that mirrored the premises of Song Confucianism, see Boot 1992, pp. 147–62. As Boot points out, the Song Confucian location of *shen* within the realm of *qi*, or psychophysical materia, presented Razan with various difficulties in his definitions of *kami*. In some places Razan follows the Song linking of *shen* to *qi*, but in others, such as those cited here, he equates *kami* with *li*, or metaphysical principle.

- 48 Hayashi Razan 1972, p. 57. Listed by *Kojiki* as the first deity to appear, Ame no Minakanushi figures in the *Nihon shoki issbo* rather than the main text. Medieval Shinto interpretations posited Kuni no Tokotachi and Ame no Minakanushi to be two forms of the same entity.
- 49 Hayashi Razan 1972, pp. 24–25, 35–36.
- 50 Yoshida 1965, p. 792, citing “Gikō gyoi oboegaki.” As Yoshida notes, Fujita Yūkoku records the same observation in *Shūshi shimatsu*; in Fujita 1935, p. 71.
- 51 *Shintō shūsei* 1981, p. 43.
- 52 See, for instance, the transmissions on Takamagahara and on Takamimusubi’s command (found in the second variant of the ninth segment) to Ame no Koyane and Futodama to set up a “sacred ritual space” (*himorogi iwasaka*); *Shintō shūsei* 1981, pp. 45 and 65.
- 53 Hakuseki’s political perspective and its bearing on his view of history are discussed more fully in Nakai 1988. For a fuller account of his approach to the *kamiyo*, see particularly chapter 10.
- 54 Arai Hakuseki, *Koshitsū*, in Arai Hakuseki 1905–1907, vol. 3, pp. 219, 225–26; Nakai 1988, pp. 245–46.
- 55 *Koshitsū*, pp. 227–32, 292–93; Nakai 1988, pp. 247–50.
- 56 Arai Hakuseki, *Koshitsū wakumon*, in Arai Hakuseki 1905–1907, vol. 3, pp. 332–35; Nakai 1988, pp. 250–53.
- 57 See, for instance, Fujita Yūkoku, *Seimeiron*, in *Mitogaku* 1973.
- 58 For a discussion of this dimension of late Mito thought, see Nakai 2002, pp. 279–91. I have also taken up aspects of late Mito thought relevant to the following discussion in Nakai 2006.
- 59 Fujita Tōko, *Kōdōkanki jutsugi*, in *Mitogaku* 1973, pp. 262–63.
- 60 For the prefatory passage attached to the annals of Jinmu, see the supplementary note to *Kōdōkanki jutsugi*, in *Mitogaku* 1973, p. 462.
- 61 Aizawa 1941, pp. 251, 253–55.
- 62 *Ibid.*, pp. 254–55.
- 63 “With her own hands” is Aizawa’s embellishment and does not occur in *Nihon shoki*. He further emphasized Amaterasu’s place as a source of blessings for the populace by noting that she had established sericulture and by associating her with the appearance of other material necessities as well. Aizawa 1941, pp. 257–59.
- 64 Motoori Norinaga, *Kojikiden*, in Motoori Norinaga 1968, vol. 9, p. 142. For Norinaga’s view of Kuni no Tokotachi, see also his *Ise nikū sakitake no ben*, trans. by Mark Teeuwen as *Motoori Norinaga’s The Two Shrines of Ise: An Essay of Split Bamboo* (Teeuwen 1995, pp. 26–31). To be sure, as with the interpretation of Ōkuninushi, the Kokugaku scholars did not separate themselves entirely from the legacy of medieval and early Tokugawa conceptualizations of Kuni no Tokotachi. The Kokugaku scholars’ presentation of Takamimusubi, who at their hands assumed new importance as a creator deity, arguably incorporated a number of elements from that legacy.

GLOSSARY

- Aizawa Seishisai 会沢正志齋
 Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神
 Amatsu Hikohiko Hononinigi 天津彦彦火
 瓊瓊杵
 Ame no Koyane 天兒屋
 Ame no Minakanushi 天御中主
 Arai Hakuseki 新井白石
arawani 顯露
chi 智
chūsei Nihongi 中世日本紀
Dai Nihon shi 大日本史
 Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来
engi 緣起
 Fujita Tōko 藤田東湖
 Fujita Yūkoku 藤田幽谷
 Fuxi 伏羲
 Futodama 太玉
gedatsu 解脱
 “Gikō gyoi oboegaki” 義公御意覚書
 Go-Horikawa 後堀河
Gukanshō 愚管抄
 Hachiman Daibosatsu 八幡大菩薩
hannya 般若
harae 祓
 Hayashi Gahō 林鶯峰
 Hayashi Razan 林羅山
himorogi iwasaka 神籬磐境
 Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤
honbun 本文
Honchō jinja kō 本朝神社考
Honchō tsugan 本朝通鑑
hongen 本源
honji suijaku 本地垂迹
honsho 本書
hōbon hanshi 報本反始
hosshin 法身
 Huainanzi 淮南子
ichi iwaku 一曰
ichidaku 一諾
 Ichijō Kaneyoshi 一条兼良
 Inbe 忌部
 Inbe no Hironari 齋部広成
 Ise 伊勢
Ise nikū sakitake no ben 伊勢二宮さき竹
 の弁
issho 一書
 Izanagi 伊弉諾
 Izanami 伊弉冉
 Izumo 出雲
 Jien 慈円
jin 仁
jindai 神代
Jindaikan kuketsu 神代卷口訣
jindō 人道
 Jingū 神功
 Jinmu 神武
Jinmu tennō ron 神武天皇論
jinnō 人皇
Jinnō shōtōki 神皇正統記
kaii no koto bakari 怪異之事斗
kakuretaru koto 幽事
kami 神
kamigoto 神事
kamiyo 神代
 Kashima no Daimyōjin 鹿島大明神
 Kasuga Daimyōjin 春日大明神
kedashi (gai) 蓋
kenkon 乾坤
kenro 顯露
 Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房
Kogo shūi 古語拾遺
Kojiki 古事記
 Kokugaku 国学
Koshitsū 古史通
Koshitsū wakumon 古史通或問
Kujiki 旧事紀
kuketsu 口訣
 Kuni no Tokotachi 国常立
kunitsukami 国津神
Kusharon 俱舍論
Kōdōkanki jutsugi 弘道館記述義
li 理
 Minamoto 源
misogi 禊
 Mito 水戸
 Miwa 三輪

Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長
 Mujū Ichien 無住一円
 Nakatomi 中臣
Nihon shoki 日本書紀
Nihon shoki sanso 日本書紀纂疏
Nihongi 日本紀
 Ninigi 瓊瓊杵
ninnō 人皇
ōbō 王法
 Ōjin 応神
 Ōkuninushi 大国主
 Ōnamuchi 大己貴
 Pan Gu 盤古
qi 氣
rei (ling) 靈
 Rinzai 臨濟
Sanwu liji 三五曆紀
seibun 正文
Seimeiron 正名論
Sendai kuji hongī 先代旧事本紀
setsuwa 説話
Shang shu 尚書
Shasekishū 沙石集
shashoku no kami 社稷ノ神
shen 神
shinbutsu shūgō 神仏習合
shinchoku 神勅
Shin-Eki gō kan 神易合勘
shinji 神事
shinshin 心神
shintō 神道
Shintō denju 神道伝授
Shintō shūsei 神道集成
shōjiki 正直
 Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子
 Shun 舜
Shūshi shimatsu 修史始末
shusse 出世
 Sima Guang 司馬光
sōbyō no kami 宗廟ノ神
 Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子
 Suinin 垂仁
 Sujin 崇神
 Takamagahara 高天原

Takamimusubi no kami 高皇産靈
Tekiiben 迪彝編
 Tendai 天台
 Tokugawa Mitsukuni 徳川光圀
ujigami 氏神
wakō no onchikai 和光ノ御誓
 Watarai 渡会
 Wu Taibo 呉太伯
 Yamatohime 倭姫
 Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇斎
 Yao 堯
Yijing 易經
 Yomi 黄泉
 Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田兼俱
yuiitsu 唯一
yū 勇
yūji 幽事
yūmei 幽冥
Zhongyong 中庸
Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑
Zuozhuan 左伝
yakudaku 約諾

Rewriting the *Ubuya* (Parturition Hut): Its Historicity and Historiography

Hitomi TONOMURA

Ōbara *Ubuya*

Located about seventy kilometers northwest of the city of Kyoto, with less than five thousand residents and an area of about ninety square kilometers, Miwa-chō seems an indistinct, small rural district and an unlikely home for an artifact that Kyoto Prefecture has identified as a Tangible Folk Cultural Property.¹ This distinction was granted in 1985 to the Ōbara (metonymically, “Grand Womb”) *ubuya*, a birthing hut that was used by local residents until the 1910s. Today, a replica unobtrusively graces the side of a stream and stands as a monument to the birthing practices of by-gone days. Far more than a static reminder of the past, however, the Ōbara *ubuya* has emerged as a concrete and material medium that generated a new conversation about the function of *ubuya* and hence the very meaning of what it meant for women to give birth. In 1999 and again in 2000, the Miwa-chō Board of Education held a symposium called the “*Ubuya* Talk.” The two symposia involved local residents, anthropologists, journalists, and outside participants, and aimed, first of all, to draw out the first-hand, women-centered understanding of the role of the *ubuya* through oral interviews. The size of the crowd, eighty in the first year and twice that number in the second year, attests to the overwhelming success of this initiative.² Subsequently, the Kyoto Tourism Federation posted a website that features the Ōbara *ubuya*, along with the Ōbara shrine, which faces and protects the *ubuya* and its occupants.³ The caption of this website reads:

When an expecting mother finally gives birth to her baby, she stays in this small hut for 7 days to recover. Being in the hut is said to help the mother feel free from housework or family stress. The hut was believed to be very sacred, and that the deity actually descended from heaven into the hut when the child



Figure: Ōbara *ubuya*. Courtesy of Ōbara Shrine. Photograph similar to that in the Kyoto Tourism Federation News Archive.⁴

was born. This custom was held until early the Taisho period (1912–1926). Now the hut is preserved as a valuable heritage of the local tradition.⁵

Reflecting the “*Ubuya* Talk,” this description of the Ōbara *ubuya* affirms women’s agency and autonomy, and holds the *ubuya* as a protective and sacred space that offered solace to birthing women. This positive image of the *ubuya*, however, differs dramatically from the usual representation, which emphasizes its oppressive physical isolation, the misery of its occupants, and by implication the polluted status of women. By displacing the notion of pollution (*kegare* or *fujō*) with sacrality and that of isolation with restful solitude, the Ōbara *ubuya* discourse not only inverts the meaning of *ubuya* but also rescues women’s alternative voice from the dark history of birth-giving practices.

The *Ubuya* Trope

In postwar historiography, the very presence of *ubuya* in records, however few, serves as proof that birthing women were seen as polluted. In this view, the *ubuya* is an instrument built to isolate the source of contamination to prevent it from spreading to the rest of the community. The *ubuya* seems to have had no other function or meaning. Historically, it cannot be denied that a space called *ubuya* existed or that the concept of birth-related pollution was evident. However, this does not mean that one concept is inextricably connected to the other. Nor is there a monolithic meaning that can be attributed to either *ubuya* or pollution. A balanced understanding of *ubuya*, and hence the history of parturition, requires a deeper examination of this institution that answers questions such as: When, where, and under what circumstances did the term *ubuya* come to be used and an isolated structure constructed? What meanings did it hold and how were such meanings transformed over time and space? How and when did the concept of birth-related pollution emerge and how did its meanings change? To whom was pollution a liability or an opportunity and what rules emerged to manage it? How did these rules relate to women’s physiological process of parturition? How did the idea of pollution come to be associated with *ubuya*? And, how did its occupants and non-occupants view the institution? It is impossible to answer all these questions in the limited space of this article. Instead, my modest goal is first to introduce the established, modern view of *ubuya*, which I call the *ubuya* trope, and to provide historically based evidence that undermines it. Through this process, I hope to demonstrate how the voice of the women who experienced the Ōbara *ubuya* is at once unconventional and unsurprising. The place to start is Japan’s folk ethnology (*minzokugaku*).

The Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) undertook a massive oral survey project in the 1960s “to urgently preserve folk cultural materials from across the country.” The project led to the publication of *The Atlas of Japanese Folk Culture* (Nihon minzoku chizu) in 1969.⁶ The map of the “taboo on delivery” (*san no imi*) shows at least thirty-five villages across the country that at one time had *ubuya*. Most of these were located along the coast and on islands. Where no *ubuya* per se was found, however, other arrangements, such as giving birth in a separate building and not sharing meals, are recorded.⁷ The government’s goal to record and preserve Japan’s past cultural forms without delay in the face of their rapid disappearance echoed the earlier goals of folk ethnologists, among whom Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) is arguably the most famous.

Segawa Kiyoko (1895–1984), a disciple from the 1930s of Yanagita, has written and lectured extensively on *ubuya*. Initially interested in the lives of female divers (she published “Hegura no ama” [Divers of Hegura] in 1933), Segawa was instrumental in energizing other female followers of Yanagita to champion women-centered research.⁸ Her 1935 oral survey of a mountain village community that “extends from Shinshū,” for example, gave special attention to interviews with women in their sixties and seventies who comprised the last generation that had personally experienced the *koya* (as the *ubuya* was called in the local dialect). According to these women, during periods of the birth and menstruation taboos, they spent time in the *koya* and were not allowed to enter the room in a house with a portable shrine or a storehouse. They also were not to touch the well, and while they could take cold food, such as miso and pickled vegetables, to the *koya*, cooked food was off limits, because sharing cooked food would pollute the fire of the main house. (Fire was considered a conduit for pollution.) Once the taboo period was over, they went into the river to wash their hair, body, and clothes. Prior to reassimilating in the main house, the women first had to be served a cup of tea at someone else’s house.⁹

Segawa’s article “Ubuya ni tsuite” (About *ubuya*), published in *Yanagita Kunio sensei koki kinen bunshū: Nihon minzokugaku no tame ni* (Essays in Celebration of Professor Yanagita Kunio’s Seventieth Birthday: For the Promotion of Japanese Folk Ethnology),¹⁰ contains a few cases of the use of *ubuya* from several regions. One is located on Shino Island in Mikawa Bay, Aichi Prefecture. This land had long belonged to the Ise shrine, which was an imperial shrine of the highest order, and villagers had a strong sense of awe for *kegare*. According to Segawa, women would give birth in the corner of their own house, but after giving birth they went to the *ubuya* with the newborn and stayed there for thirty to fifty days. Relatives brought water and cooked food for them. The *ubuya* apparently was a temporary structure, built beside a menstrual hut called *kariya* (temporary structure), and was destroyed when not in use. An official document addressed to the villagers, dated 1621, shows among other items that the shrine official approved the appeal of the villagers to have *kariya* constructed near houses.¹¹ Although the document is silent on the reason behind the villagers’ appeal, Segawa assumes that “according to this document, the *kariya* of this island was located far from houses. Villagers must have found [this distance] unbearable and therefore appealed to the shrine official.”¹²

Segawa also cites in the same article a Tokugawa-period topographical record (*Nanpō kaitōshi*) that describes the condition on southern islands:

In each of the villages of the island, on the mountain side away from houses were built several thatched structures with no floor. Menstruating women and women in their full term of pregnancy entered them and stayed there, menstruating women for eight to nine days and expectant women for more than fifty days. During this time, women had no communication with family members. Even if their father or mother were ill, they could not look after them. Even if the woman herself became deathly ill, her child could not come see her. Many women felt miasmatic, some died, some developed a chronic illness, and young women invited sexual misconduct.

The situation was so bad, the record continues, that the patrol official dispatched by the bakufu lamented the “deterioration of the custom and loss of teaching” and admonished the

islanders: "On the homeland, this does not exist. There is no greater violation of benevolence and filial piety than this. It destroys industriousness, leads to sexual immorality, promotes poison, and invites illnesses. From now on, prohibit this practice." In response, the islanders explained that "it is this way because we fear divine retribution" but promised to follow the admonition and abandon the custom. However, according to Segawa, their fear was such that the practice remained alive "until recently." She also remarks that the comment made by the official about the absence of these practices on the homeland "of course is a huge error."¹³

Based on her extensive research and oral interviews, Segawa concludes: "From these examples, we understand that the *ubuya* had to be built far away from human habitation (*bitoazato*). It was a separate and temporary building that would be destroyed in time. [Staying in the *ubuya*] was an excessively wretched and restricted life."¹⁴ The ethnographer's attitude toward her subject is extremely sympathetic, as expressed in her usage of dramatic phrases such as: "in a hut all by herself in true solitude; desolate and alone, amidst the field, as the cold wind blows down from the mountainside," and "a solitary and wretched condition that keenly touches us." She also comments on how she realized that "all women in the past spent nearly half of each month in this hut, and although I tried to feel their fate as they experienced it, I was simply shocked and dismayed (*akirerubakari*) by the appearance of lonely isolation and the subservience of the women of old who had accepted such wrongful treatment."¹⁵

The miserable conditions described here must have been a reality for some women, but these examples come from island, coastal, or mountainous communities. Despite these limitations, Segawa eagerly generalizes from them in her other writings and claims a uniformity of cultural rules related to *ubuya* or *kariya* throughout the country.¹⁶ In Segawa's construct, not only did *ubuya* cover the Japanese archipelago from corner to corner, but they also existed continuously from time immemorial. In seeking "the silent flow of the ways of living and thinking of the Japanese people from ancient times," she considers that the "problem of *ubuya* should find its point of departure in the world of ancient myth." She identifies "the myth of Toyotamahime in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters; comp. 712)" in which the *ubuya* is a significant motif.¹⁷ Thus, in Segawa's citation of Japan's oldest extant writing, the work that chronicles the country's origin from gods to the imperial line, is born a powerful trope of timeless *ubuya* that the inhabitants of the nation have commonly shared throughout Japan's history. The *ubuya* trope is a totalizing discourse that fuses the analytically distinct notions of women, pollution (*kegare*), parturition, isolation, misery, and disempowerment into an unbroken circle of timeless Japaneseness that is tangibly confirmed by its very physical form and ontologically sustained by its imagined mythical origin.¹⁸

Recent critical discussion of modernity has led to a reconsideration of Yanagita Kunio's scholarship that, in the face of developing capitalism and concomitant imagined and real loss of what was conceived as traditional ways, romanticized past history, especially that of ordinary folk, into a seamless and immutable culture.¹⁹ As Stephen Vlastos eloquently states in his *Mirror of Modernity*, tradition, with no clear beginning, "aggregates and homogenizes premodern culture and posits a historical past against which the modern human condition can be measured." Borrowing from Anthony Giddens, Vlastos points to the "ontological security" that tradition offered in the face of the new condition of "radical doubt" that modernity was institutionalizing. The institution of "*ubuya*" would fit perfectly as a visible reminder

of “life in traditional society, where kinship, religion, custom, and ceremony impart feelings of belonging.” “Ubuya” also can be understood in what Vlastos calls the second usage of “tradition,” which refers to “a continuous cultural transmission in the form of discrete cultural practices of ‘the past’ that remain vital in the present.” Building on Edward Shils’s (1910–1995) formulation of the “normative transmission which links the generations of the dead with the generations of the living,” Vlastos accentuates the point that the “core of tradition is strongly normative; the intention (and the effect) is to reproduce patterns of culture. In this conception, rather than representing the culture left behind in the transition to modernity, tradition is what modernity *requires* to prevent society from flying apart.”²⁰

Ubuya, both real and imagined, played a crucial role in this modernist construction of tradition. Folkways researchers such as Yanagita’s followers sought out *ubuya* structures that remained and documented them. Once some had been found, their existence proliferated in the imagination of a universal folk. The *ubuya*, whether or not it still stood, was everywhere, and the same meaning and purpose were ascribed to it: to contain female-specific pollution. From this formulation, it was a short step to defining the universal female, whose undeniable biological essence was pollution. The analytical distinction between cultural interpretations of the essential quality and the essential physiological make-up itself often was blurred. Modern ethnologists constructed a “history” that was more normative than descriptive, and strongly influenced the way society viewed the female gender. Meanwhile historians of pre-modern Japan whose professional goal was to investigate premodern sources rarely discussed the topic of *ubuya* precisely because their sources scarcely mentioned it.

Standardizing the Meaning of *Ubuya* in Lexical Dictionaries

Definitions for “ubuya” given in authoritative Japanese-language dictionaries conform to the *ubuya* trope. The reputable multi-volume *Nihon Kokugo daijiten* (NKD, or Grand Dictionary of Japan’s National Language), published in 1979 by Shōgakukan, gives three definitions for “*ubuya*.” The first reads:

A house structure built separately (*betsu ni*) [from the home] *in order to* avoid (*imu*) birth pollution (*shussan no kegare*) and isolate (*kakuri*) the birthing woman. Even today, there are regions where cases of [women] living apart [from the family] in a communal hut remain²¹ (italics added).

This definition emphasizes the link between the structure, the pollution, and the need to isolate the source of pollution: namely, a woman. It takes precedence over the second definition, which simply points to the functional relationship between parturition and its location: “A room arranged for the purpose of accommodating childbirth.” The third explains the interchangeability of the terms “*ubuya*” and “*ubuyashinai*” (nurturing the newborn), which refers to the series of ceremonies held for the newborn child, a practice observed by ancient aristocrats, including the ceremonies held on the first, third, fifth, and seventh days.²² The second and third definitions are devoid of explicit connections to either the notion of pollution or isolation of women.

Another popular dictionary for classical Japanese, Sanseidō’s *Kogo jiten* (Dictionary of Archaic Japanese), also presents this definition: “*Ubuya*: A detached building for birthing. In antiquity, it was set up *because* birthing was considered pollution/polluting and was feared/

avoided”²³ (italics added).

According to the NKD, the term “*ubuya*” has multiple meanings. On what basis, then, does a dictionary prioritize one definition over another? Why does the meaning that emphasizes pollution appear first? The NKD’s “Principles of Compilation” give a partial answer. One contributing factor for ordering multiple definitions is the date of supporting historical material or representative example illustrating the particular definition.²⁴ Among the three definitions offered for “*ubuya*,” the first cites *Nihon shoki* (Annals of Japan; comp. 718), the eighth-century source that describes the “age of the gods” (*kamiyo*). References for the second and third NKD definitions date from the Heian period (ca. ninth–twelfth centuries): “Furnishings in *ubuya*,” in *Utsubo monogatari*, probably written in the late tenth century, and an expression, “People composed poetry during *on-ubuya*” (“on” is an honorific) in *Ise monogatari*, from the early Heian period.

Ironically, the meaning attributed to the oldest example, from the *Nihon shoki*, reformulates itself to contemporary relevance, as it is followed by the phrase “even now” *ubuya* are still found in some regions. By juxtaposing the actual physical presence of *ubuya* that can be witnessed today concretely in identifiable geographical locations against the term’s manifest form in Japan’s most remote past, the first definition casts *ubuya* as an institution of deep historicity and stability, whose ontological significance has endured from Japan’s beginning to this day.

The NKD’s *Nihon shoki* reference for the term *ubuya* is a passage in the story about the daughter of the Sea God (Watatsumi no ookami), Toyotamahime, an earlier variant of which appears in the *Kojiki*. The *Nihon shoki* itself has several variants. All share the same narrative outline, focusing on the *ubuya* that Toyotamahime requests her husband, Hiko hohodemi no mikoto, to build.²⁵ Descended directly from the supreme goddess Amaterasu, Hiko hohodemi no mikoto is the Heavenly Grandchild and grandfather of Japan’s first earthly emperor, Jinmu, whose putative reign began in 660 B.C.E. The story represents an important segment in the imagined progression from myth to the creation of the imperial lineage around which the first Japanese state emerges. Embedded in the foundational mytho-political text, the story carries the weight of historical and historiographical authenticity that legitimizes Japan’s national origin.

In one *Nihon shoki* variant, the Heavenly Grandchild had been living under the sea with his wife Toyotamahime. She announces: “I have already conceived. I should not deliver the Heavenly Grandson’s child in the sea. Therefore when I give birth, I will go to your land. If you would build an *ubuya* for me on the beach and wait for me, that would be just what I wish.” Hiko hohodemi returns to his homeland, and applying cormorant feathers, builds an *ubuya*. Even before the roof is completed, Toyotamahime arrives on a tortoise, accompanied by her younger sister. Because her delivery time is imminent, she enters the structure without waiting for the thatching to be completed. She declares to her husband: “I beseech you not to look when I am in delivery.” The husband-prince becomes suspicious, peeks, and sees that she has transformed into a large crocodile (*wani*). When Toyotamahime learns of this violation, she feels deeply ashamed. Nonetheless, the husband asks her “what name should be given to this child?” Having named the child, she leaves for the sea, and the prince writes a love poem and appoints various women as wetnurse, hot-water giver, food-giver, and bath-giver.²⁶

The same story in the *Kojiki*, to which Segawa refers in establishing a lineage to contemporary *ubuya*, is more elaborate and graphic. It includes Toyotamahime's initial observation that "All persons of other lands, when they bear their young, revert to the form of their original land and give birth. Therefore, I am going to revert to my original form (*moto no mi*) and give birth. Pray do not look at me." The prince then sees her "crawling and slithering around." Awe-struck, he runs away. Realizing that her "form has been seen, [Toyotamahime is] exceedingly ashamed" and returns to the sea, leaving the child on the shore and forever separating the land and sea. "Later, although she was bitter at him for having looked at her," she still longed for him and sends her younger sister to nurse the child.²⁷

At both the descriptive and symbolic levels, the depiction of the *ubuya* in any version of the story differs greatly from the meaning given in NDK: "A house structure built separately *in order to* avoid birth pollution and isolate the birthing woman."²⁸ In the story, the *ubuya* is a structure built to accommodate a birthing woman, away from outside elements and from peering eyes, and to allow her to return to her "original form" in her moment of delivery. Nowhere does the story state, or even suggest, that birth pollution was the reason why the *ubuya* was built. Moreover, it was Toyotamahime who requested that it be built. At variance with this, the dictionary's definition situates the woman as an object of containment instead of as a constructive agent. In the source texts, *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, it was a self-initiated solitude, not an externally-imposed isolation, the purpose of which would be to protect the prince from contamination. Toyotamahime's wish not to be seen is explained in the *Kojiki* version. Her comment on "returning to the original form" can be read in many ways, but considering that the words come from a woman about to go through the arduous labor of child delivery, and gauging from her later reaction to having been visually violated, her words in the original text likely expressed her desire for privacy in the hours of contraction and pain. Giving birth is an occasion that transforms a woman to a bodily condition that divests her of the physical qualities typically described as enticing to men. Interpreted from the birthing woman's body-centered perspective, Toyotamahime's request to secure what we would call privacy seems reasonable and sensible. Did she not want an undisturbed place to concentrate on her own bodily process and manage the pain, an act that is graphically expressed in terms of "crawling and slithering"? Did she not want to secure a place that keeps an outsider's gaze away from bodily discharge and her exposed body parts—vagina and surrounding areas—that in other circumstances are the focus of male-directed sexual desire?

Perhaps a princess of the sea such as Toyotamahime is constructed differently from a human woman. Even so, instead of pollution, the *ubuya* in the myth accommodates the symbolic expressions of the practical and pragmatic needs of a woman facing moments of labor and delivery. Toyotamahime's apprehension that her laboring form would frighten or repel the prince was indeed proven correct, as it astonished him so much so that he ran away.

The meaning attributed to the story by the dictionary's reference misconstrues the broad implication of the source narrative. In the story, it is Toyotamahime who gives the *ubuya* its functional significance. The entire childbirth episode, from the building of the *ubuya* to the naming of the newborn, rests on her knowledge and authority. The story endows her with the authority to navigate the birth, create a baby who would carry the prince's patrilineal line, and delimits the boundary of that rule by drawing the line between the worlds of the sea and the earth. The prince defers to Toyotamahime in the naming of the newborn, which reflects the

ancient practice in which mothers named children, and magnifies the idea of a female-centered perspective that underlies the story.²⁹ More prescriptive than descriptive, the twentieth-century dictionary reshapes the meaning of the story to fit the modern discursive agenda; it transforms Toyotamhime's *ubuya* from a place of protection to the architectural proof that the *ubuya* isolated the birthing woman in order to protect others from her *kegare*.³⁰

The *ubuya* trope, then, asserts some or all of the following circular logic: parturition was *kegare*; therefore the *ubuya* was built in order to contain it by isolating the source of *kegare* (woman); because the *ubuya* was built, parturition and the human agency that was sequestered in it must have been polluting; and because the *ubuya* was built in the time of Japan's mythical antiquity and also can be seen in modern Japan, it must have been there continuously throughout. Finally, the trope strongly infers that one example of *ubuya* can be generalized for all times and all regions because women's physiological essence and their birth-giving functions are the same and unchanging.

The trope is easily found, both in English- and Japanese-language material. In a note to his translation of the *Nihon shoki*, published in 1896, W. G. Aston (1841–1911) associates *ubuya* with timelessness, although without specific reference to pollution: “it was the custom in ancient Japan for women to retire for their confinement to a temporary hut constructed for the purpose. [Ernest] Satow (1843–1929) and [Frederick Victor] Dickins (1838–1915) found this practice *still* in vogue in the Island of Hachijō when they visited it in 1878”³¹ (italics added). Nakamura Yoshio (1925–1993), a *kokubungaku* (national literature) specialist, also gives examples of *ubuya* in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* and then, exceeding the limits of his source texts, explains that this custom of building *ubuya* “comes from the ancient people's taboo concept that held parturition to be *kegare*. The abundant existence of *ubuya* among the undeveloped peoples have been pointed out, and in this country as well, the legacy of this practice in many parts of Japan is reported.”³²

Unpacking the *Ubuya* Trope

The *ubuya* trope, although dominant, is not the only discourse that explicates the meaning of the *ubuya*. Some theories are merely speculative and perhaps as groundless as the *ubuya* trope itself, while others demonstrate certain historical sensitivity. For example, after clarifying that “seclusion of birthing women in an *ubuya* and a storage room (*nando*) was not because birthing was polluting but precisely for the act of confining oneself,” Makita Shigeru declares that “people of old believed that, like the soul of rice that confines itself inside the husk, the soul of a child is confined inside the womb of the mother who in turn confines herself inside an *ubuya* to store up the baby's power to expel itself and grow.” For Tanigawa Ken'ichi, who believes that birth signifies a transfer from the realm of the dead to that of the living, the *ubuya* is a place where regeneration following the transfer occurs. Takatori Masao (1926–1981) considers the historical progressions by explaining that the *ubuya* initially was a place where a woman acting as a priestess stayed to pray for the descent of heavenly spirit. As the concept of blood pollution strengthened, the *ubuya* came to be viewed as a place to isolate pollution.³³

Colorful and insightful as they may be, these depictions fall short of providing a realistic understanding of *ubuya* in its concrete setting and representations. A critical assessment of historical *ubuya* that transcends presumptive or romantic generalizations calls for an inves-

tigation that considers not only the meanings of *ubuya* in all its manifest forms but also its absence in birth-giving practices. We begin our historical inquiry by examining *Vocabulario da lingoa de Iapam*, a Japanese-Portuguese dictionary, compiled in 1603 by de Iapam da companhia de Iesus (the Japan Society of Jesus), which has more than 30,000 entries. Among the term “*vbu*” and its compounds, we find “*vbuya*.” The definition states simply: *Casa do nacimiento, ou que se faz peranella nacer alguem* (House for birth, or that which is made for a person to be born within). There is no implication that the structure is built to contain pollution. It is unlikely that the Jesuits viewed birth to be polluting in the early seventeenth century. It is possible that they were unaware of the complicated concept of *kegare*; the term *qegare* (*kegare*) in the dictionary refers only to the sense of external dirtiness.³⁴ This also may bespeak of the absence of the visible signs and operation of *kegare* in what the Jesuits encountered.

Turning to the modern Japanese references, the definition of “*ubuya*” given in *Kokushi daijiten* (Encyclopedia of Japanese History), published by Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, states:

Place in which to give birth; or a place to stay during the time of taboo. There are two kinds of childbirth. One occurs at home and the other in a place that is specially constructed for this purpose. In the *Nihon shoki* is a story about building a special *ubu-shitsu* (birthing room) for Toyotamahime. The significance of this story is [to show] the construction of a space in preparation for birth that is different from the ordinary living space.³⁵

This entry, signed by Kamada Hisako, mentions the custom of building a temporary structure and putting up sacred paper, the purpose of which is “avoidance of evil spirits.” It specifically emphasizes that “Today, it is explained that this custom reflects the belief that birthing was pollution, but instead it probably shows that birthing originally was sacred.” After noting that “there are places that regard birthing as pollution and isolate women for that reason,” *Kokushi daijiten* adds important qualifying information: such practices are “mostly [found on] the islands of Izu and the Seto inland sea, and the eastern region of Aichi prefecture.”³⁶

Unlike Segawa who has sought a unitary meaning from her examples, Namihira Emiko, an anthropologist, has analyzed and interpreted separately each of her sources and pieces of evidence. Like others, she begins with the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* and finds that the notion of pollution presented in these texts has to do with death, not birth. Childbirth is linked to a commandment against viewing a woman in delivery, but the idea of birth-related pollution is absent. Namihira’s understanding is reconfirmed in more recent works, such as that of Osada Aiko. Osada has painstakingly examined terms and circumstances in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* that might possibly relate to the categories of “childbirth *kegare*”—and she found none.³⁷

For more recent centuries, instead of a wide distribution of *ubuya*, Namihira sees an uneven distribution across Japan, with a particular concentration on islands and in the mountains. She analytically disentangles the structure of the *ubuya* from the notion of pollution and notes that the absence of the architectural structure of an *ubuya* per se does not mean the absence of the idea of female-specific pollution. Some regions, without the *ubuya*, prohibited the sharing of the cooking fire with birthing women who were considered polluted. For her, “the distribution of menstrual and childbirth huts is one yardstick for measuring the strength of the concept of pollution in particular areas.”³⁸

Namihira's understanding is based partly on her examination of *ubuya* on Hachijōjima. This is a case that strongly argues for the connection between *ubuya* and pollution, but not necessarily misery. The birthing house on this island was called *taya* (the other house), as documented in the *Hachijōjima nendaiki* (Hachijōjima Chronicle, 1335–1652) as early as 1514.³⁹ Apparently, the organization and function of the *taya* underwent some transformation over the three and one-half centuries of its existence. Initially, for menstruation and birth two separate structures were used, but eventually these were merged into one building. Early structures were located a long distance from homes, but were later built near them and eventually were moved into a residential compound. Then there was another structure called a “third day house (*mikkaya*),” where women whose menstrual period had ended stayed for three days prior to going home, but this house was abolished later. During the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), bakufu administrators prohibited the custom of *taya* and ordered its destruction, but apparently local usage prevailed. In the Meiji period (1868–1912), the new government also issued prohibitions on several occasions. After its final removal in early Meiji, the islanders quickly rebuilt it when a typhoon damaged many homes, a result, they believed, of the destruction of the previous *taya*. The *taya* finally disappeared from the island in the 1880s.⁴⁰ In the islanders' view, there was a manifest connection between the architectural reality of *taya*, the containment of *kegare*, and the divine maintenance of natural balance.

Based on this information, Namihira considers reasons for the bakufu's prohibition and the islanders' desire to keep the structure. The first possible reason for the bakufu's prohibition is the payment of taxes, part of which was made in the form of cloth woven by women. If women were sequestered, there would be fewer labor hours to weave. This reasoning does not hold because the evidence also shows that women took the loom into the *taya*. Additionally, there is no evidence that the bakufu disdained cloth that had been woven by the “polluted women.” There clearly were other factors. In exploring other possibilities, Namihira reverses the widely held belief that it was men who wanted to keep the *taya* and instead postulates that it was indeed the women, who tenaciously held on to it. This way of thinking also can challenge the view that women “suffered” from the *ubuya* custom. Acknowledging that islanders recognized birthing and menstruation to be *kegare*, Namihira nonetheless asserts that *kegare* on this island did not negatively affect women's status. Compared to women on the homeland, the island women enjoyed far more favorable marriage and inheritance practices. Dickins and Satow, too, remarked that although their stay was too short to ascertain it themselves, “it has been said that owing to the fact that the tax or tribute paid to the Government is the product of their industry, they [women] occupy a much more important position in the family than elsewhere in Japan.”⁴¹

In fact, instead of experiencing misery in the *taya*, women of this island used it for functions other than the containment of *kegare*. The length of stay for menstruating women was often as long as fifteen days and, “women were at their own homes for very few days out of a year.” Moreover, “even though men would not even speak to menstruating women upon encountering them on roads, they made nightly visits to women in *taya*.” This is a point also observed by Dickins and Satow. Kondō advances that “women, too, sought to meet up with men who visited them secretly, and extended their stay there beyond their time.”⁴² Namihira wonders if the *taya* served as a space for birth control.⁴³ Inasmuch as women's most fertile time came just about the fifteenth day after the beginning of menstruation, it seems likely

that the *taya* served as a place for engaging in sex, with the hope of avoiding pregnancy. The sexual intercourse that likely resulted from young men's visits would have been made secure from unwanted pregnancy if it took place during menstruation and shortly after its stoppage. Perhaps the *taya* conveniently accommodated women's needs to both control fertility and to experience sex at different moments in their reproductive and menstrual cycles as well as their sexual life regardless of marital status. Of course, while undocumented, the chance of women becoming a target of sexual aggression by men, a phenomenon recorded in many villages, also may have been a reality.⁴⁴ "Sexual misconduct," mentioned in a record introduced by Segawa earlier, adds substance to the likelihood that the *ubuya* (or *taya* or *koya*) was a convenient location for rendezvous.⁴⁵ Finally, the record on the *taya* of Hachijōjima contains information about girls aged two, three, and six or seven years old entering and remaining in the *taya* for as long as thirty and fifty days. Because the records also disclose how impoverished the island was, Namihira wonders if these pre-pubescent girls, who obviously had no physiological reason to visit the *taya*, may have been seeking to escape from agents who sought girls for sale.⁴⁶

That *ubuya* was used sometimes for purposes other than giving birth or containing menstrual pollution is demonstrated in a document dated 1798 from Mimasaka (Okayama prefecture). Submitted by villagers, it reveals that, due to poverty, they regularly committed infanticide in *ubuya*, "thinning" either a male or a female depending on the sex ratio of the existing family.⁴⁷ In contrast to this example, on the island of Oki in Shimane prefecture, only the well-to-do used the *ubuya*, which was built within the family's residential compound, while the others simply used their houses for birthing.⁴⁸ These variations in use and users force us to reevaluate the NDK's simplistic and normative definition. The inconsistent symbolic meanings that underlay the *ubuya* institution and the multiple roles that it played complicate our assumptions not only about the *ubuya* per se, but also about the power, authority, and vulnerability that women's physiological reality embodied.

Codification of *Kegare* Concepts

Historical studies of *ubuya* typically belong to the larger discussion of taboos and pollution related not only to female blood but also death and other phenomena. Exemplified by the works of Okada Shigekiyo, Yasuda Yukiko, and Narikiyo Hirokazu, this ambitious research traces the changing concepts of *kegare* in legal, documentary, and literary evidence.⁴⁹ According to these authors, the legal codification of the idea of *kegare* took place in the early Heian period.⁵⁰

The Japanese imperial institution and the bureaucracy which arose through the coordinated efforts of aristocratic families distinguished the imperial line as "the first among equals" by its putative sacerdotal superiority. The stories in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the earliest "myth-history" that helped to explain the imperial origins and legitimize the new centralized polity, illustrate the concepts of purity and impurity but not in the context of female blood. The so-called *Six National Histories* (Rikkokushi), compiled in the eighth and ninth centuries to furnish an up-to-date history of the imperial court,⁵¹ record and discuss events and questions that are relevant to the maintenance of purity, for example a command to clean and purify shrines and other divine spaces issued in 725.⁵² According to Yasuda, it is in the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (*Veritable Records of Three Reigns of Japan*; comp. 901; covers 858–887), the

last of the *Six National Histories*, that what she calls “the *kegare* consciousness” blossoms, as expressed by the increased number of *kegare*-generating situations and categories.⁵³ It mentions, for example, that in 878 *kegare* was removed preceding the ceremony at the Kamo Shrine, and in 882 a debate took place concerning the required length of abstinence after encountering pollution.⁵⁴ It should be noted that these instances are relevant only to the narrowly constructed sacred space of the gods and the imperial institution; *kegare* was a phenomenon that violated this sacred space, and purification did the opposite by restoring the space to order. The object of avoidance or abstinence was precisely this sacred space.⁵⁵

By comparing the country’s first comprehensive legal codes, the *ritsuryō*, issued in the eighth century, with compendia of legal interpretations that supplemented or refined them in the ninth century, we can see how the definition of *kegare* changed over the centuries. The original “Codes Pertaining to Kami Affairs” (*jingiryō*), issued in 718, adopted most of its wording from Chinese laws and stipulated that one is not to participate in mourning, visit the sick, eat meat, adjudicate crimes, or play music, AND “not to engage in defiled (*kegare*) and evil matters” during the time of purification or ceremony. The phrase does not spell out what constituted defilement.⁵⁶ Highly relevant to this discussion is another passage in the *Ryō no shūge*, a set of legal commentaries completed around 860, which cites from the *Koki*, a still earlier legal commentary (no longer extant) most likely completed in 738. The *Koki* asks “What does *kegare* mean?” and notes that *kegare* is signified by an act of “not seeing women give birth” (*umeru fujo o mizaru no tagui*).⁵⁷ Not the act of birth but SEEING the act of birth was considered *kegare* in the early eighth century, a point that is directly relevant to the problem of the prince’s gaze in the story of Toyotamahime. Another group of supplementary ritual procedural codes, the *Kōninshiki*, dated 820–840, includes wording that specifies seven days of abstinence for birth and thirty days for death. It also addresses the defilement of “injury of the fetus in its third month or later,” that is, miscarriage. Miscarriage signified the death of an imperfect body form.⁵⁸ A record kept by the Ise Shrine, the country’s most sacred, *Daijingu shozōjiki* (Miscellaneous Record of Ise Shrine), contains an actual case of birth-related defilement in the entry dated 813.9.16. A wife of a shrine official delivered a child under the shrine’s gate while attending a festival, gathered up the baby in the sleeves and left the premises. Afterward, both the wife and husband received purification, followed by the issuance of a new shrine rule: “From now on, a pregnant woman must not enter within the torii gate.”⁵⁹

Nearly three decades after emperor Daigo (r. 897–930) ordered the compilation of a body of procedures, the *Engishiki* (Engi Detailed Supplementary Civil Code) was submitted to the throne in 927 and promulgated in 967 following additional revision. It represented a further specification or clarification of ideas embodied in earlier works.⁶⁰ The most relevant section for our discussion is the Third Book, “Provisional (or Extraordinary) Festivals,” which includes the following:

At all times, in coming into contact with defilement or evil, avoidance is practiced: thirty days for the death of a person (count from the day of burial), seven days for birth, five days for death of a domestic animal, three days for birth of one (avoidance does not apply to chickens); eating of meat requires avoidance for three days (the shrine officials regularly avoid it, but at the time of a festival the rest of the officials all avoid it).

The code further restricts a person’s approach to sacred spaces after encountering certain

circumstances, such as the sick, reburial of the dead, abortion, or miscarriage in the fourth month or more of the term of pregnancy. In these cases, the person is required to abstain for thirty days. If the abortion or miscarriage occurred in the third month or earlier, only seven days of avoidance is required. If ladies-in-waiting at the palace become pregnant, they must withdraw from the palace before the days of partial abstinence; when they have their menses, they must withdraw before the day of a festival to their hearths and homes and may not enter the palace until the condition is over. The code also details how pollution may spread: "If place A becomes defiled, person B who enters the place (that is, to take a seat; the same thereafter) and all persons in that place become defiled. If C enters B's premises, C's body alone becomes defiled, not those of people on his own premises. If D enters C's premises, D does not become defiled."⁶¹

Thus, in establishing the boundaries to protect the purity of the imperial space, two specifically female functions, pregnancy and menstruation, came to be regulated along with other sources of defilement, such as encountering death, the most potent source of pollution. At this juncture, these restrictions specifically pertained to participation in ceremonies and to serving in the palace.

The concept of *kegare* was continuously rethought and articulated in these legal texts, becoming more prevalent in discourse, complex in meaning, and both concrete and expansive in application. The discourse increasingly emphasized the harmful impact that *kegare* would bring to sacred space. The purity of the *kami* (gods) was synonymous with the purity of rulers, and *kegare* became a meta-code that violated this purity.⁶² As Mitsuhashi Tadashi suggests, provisions in the *Engishiki* were fundamentally different from earlier formulations of *kegare* as they appeared in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, for example. In the earlier writings, *kegare* pertained to a beholder's acts, such as seeing birth in process, and was instantly erasable through purification. But in the *Engishiki*, the object (for example, the birthing woman) that earlier generated impurity in those who engaged with it (for example, seeing it) was itself polluted. Mitsuhashi states that such objects "were not of a nature that could be easily purified by ceremonies." The new definition of *kegare* emerged sometime in the mid-ninth century and was firmly established in the *Engishiki*.⁶³

***Ubuya* in the Vocabulary of the Heian Aristocracy**

What impact did these provisions have on birth-giving practices? The richness of historical sources produced by women and men of the aristocratic class in the Nara and Heian periods allows an in-depth analysis of activities related to childbirth. The term "*ubuya*" rarely appears, and when it does, it means something quite different from the meaning assigned to our "*ubuya* trope." The "*on-ubuya*," with the honorific "*on*," mentioned in *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) illustrates this point. Royall Tyler translates it as "the rites attending the birth." "*On-ubuya*" were "done with great pomp and splendor. At the birth celebrations offered by his ladies, the usual trays, double trays, and tall stands showed how keenly each vied with the others."⁶⁴ Another example comes from *Makura no sōshi* (*The Pillowbook of Sei Shōnagon*), in which Sei Shōnagon (b. ca. 967) lists "*ubuya* in which a newborn has died" and "not having the commotion of *ubuya* four or five years after taking in a groom" (*mukotori*) among the items in the category "Dreadful and Discordant Things." Also in this classification are "dogs that bark at midday," "wickerwork for catching fish that is set up in the spring,"

“*kōbai* (scarlet on the outside and purple inside) layering of gown in the third and fourth month,” and “brazier that would not light,” to name a few. In Sei’s view, a baby should be alive at birth, childbirth should follow soon after taking a husband, dogs should bark at night, wickerwork should be set up in the winter, *kōbai* is proper in the eleventh through second months, and braziers should light.⁶⁵ To Sei, *ubuya* signifies both a room in which childbirth takes place and the act of child delivery itself.⁶⁶ She makes no reference to *kegare*, and her usage does not tell us if the *ubuya* was in a detached building. But Murasaki Shikibu’s (b. 978?) lengthy and detailed description of the childbirth experience of Shōshi (988–1074), the primary wife (*chūgū*) of emperor Ichijō (r. 986–1011) and the author’s patron, in the *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* (*Diary of Murasaki Shikibu*, ca. 1008) is quite informative in answering the question of where and how aristocratic childbirth took place.⁶⁷

The diary opens with a description of the magnificent Tsuchimikado mansion to which Shōshi has returned from the palace on the sixteenth day of the seventh month (in 1008), about a month prior to the expected delivery date.⁶⁸ The mansion where the child was to be born belonged to Fujiwara Michinaga (966–1027), Shōshi’s father, then the most powerful minister who wielded great influence over the imperial family and government.⁶⁹ Murasaki’s empathetic description reveals the ways in which childbirth was organized as a celebrated event. After all, it was an occasion that could produce a crown prince and, significantly, make Michinaga the maternal grandfather of a sovereign.⁷⁰ On the ninth day of the ninth month around midnight, people began shouting, and the following morning Shōshi was transferred to the white (or unpainted) dais in a different room. More than forty priests of all stripes, yin-yang experts, ladies-in-waiting who came from the palace, shamanic mediums, and exorcists, not to mention millions of gods whom Michinaga summoned for this occasion, filled the chambers and galleries, some chanting loudly until their voices were hoarse. The opposite of isolation, the place was so crowded that the late arriving ladies-in-waiting could hardly edge themselves in—so much so that some were in tears.

At dawn on the eleventh day, the sliding doors on the north side were removed and Shōshi was moved again. There, because it was impossible to hang up bamboo blinds, a number of screens were set up in layers. The place continued to be so crowded that ladies-in-waiting were losing “the hems of their trains and their sleeves in the crush,”⁷¹ and Michinaga ordered everyone except a few to move out to areas to the south and east of where Shōshi was lying. In Murasaki’s text, the birthing room at this point becomes a space for women only—Shōshi, her stepsister, and the wet nurse of Michinaga’s fifth son. But the two high-ranking priests and Michinaga are standing just outside the room.⁷²

From this description, we can conclude that for this imperial birth, the delivery took place within the mansion of the woman’s natal family where a certain space was marked off for the occasion. Doubtless, the room had a special meaning. Screens demarcated the birthing space from the rest of the mansion, and it was, as Murasaki notes, transformed into a scene filled with whiteness. The borders of *tatami* mats, as well as clothes and hair ribbons of all female attendants, cabinets, and the outfits of priests were all white. It was a situation that inspired Murasaki Shikibu to comment: “I was reminded of those beautiful line drawings where everyone’s long black hair literally seems to grow from the paper.”⁷³

Some scholars consider that the white color signifies birth’s association with death, which is expressed by white. Death often accompanies childbirth. Birthing women, including

Shōshi, often prepared for the possibility of death by taking a mini-tonsure, which involved shaving a small section of the head.⁷⁴ The white coloring of the birthing room also may have accentuated sanitary conditions that only the elites could afford, and intensified the caregiver's focus on the birthing body's process by helping to highlight the discharge of amniotic fluid, blood, and other matters as well as expulsion of the infant and placenta. No separate building was built nor was there isolation of the woman.

Was Shōshi's birthing act considered polluted or polluting? From the perspective of the *Engishiki* and the imperial sacred space, the birthing event unquestionably was taboo. For one thing, Shōshi's pregnant body was definitively removed from the imperial palace, as prescribed by the code. Shōshi's example was not unique. Other imperial wives moved out of the palace and usually returned to their natal family's home for delivery, staying for several months before resuming their palace duties. Shōshi returned to the palace on 1008.11.17, about two months after giving birth on 9.11. Emperor Sanjō's (r. 1011–1016) wife, Kenshi (994–1027), gave birth on 1013.7.6 and returned on 1014.1.19, eight months later.⁷⁵ Some scholars have interpreted the transfer of pregnant imperial wives to their natal homes as a "legacy of *ubuaya*."⁷⁶ This interpretation is problematic, inasmuch as the "legacy of *ubuaya*" is yet to be established at this historical juncture.

How do we interpret the act of enclosing the birthing area with the layered screens surrounding the dais to which Shōshi was moved? Obviously, the screens protected Shōshi's privacy from the throng milling around outside the room. The screen also may have protected the others from the contagion of *kegare* associated with childbirth itself or even the *kegare* associated with the viewing of childbirth, something that came to be included in the code a century after the writing of the *Kojiki*. It seems that both interpretations are correct. For the sacred imperial space, the laws regarding the defilement of birth had to be observed. Murasaki Shikibu was clearly aware of this, for she specifically mentions First Secretary Yorisada, who was dispatched by the palace to the mansion soon after the birth of the prince. He arrived with the ceremonial sword and in turn received from Michinaga the news of the birth. According to Murasaki, "Yorisada did not enter the premises, and Michinaga requested that the news of a safe birth be conveyed to the emperor standing up." The reason given by Murasaki was that "today is the day that the Imperial messenger is dispatched to Ise."⁷⁷ Murasaki is mindful of the *Engishiki* rules on contagion of defilement through contact, from A to B to C, and so on, but only in a sitting position. It is worth remarking that Murasaki makes a special note of this incident that concerns the most sacred space, Ise Shrine.⁷⁸

Various pieces of direct and indirect evidence support the notion that childbirth of imperial wives and perhaps other associated aristocrats was considered to be *kegare* at least legally and in relationship to the imperial institution. How then did *kegare* constrain those involved? If, for example, we interpret the white color of the enclosed room as a manifestation of *kegare*, Murasaki Shikibu's overt appreciation of its aesthetic quality seems at odds with what we would expect from "*kegare* in operation." From the perspective of the woman, the "forced" return to her natal house allowed her to be with her own family, especially her own female companions and other supporters who served her kin. Outside the imperial family, the daughter most likely would have been at home to begin with, because the patrilocal marriage practice had not taken root; marriage with an emperor was an exception that required patrilocal marriage. The ideology of *kegare*, in this context, assured the ambitious father, Michinaga,

the return of the daughter home, away from her husband-the-emperor who personally had little direct authority over the maternity leave. The date of departure, relevant appointments, and other tasks related to the maternity leave were managed by the Office of Imperial Wives (Chūgūshiki), over which Michinaga held influence.⁷⁹ Not only did Michinaga take charge of assigning specific women to the official tasks of nurturing the infant, but he also gave gifts and favors to targeted courtiers to strengthen their association as they participated in the series of rituals and ceremonies. The child would be raised in Michinaga's home, with him as the authoritative grandfather and the patriarch of his lineage. Shōshi's husband, emperor Ichijō, did not meet his own son until the sixteenth day of the tenth month, more than a month after the birth, although the court did sponsor, from a distance, the Seventh Day Ceremony that took place at Michinaga's house, along with all other ceremonies. After elaborate preparations, Michinaga welcomed emperor Ichijō's arrival, and he himself handed the newborn son to the emperor to hold for a short while, upon which "the baby cried a little."⁸⁰ *Kegare* "performed" in this instance more to frame the authority of the imperial institution than to constrain the birthing woman. Indeed, entries in men's and women's writings of the Heian period strongly suggest that it was the imperial institution that, at this juncture in the evolution of the *kegare* concept, would be most inconvenienced; as their journals abundantly demonstrate, male aristocrats frequently excused themselves from attending the palace duties due to having encountered or suffering from *kegare* of one kind or another. Palace women too took time off using their biological rhythm as a reason or excuse.⁸¹

The Requirements of the Warrior Class in the Kamakura and Muromachi Periods

The military institution that arose at the end of the twelfth century was built on a network of human relations that differed from that which organized the aristocrats. The baby-making enterprise for the warriors had little to do with obtaining political advantages from the pinnacle of symbolic authority, the imperial institution. Instead, apart from its obvious purpose of producing a child, childbirth was a means through which to demonstrate the vertical order of power and to further lord-vassal ties. The shogun's babies were born at a vassal's home that was designated as a "*sanjo* or *ubudokoro*," literally "a place to give birth," but with the added meaning of "office." Officials with such titles as *osanjo bugyō* (Birthing office administrator) managed matters related to childbirth and *osanjo yūbitsu* served as special record-keepers (secretaries) for the occasion.⁸² For the Kamakura period (ca. 1185–1333), information about *sanjo* sporadically appears in the bakufu's chronicle, the *Azuma kagami* (Eastern Mirror 1180–1266), and in journals kept by aristocrats. For the Muromachi period (ca. 1336–1572), the *Osanjo nikki* (Journal of the Honorable Birthing Place), possibly written by the bakufu's medical specialists, the Aki, offers organized data for the twenty-eight cases of births by various wives to shoguns Yoshinori (1394–1441, r. 1429–41), Yoshimasa (1435–90, r. 1449–73), and Yoshiharu (1511–50, r. 1521–46).⁸³ According to Suzuki Rika, writing in 1993, "*sanjo*" as a historical topic has received little scholarly attention.⁸⁴ "*Sanjo*" hardly fits the *ubuya* trope, and a few examples will suffice to prove this point.

Hōjō Masako (1156–1225), the wife of Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199), the first Kamakura shogun, was moved to the residence of Hiki Yoshikazu (d. 1203) in a palanquin when she felt the "sense of delivery" (*osan no ki*), according to an entry dated 1182.7.12 in

Azuma kagami. The warrior government was still in its infancy then; the *shogun* title had yet to be conferred on Yoritomo. Kajiwaru Kagetoki (d. 1200), a vassal, was commissioned to handle miscellaneous necessities during the “period of birth.” On the eleventh day of the eighth month, Masako went into labor. The chronicle notes that vassals (*gokenin*) from various provinces arrived. They were dispatched to shrines all around to give offerings for prayers, and the following day, a boy (Yoriie, 1182–1204) was born. Mother and son remained in the residence for two months before returning to “the headquarters.”⁸⁵

The connection between Hiki Yoshikazu, the proprietor of the *osanjo* (with the honorific “*o*”), and Yoritomo is important as it illustrates the kind of human ties that shaped lord-vassal relations. Hiki Yoshikazu was an adopted son of “the Hiki nun,” who had served as one of Yoritomo’s wet nurses. The same entry in *Azuma kagami* applauds the service of the Hiki nun who, out of loyalty to Yoritomo, had had her husband serve Yoritomo from the time of the latter’s exile in Izu in 1160. These personal connections secured Yoshikazu a position of trust and thus the responsibility to provide the *sanjo*. Yoshikazu’s wife was appointed to be the wet nurse for the newborn, Yoriie. Yoshikazu’s own career also flourished, as he later received two *shugo* posts. His daughter, Wakasa no Tsubone, became a wife of Yoriie, and gave birth to Ichiman. Clearly, offering a residence as *sanjo* was an honor and a path to future success. (But Yoshikazu’s rising power led to a conflict with Hōjō Tokimasa, Masako’s father, and caused the demise of the entire Hiki family, along with Yoriie and Ichiman, in 1203–1205.)⁸⁶ In this formulation, *osanjo* at any rate hardly matches the image of an isolated *ubuya*.

For Masako’s second childbirth (of Sanetomo) in 1192, the *sanjo* was at the Hōjō headquarters at Nagoe in east Kamakura, often called “Hama-gosho” (beach-palace). Ironically, this was the location where Hiki Yoshikazu would be murdered in 1203 by Hōjō Tokimasa. Masako’s use of this location foreshadows the future course that the Kamakura regime would take—domination by the Hōjō. Two days after the birth, Yoritomo was named shogun by the imperial court. The chronicle records the names of vassals and female attendants, as well as the ceremonies that followed the birth far more elaborately than before.⁸⁷ The Hōjō men, brothers of Masako, also had their wives give birth at locations designated as *sanjo* (without the honorific “*o*”).⁸⁸ The *osanjo* continued to be the birthing location for the wives of the later Kamakura shoguns, who were courtiers and imperial princes, such as Kujō Yoritune (1218–1256), the fourth shogun, and Prince Munechika, the sixth shogun. For them, the *osanjo* was normally the home of one of the Hōjōs.⁸⁹

In the years following the fall of the Kamakura bakufu, *sanjo* or *osanjo* continued to be the location in which elite warriors’ wives gave birth. *Sanjo* were set up at the houses of close vassals, such as Hosokawa, Akamatsu, Hatakeyama, Yamana, Isshiki, and Toki, who were mostly holders of important bakufu offices and titles.⁹⁰ For them, the *sanjo* assignment was an official job that enhanced a close, informal connection with the shogun.⁹¹ According to Suzuki, births unrecorded in the *Osanjo nikki* also utilized the *sanjo*. For example, the wife of the second Muromachi shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiakira (1330–1367, r. 1358–1367), was to give birth at a house designated as the *sanjo*, which belonged to Sasaki Ujijori, a *shugo* of Ōmi province, who had a close relationship with the Ashikaga. But the delivery occurred too soon, before she was able to move to the *sanjo*. Nakahara Moromori reports this incident in his journal, *Moromori ki* (1339–1374), in an entry dated 1365.4.10, and calls it “outrageous” (*motte no hoka*).⁹²

The medieval warriors left few documentary traces concerning birth-related taboos, but they were aware of the rules that aristocrats observed. Hōjō Tokiyori (1227–1263), for example, begs a priest to enter the *sanjo* in order to pray for his wife, “although the *kegare* associated with birth has not ended.”⁹³ Tōin Kintaka (1291–1360), an aristocrat, wrote in his journal on 1347.6.13 that “I understand that warriors also hold birth taboo for seven days.”⁹⁴ Although these remarks indicate that the warriors observed birth pollution, it is unclear what “*kegare*” meant in practice, either for the woman or men of the warrior class. It is difficult to tell what they would abstain from for seven days. Did the taboo require them to avoid certain work? Their work did not involve participating in rites and ceremonies at the imperial palace, but instead required them to be poised to deal with death, blood, and bodily injuries as a matter of profession. The fact that the bakufu did not issue formal rules governing *kegare* suggests that it had other more pressing or practical issues to regulate.

Intensification of Birth-related *Kegare*

Despite the relative laxity in the bakufu’s attitude, the practices surrounding the idea of *kegare* made great advances in the medieval period, although not without differences in opinion. At the beginning of the Kamakura period, the *Engishiki* rule that required seven days of avoidance after coming into contact with childbirth or miscarriage occurring within three months of conception was reaffirmed in the *Hossō shiyōshō*, a compendium of interpretations of previous laws.⁹⁵ In practice, there were changing opinions, for example, at the imperial center. The retired emperors Shirakawa (r. 1072–1086) and Toba (r. 1107–1123) observed the seven-day rule, but the retired emperor Goshirakawa (r. 1155–1158) observed a taboo period of thirty days instead of seven.⁹⁶ Disputes continued, as evidenced from an entry in *Gyokuyō* (1164–1200), Kujō Kanezane’s journal, dated 1189.8.7, in which the diarist (1149–1207) declares that there is no court law that prescribes thirty days abstinence for birth pollution, regardless of the recent recommendation by Fujiwara Chikamasa pertaining to shrines and temples, and that there is no need to change the law.⁹⁷ The retired emperor Gotoba (r. 1184–1198), however, seemed to have enforced the thirty-day avoidance rule, according to *Meigetsuki* (ca. 1180–1235), the diary of Fujiwara Sadaie (1162–1241).⁹⁸ The defilement of childbirth in practice became progressively heavier, if judged from the required period of abstention, which now changed from seven to thirty days.⁹⁹

These practices doubtless reflected the new formulations being introduced by the established shrines. Popular Buddhist teachings also added fuel to this trend, but in a significantly different way. The increasing systematization of what we call “Shinto” naturally emphasized guarding purity within the shrine’s space. Major shrines issued *bukkiryō*, or mourning and taboo rules, which, however, varied greatly in content from one shrine to another. *Shosha kinki*, a compendium of rules dating from the Kamakura period, lists taboo periods relative to death and birth set by each of the twenty-one major shrines in the Kinai region. For the *kegare* associated with death, the abstinence periods ranged from thirty to seventy days, with one exception set for one year. For the *kegare* associated with birth, with the exception of Kamo Shrine, which adhered to the *Engishiki*’s seven day rule, all the other shrines, including the Ise Shrine, upheld the abstinence period of thirty days or longer. Among them, Hie Shrine and Hirota Shrine demanded the most severe avoidance: seventy or eighty days for Hie Shrine and seventy days for Hirota Shrine, except the birthing woman herself who needed to abstain

for one hundred days.¹⁰⁰

Comparing this with another compendium, *Bunpōki*, issued by the Ise Shrine probably in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, we can see some inconsistency: *Bunpōki* prescribes seven days of taboo for birth-related *kegare*, in contradistinction to the thirty days stated in *Shosha kinki*. It also rules thirty days for miscarriage, and a one hundred day absence before the birthing woman could attend the shrine. Lengthy and detailed, *Bunpōki* raises and answers numerous questions, such as the precise point—before or after the expulsion of placenta—at which the “*kegare* of birth” begins; what to do if a dog eats the placenta of a newborn; when the newborn may attend the shrine; whether or not the husband who did not stay with the birthing woman or share the fire (of cooked food) has *kegare*, and whether or not the clothes women wore against the skin during menstruation are still defiled after washing, and so on. Of interest to us is that it uses the term “*ubuya*” to refer to a birthing place. Also to be noted is that it explicitly equates death pollution with birth pollution through this logic: “The [polluted] condition of a matter (*mono*) that has *kegare* of death results from the fact that it has *kegare* of birth.”¹⁰¹

Aristocrats often alluded to the linkage of death to birth, as Murasaki did in describing Shōshi’s childbirth, for example, or through the literary device that introduces ghostly *mononoke* spirits as a linked code to birth and death.¹⁰² However, this pronouncement in shrine law, as Narikiyo propounds it, sets a new stage in the development of women-specific *kegare* ideals. The country’s highest shrine officially raised the level of birth-related *kegare* to that of death, which hitherto had been the most dangerous and thus requiring the longest period of abstinence.¹⁰³

A story in *Shasekishū* (comp. 1283), a collection of Buddhist stories by Mujū Ichien (1227–1312), also promotes the idea that birth and death are joined through *kegare*:

The tabus observed at Ise differ somewhat from those of other shrines. Child-birth (*‘ubuya’*) is spoken of as ‘bearing spirit’ [*shōki*], and those involved are under a fifty-day pollution; likewise, death is spoken of as ‘death-spirit’ [*shiki*], and also creates a fifty-day pollution. Death proceeds from life, and life is the beginning of death. The shrine official informed me that this was handed down as the reason for birth and death to be both tabu.¹⁰⁴

In this logic that connects life and death, both parturition and death are marked by a *kegare* requiring the same degree of abstinence. Although the actual number of days prescribed for birth pollution is different from that in other writings, this entry in *Shasekishū* confirms that the pollution of death was beginning to be deemphasized in proportion to the weight of pollution caused by birth. The Hie Shrine rules, that set forth seventy or eighty (instead of seven) days of avoidance for *kegare* from birth, only require fifty (instead of thirty) days for *kegare* from death. The country’s spiritual leaders, in the context of intensifying competition among shrines and the rising warrior power that politically legitimated violence and bloodshed, were beginning to intensify the weight of birth pollution relative to the weight of death pollution.¹⁰⁵

Women’s consciousness about their own condition of *kegare* also seems to have been evolving in the medieval period. According to Kanezane’s journal entry for 1172, menstruating women themselves were taking proactive measures to remove themselves from public premises. Kanezane makes a small notation that his wife, for instance, moved to a *betsuya*

(“separate quarter”), and ladies-in-waiting at the court moved to a *taya* (“the other quarter”) for menstruation. Kanezane’s understanding, confirmed in his conversation with the official from Ise Shrine, was that a menstruating woman observed taboo for seven days after the first day of menses, and thereafter took a purifying bath before attending the Ise shrine. If menstruation continued, the woman waited for three more days before attending the shrine.¹⁰⁶ The case of Kanezane’s wife is important in signifying an instance in which menstrual taboo is observed in a space disconnected from the imperial institution or shrine affairs. We must be cautious, however, in making assumptions about the ways in which these women may have regarded their menstrual condition. Did they internalize *kegare* as part of their essentialized being or treat menstruation simply as an external physiological condition that was an uncontrollable nuisance regardless of taboo rules?¹⁰⁷ Considering the material condition in which women had to manage their hygiene, the concept and practice of *kegare* probably embodied meanings that differed across genders.

One indication of the development of a *kegare* concept internalized by women in the late medieval and early modern periods was the powerful formulation of the *Ketsubonkyō*, the “Blood Pond Sutra” (Ch. *Xuepanjing*). A heretical text transmitted from China sometime in the late medieval period, this “sutra” gained notoriety and popularity for its promise to save women from the ultimate destination of hells specifically designed for those who polluted the ground and water with parturition and menstrual blood. Women themselves or perhaps their sons copied the sutra on a wooden tablet to be thrown into a pond or river in order to save themselves or their female kin. For women who were sterile or whose infant had died, there was yet another hell in which the fallen ceaselessly dug bamboo roots with a limp lamp wick. The vivid images of these hells were depicted broadly in the late medieval and Tokugawa periods by what Barbara Ruch calls “media evangelizers,” the self-proclaimed “Buddhist nuns of Kumano.” They instilled or reinforced fear but also provided promises of salvation through empathetic preaching, while some collected additional offerings to give one more description of potential hells that awaited the avid listeners. In this way, “knowledge” and warnings about female-specific pollution proliferated in readily accessible cultural forms.¹⁰⁸

Yasuda Yukiko argues, however, that long before the spread of the Blood Pond Sutra, Buddhist notions of *kegare* were having an impact on Japanese society. From late ancient through medieval times, a salvation technique that depended on easy-to-accomplish prayers (*nenbutsu*) became popularized. This method was premised on the understanding that the world of sins and *kegare* existed. Through the process of *nenbutsu* recitation, then, the idea of *kegare* from which one was to be rescued was reconstituted and internalized. Buddhist notions of *kegare* that resided in the human spiritual realm began to merge with Shinto notions of *kegare* (such as those spelled out in the *Engishiki*), that were temporary and external to one’s spirituality.¹⁰⁹ The Blood Pond Sutra landed on this fertile soil and helped to accentuate the notion of a female-specific *kegare* with concretely imaginable negative outcomes—descent to hells—eventually leaving an indelible mark on people’s perceptions of women’s body, life, blood, and death.

The Populace in the Late Muromachi and Tokugawa Periods

We know little about the birthing practices of non-elites prior to the Tokugawa period. The literate elite was rarely motivated to write specifically about how or where commoner

women had babies. Their childbirth involved few ceremonies, and the physiological process of birthing, absent some unusual irregularities that alerted the court diarists, was apparently outside the interest of the educated mind (with the exception of a few medical scholars).¹¹⁰ Mothers and babies do appear in popular tales, such as those in the *Konjaku monogatari shū*, but the stories are not about the process of parturition and, for our purposes, not about the *ubuya*. But popular tales direct our attention to their frequent engagement with the concept of *kegare*. One often-quoted story, for example, appears in the section “shrine and Buddhist affairs” of the thirteenth-century collection of edifying tales *Zoku kojidan*. In it, Fujiwara Tomosada suffers a bloody nose upon participating in a religious ceremony twenty some days after embracing a pregnant woman. A messenger of Hachiman appears to reprimand him. Tomosada asks the messenger how many days of abstinence needed to be observed for birth-related pollution. The answer was thirty days.¹¹¹

In the Tokugawa period, especially from the late eighteenth century on, medical texts on childbirth and illustrated guides for women’s activities flooded the urban space among the multitude of other publications. But these texts fail to inform us of the existence of *ubuya*. Childbirth scenes in popular illustrated texts typically show a room in a house, not an isolated *ubuya*. One text includes “A guideline for *ubuya*,” but “*ya*” is written with the graph for “*ie*,” the corporate household, instead of the “*ya*” that means “structure” or “roof” and is used for the *ubuya* of our focus. The guides show how to care for the inside of the mouth of the newborn and the naval after the cord drops off, for example.¹¹² The term “*sanjo*” is used in some texts to refer simply to where the birth is taking place and in the context of practical recommendations, such as that the people in the *sanjo* should speak in a low voice so as not to disturb the woman’s mental balance.¹¹³ One mid-eighteenth-century text explains the word “*taya*,” the term introduced earlier, that was used in a document kept at Shino Island, a property belonging to the Ise shrine, to refer to an isolated menstrual hut. The Tokugawa text reveals that “*taya*” means menstrual period itself and provides the etymology: “Women of the region where various major shrines such as Ise, Yawata, and Kasuga are located and women serving in the imperial palace segregate themselves for seven days in a different house during their menstrual period. This [structure and practice] is called ‘*tai no ya*’ (wait-structure). It is said that this in turn became abbreviated, turned into the customarily used word ‘*taya*.’”¹¹⁴ It seems that to the text’s readers, the prescriptive language in the *Engishiki* and other rules would have been unfamiliar and peculiar.

Without mentioning the issue of *kegare*, these texts give instructions on the details of prenatal, obstetric, and postpartum practices, such as how to prepare one’s own food, what to see, how to feel, and how to stand or walk.¹¹⁵ Men, too, were urged to participate. One text that enjoyed four printings between 1755 and 1772 exhorts “men to frequently visit the woman while she is in labor. This encourages women. It is often said that ‘Men should not be in [the room],’ but this is a huge error.”¹¹⁶ It apparently was not only in Edo that men were engaged in birthing tasks. Sawayama Mikako notes the actual involvement in the birthing processes by the father, husband, and other male relatives in northeastern Japan.¹¹⁷

That women gave birth at home, at least in cities, is suggested both by the absence of any mention of a separate structure and by the many drawings of “home birth” scenes. The intimate interaction among family members recorded in a journal of Watanabe Katsunosuke (1802–1864), an early nineteenth-century low-ranking samurai, also allows us to imagine

a home birth. When his wife was in labor with their second child, Katsunosuke writes, he tried to keep their first child, a four-year-old boy, from bothering his mother by entering the birthing room. He describes his son sleeping with the grandmother, then reports that the boy awoke to ask, “What’s that?” upon hearing the newborn’s first cry. “When I told him that that is the cry of the baby, he said, ‘Yes, it is, isn’t it?’ in a well behaved way.” The childbirth was taking place within the hearing of the rest of the family, and Katsunosuke was pleased at his son’s “unexpected” good behavior.¹¹⁸

In contrast to these popular discourses, however, religious and political authorities articulated *kegare* in their “new and improved” rules for governing their sacred spaces. The original *Engishiki* version, with later and more recent modifications, continued to have practical significance for the now vastly shrunken imperial institution. More energetic were the country’s important shrines, which reshaped rules with a new emphasis on details.¹¹⁹ One text, *Jingidō bukkiryō hishō*, set forth in 1645 by the Urabe, a lineage of Shinto priests and theorists, was based on an earlier *Shokue mondō*, or “Questions and Answers on Contracting *Kegare*,” and discusses 136 categories including menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, a category placed at the end, numbers 129 through 136.¹²⁰ The document begins with rules on encountering death and the issue of third-party contagion (from A to B to C), which required thirty days of avoidance. Rules address the situations that the members of the samurai class may encounter in specific detail: only one day’s abstinence was required for cutting down someone with a sword outside (*kirizute*) and for participating in guard duty but not touching the dead body. Indoor killing was a worse offense and required thirty days’ avoidance. The sword that cut off the head was polluted for thirty days.¹²¹

The *kegare* associated with childbirth, which demanded thirty days of abstinence, the same as the medieval rules for most shrines, was an offense thirty times graver than *kegare* associated with cutting down someone outdoors! But the third-party contagion from birth was in effect only for the first seven days. A pregnant woman was required to observe avoidance after putting on the maternity sash in the fifth month. A birthing woman was permitted to attend the shrine after one hundred days. The clothes she wore during birthing must not be worn to the shrine even after washing. For menstruation that lasted seven days, the eighth day was cleared for sitting and sharing fire with shrine personnel. The woman herself was free to attend shrine on the eleventh day. In the past, the husband of a pregnant wife observed abstinence starting in the fifth month of her pregnancy, but the new rule required abstinence only in the last month.¹²²

Under the fifth shogun, Tsunayoshi (1646–1709, r. 1680–1709), the bakufu came to issue its own rules on mourning and abstinence in 1684.¹²³ According to Takigawa Seijirō (1897–1992), of all the laws Tsunayoshi issued during his reign, these *bukkiryo* had the greatest and most lasting impact. The 1684 version underwent several revisions, first, two years later and also in 1692 and 1736.¹²⁴ These rules addressed two areas of concern. The first was the avoidance and mourning periods for the death of family members and relatives. Minute rules were set for family members, such as different kinds of “mothers” identified according to patrilineal principles.¹²⁵ The second concern was the governance of *kegare* in general, including that pertaining to female physiological functions. For the *kegare* of childbirth, the father abstained for seven days and the mother, thirty-five days. For miscarriage, the father abstained for three days and the mother, seven days if the gestation period had been less than four

months and thirty days if more than four months. These rules regarding birth-related *kegare* were less restrictive than the shrines' provisions set forth in the medieval period. But compared to the defilement caused by a non-relative's death, which now required only purification, the penalties were much heavier. Narikiyo also noticed the order in which various *kegare* types came to be listed: birth-related defilement before the death-related defilement.¹²⁶

How do we reconcile the contrasting images of childbirth in the pragmatic and popular literature on the one hand and the formalistic laws and regulations issued by the government and major shrines on the other? Moreover, if *ubuya* as a custom indeed proliferated in the Tokugawa period, as advanced by folk ethnologists, why do we not see the evidence more widely in these sources? Is it because the sources we have examined come mostly from urban regions, especially Edo? Apparently, rural areas produced little written evidence of *ubuya*, prompting Okada to lament the scarcity of "historical sources from rural areas that can intersect with the material that folk ethnologists have used."¹²⁷ Okada does, however, introduce one document dated 1825 that nearly supports the existence of *ubuya*. The document comes from the island of Miyajima in Aki, where the ancient and prestigious shrine of Itsukushima stands in the shallows of the sea. "A lone island in the sea, this land where deities of renown reside, is not only exquisite in landscape but also has customs that are extraordinary," the document begins. It lists ten "customs that are different from other places and will omit those that are the same." To paraphrase, the island originally was the land of the gods, and therefore people revered purity. Every morning, every household purified the inside of the house using the newly scooped up sea water from the shoals in front of the *torii* gate facing the Itsukushima shrine, while everyone purified him/herself with hot water and prayed at the shrine. Rules for maintaining the purity of the fire were very strict. If a guest came to have tea and encountered defilement later, the previous sharing of the fire would be marked as contagion. Depending on the gravity of *kegare* the guest encountered later, the tea container would be thrown in the water or pots discarded in the sea.

In this deity-fearing, *kegare*-conscious island, childbirth naturally was a target of regulation. "As soon as a child is born, both the child and mother are placed on a boat to be sailed out to the inlet. They return to the island after one hundred days. This is because the defilement of the blood is extreme. However, from ancient times, nobody has suffered from the sea wind and waves, nor has anyone from the island ever had difficult labor or childbirth." For menstrual periods, there was a separate place for containing the *kegare*. "Above East and West Town there was a mountain called 'Ase yama.' Atop this mountain were several thatched structures. 'Ase' [which means perspiration] stands [euphemistically] for 'blood' and is a taboo word used by the Ise shrine. Therefore, 'Ase yama' means 'Blood mountain.' It is said that in the past, when island women had menses, they left their home and stayed in these places." But, apparently, this structure was not just for women. Men and women who were defiled for other reasons such as handling the dead or even caskets also used this structure for a certain duration.¹²⁸

The Itsukushima case adds to the list of island-based locations where women were segregated for their childbirth and menstrual functions. That this was less than common is evident in the introductory section's claim to the community's own uniqueness. This claim, combined with the difficulty of locating a similar custom in urban literature, leads us to conclude that the *ubuya* and similar structures were far from uniform or prevalent at the end of

the Tokugawa period.

Conclusion

We have questioned the widely accepted assertion, articulated in ethnographic and folklore studies, that the *ubuya* was an ageless instrument built to sequester birthing women, with the explicit purpose of containing the pollution emanating from childbirth. Our examination of the Toyotamahime legend, which contains the supposed prototype of the modern *ubuya*, revealed no ontological connection between the *ubuya* of Japan's ancient myth and that of modern ethnographers' description. Our investigation of ancient, medieval, and early modern sources have illuminated more the scarcity of records related to *ubuya* than its stable, continuing, and pervasive existence.

In probing the historicity of the *ubuya*, we looked for its signs in a *kegare*-related epistemology. In the Toyotamahime legend, the containment of defilement was not the meaning attributed to the *ubuya* that Toyotamahime herself asked her husband to construct. By the tenth century, the country's ritual authority officially classified menstruation and childbirth as *kegare*. Women's bodily conditions now came to formally offend the putative purity of the gods and their earthly manifestations, including the imperial sphere. But the limited cases of the word *ubuya* that appeared in aristocratic writing simply referred to a "birthing room" in a mansion or "a series of ceremonies" held for the newborn.

In the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, the major shrines upgraded the significance of female-specific pollution by establishing ever more elaborate and lengthy rules of abstinence, in some cases reversing the order of gravity between the defilement of death and of birth. But these changes had little to do with the epistemology of *ubuya*. In the new context emerging from the inauguration of warrior rule, the shogun and other notable warriors' children were born at the *sanjo*, a birthing space and an office with political implications set up at the home of important vassals or Hōjō regents.

After the country moved from war to peace in 1600, the Tokugawa bakufu issued rules for dealing with *kegare*, the first time for a warrior government, just as the imperial government and shrines had for some time. For this military government, killing people outdoors was an act that was far less polluting than giving birth to a baby. Meanwhile, among the populace, Buddhist notions of female-specific *kegare*, whether heretical or orthodox, spread and helped to transform the defilement into a spiritual quality of womanhood itself, not an externally definable and temporary condition. Even with new laws and the spread of new ideas, and despite our expectation of encountering many records of *ubuya*, the evidence turns out to be the opposite, both in literature and local records. Given this paucity of evidence, it is no wonder that the historical discipline, to which evidence is *sine qua non*, has been slow to develop a study of *ubuya*. Ethnographic writings often compensate for this lacuna, as is evident from their inclusion in collections of historical essays.¹²⁹

Our approach, which connected *ubuya* with the development of ideas of *kegare*, has created its own problems. In our investigation, we subordinated *ubuya* to the very trope we were seeking to challenge—the presumed interactive relationship between the architectural presence of the *ubuya* and the abstract notion of *kegare*. Underlying this presumed connection was the general assumption that the pollution belief, and therefore the *ubuya*, oppressed women. In reality, the two elements had only tenuous connections to each other, if they had