

# THE IMAGE OF “RŌJO” OR ELDERLY WOMEN IN JAPANESE LEGEND

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This paper explores the lives of elderly women in the early modern period of Japanese history by examining and comparing various images of “*rōjo*” in Japanese legend. Unlike the generally positive image of “*rō-ō*” or elderly men, the image of “*rōjo*” in Japanese legend is sometimes touched by gloom and eeriness. For instance, “*yamamba*” one of the well-known types of the legendary “*rōjo*,” is depicted as eerie and ghostly.

To illuminate this ambivalent image of “*rōjo*” in Japanese legend, I will examine three different types of “*rōjo*” in Noh plays of Medieval Japan. The first type is the “*rōjo*” in “*Yamamba*,” a Noh play written by Zeami. The second type appears in “*Takasago*,” another Noh play by Zeami. The third type is the protagonist of the masterpiece, “*Obasute*.”

The first type, the “*rōjo*” in “*Yamamba*,” gives a strong impression of a specter or a demon. By contrast, the second type, the “*rōjo*” in “*Takasago*,” is accompanied by the “*rō-ō*” or an older man and represents the “*rōjo*” as an indispensable half of the long-lasting marital partnership. The third type of “*rōjo*” is a grandmother abandoned by her relatives. She is the “*rōjo*” in the famous “*Obasute*” story.

The paper also addresses the dichotomization of “*rōjo*” into the gentle “*ouna*” and the frightening “*uba*” and considers how this dichotomy is related to the three types of “*rōjo*” mentioned above.

*Key words:* OKINA, OUNA, ELDERLY WOMEN, UBA, YAMAMBA, NOH PLAY, SPECTER, MARITAL-PARTNERSHIP, MATURITY, MOUNTAIN-WOMEN.

## 1

The joining of the terms for old man and old woman suggests a balance not present in their historical actuality. Of course, an impression of a formal combination is not necessarily lacking. But it sways in a delicate and somewhat unsteady counterpoise. It is probably here that lies the greatest difficulty in considering the contrasting pair of old man and old woman.

Recently, Shirasu Masako wrote the following in an essay reminiscing about Ozaki Kazuo in his old age. Before his death, Ozaki’s countenance took on a gentle expression that even seemed to make him difficult to recognize. It was an extremely attractive face that closely resembled the *okina* mask. But, she goes on to say, women hardly ever develop such an appearance. Occasionally one sees such a face among women who work at farming in the countryside, but it is impossible that one like herself would become so. In terms of the Noh drama, males have the *okina* mask, but for women, there is only the *yamamba* (old woman of the mountains). The *yamamba* was originally an aged priestess (*miko*) who served the gods, but she came to be feared by villagers as something of a wizened female demon. Aging seems to be more difficult for women....<sup>1</sup>

It is not difficult to perceive Shirasu’s modesty in these remarks, but she points out that viewed

1 *Shinchō*, January 1993; *Yomiuri Shinbun*, December 21, 1992.

historically, the *yamamba* image is, compared with that of the *okina*, at a disadvantage.

In general, it is undeniable that, while the image of the *okina* is wrapped in an aura of elegance and spirituality, by contrast there is a tendency for the old woman to be tied to the traditions of the demon woman and the *yamamba*, and to be made an object of fear and dread. Even if it is not always so, compared with the lore of the old man, that of the old woman has an air of dreariness and is enveloped in an atmosphere of uncanniness. For example, in his *Notes on Tales of Old (Mukashibanashi oboegaki)*, Yanagita Kunio tells the following story.<sup>2</sup> An old man with an ox (in some accounts, a horse) loaded with salted fish comes to a mountain pass, when an old mountain woman (*yamamba*) appears. The crone presses him for a fish, so he gives them to her one after another, until they all disappear. Then the woman eats the ox, and finally tries to eat even the man. He runs away and escapes by climbing a tree, but in fleeing further, he comes upon a house in which he hides. Unfortunately, it is the house of the mountain woman, who returns home and toasts some rice cakes. From his hiding place in the rafters, the man is able to skewer and take some of the rice cakes. Finally the old woman gets into a chest and goes to sleep. After making sure she has fallen asleep, the man kills her by pouring boiling water over her.

Yanagita states that this kind of tale can be found throughout Japan. It may be said to express clearly the supernatural character of the mountain woman. The mountain woman as she appears in folk tales is commonly an old woman, tall and with long hair hanging down. She characteristically has a large mouth, slit eyes that glint sharply, and is extremely pale in color. She displays a wraithlike character, and as Wakamori Tarō has stated, may be a form of one who has died an unnatural death or as a result of an epidemic and, unable to attain Buddhahood, turned into an angry spirit.<sup>3</sup> For example, burial places known as *hase* or *ohasse* were often located in the hills, and it was said that beings similar to such angry spirits, unable to attain birth in Amida's Pure Land, wandered about in those places. The word *ohasse*, indicating such cemetery sites, may actually have been derived from the word *obasute*, which refers to the abandoning of old women in the hills to die.

We must note, however, that at the same time, the mountain woman also occasionally had the character of a demigod. For example, in many locales there are tales relating that the mountain woman emerged in the village only at the time of the market day at the close of the year. The money she paid at that time was said to be especially full of blessings, so that the merchants vied with one another for it.<sup>4</sup> Further, the tale of the "great old woman" (*Ōuba-sama*) is known throughout in the Mushikura mountain range in the Shinshū region. Most versions are connected with the traditions of *Obasute-yama* ("old woman-abandoning mountain") of this area, and at the same time retain strong traces of the deities that preside over production—water deities and the deities who bestow and nurture children.<sup>5</sup> We find in the "great old woman" lore of the Mushikura mountains that the mountain woman has one aspect of being a goblin, and at the same time holds, in a multi-layered form, the character of a blessing deity who bestows children.

The fact that the old mountain woman is a goblin-like female deity as well as a woman deity and water deity who manages production is connected with tales of *ubagai* (old woman's well) or

2 Teihon Yanagita Kunio Shū, vol. 6, 439.

3 Wakamori Tarō "Nihon Minzokugaku no Kadai to Hōhō," in *Nihon Minzokugaku Taikei*, vol. 2 (Heibonsha, 1958), 215.

4 Yanagita Kunio, "Yama no Jinsei," in *Yanagita Kunio Shū*, vol. 4, 148.

5 *Chūjōmura no Mukashigatari*, Chūjōmura Kyōiku Inkai, 1993.

*ubagafuchi* (old woman's deep pool). For example, again as related by Yanagita Kunio,<sup>6</sup> an old woman bearing a child on her back accidentally lets the child fall down a well, and then plunges down after it. The well is known as the "old woman's well" (*ubagai*). A similar story is found in the story of the "old woman's deep pool" (*ubagafuchi*). A wet-nurse raising a child of nobility casts herself and the child into the waters, and her spirit remains along the water's edge. According to Yanagita, these tales all show faith in deities of the mother and child. However, in stories of misfortune and sacrifice we should not overlook such aspects as the character of a protective deity that manifests itself in the nurturing of a child or the existence of a body of water such as a well or pond.

One further tale that we must not omit in connection with the above tales of the old woman of the mountains is that of Kintarō of Mount Ashigara. Kintarō is a boy of miraculous powers living with a mountain woman in the mountains of Sagami. Eventually he is discovered by Minamoto Yorimitsu and becomes active as one of his "four god-king" protectors. When Kintarō becomes a mature samurai, he is known by the name Sakata Kintoki. He is a stalwart figure who, from childhood, can seize and tear apart bears and wolves with his bare hands, and the mother who gave birth to this animal wrestler is a mountain woman. The mountain woman who appears in these tales reveals both her existence as a frightening goblin who eats human beings and animals, and also her character as a guardian deity who bestows children. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the mountain woman who appears in the woodblock prints of Utamaro is a bewitchingly beautiful woman, while the mountain woman in the shrine plaques (*ema*) of Nagasawa Rōsetsu is an aged demon woman. We see here that the depictions of the mountain woman in the premodern period were composed based on the double image present in folklore and traditional tales.<sup>7</sup>

This image of the mountain woman is also depicted in the puppet drama (*jōruri*) *Komochi Yamamba* by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, which is of course based on the Noh play *Yamamba* by Zeami. While Chikamatsu's play draws on and adds new flavor to Zeami's, there is also a subtle difference in historical background between the two dramas which I will discuss later.

In any case, various streams of folklore are intertwined in these *yamauba* or mountain woman tales. Yanagita enumerates the following three elements as the basis for the origin of the mountain woman traditions.<sup>8</sup>

1. In actuality, such beings have existed in the deep mountain in the past and also at present.
2. In former times the belief in mountain deities included a fear of wolves.
3. There were women who went into the mountains.

With regard to the third theme, Yanagita took up stories of women who were "abducted by gods" (*kamikakushi*) in *Tales of the Tōno District (Tōno Monogatari)* and *Mountain Life (Yama no Jinsei)*.

In short, this is an explanation based on the assumption that in the mountain woman lore, there is a basis in actual life. This is a reasonable interpretation very typical of Yanagita. When we trace the tales back to the medieval period and to ancient times, however, the lore of the old woman becomes lost in a thicket of fantasies which are not necessarily explained by these considerations alone.

For example, it has been pointed out by Origuchi Shinobu that the origin of the *okina* "old

6 Yanagita Kunio, "Imōto no Chikara," *Teihon Yanagita Kunio Shū*, vol. 9, 153-154.

7 Amino Yoshihiko, Ōnishi Hiroshi, and Satake Akihiro, eds., *Chōjū Giga*, Fukuinkan Shoten, 1993.

8 *Teihon Yanagita Kunio Shū*, vol. 4, 378-380.

man” of the medieval period is the mountain god (*marebito*). It is said to have been customary, on the last eve of the year, after the harvest had ended, for the mountain god (*okina*) to descend to the village and deliver congratulatory words to the farming people. In the Japanese archipelago, from the end of the year through the new year’s period, performances are frequently put on at festivals at temples and shrines, and the *okina* often appears on stage for this reason. Origuchi discusses this in detail in his article “The Origin of the *Okina*” (*Okina no Hassei*). For some reason, however, in his treatment of *okina* and performing arts, he does not examine the role of the old woman.<sup>9</sup> As we have seen, the image of the deity of the mountains is strongly intermixed in the lore of the old woman of the mountains in the premodern period. In spite of this, the old woman of the mountains, who has the character of being a mountain deity, did not necessarily resemble what Origuchi called *marebito*. It does not seem that the mountain woman ever attained the status of a deity in performing arts like the *okina*. Why was this?

## 2

In the Noh of the medieval period, I find that depictions of old women in general fall into three patterns. The first is the old woman who appears in the play *Yamamba*, attributed to Zeami; the second is the woman who appears in the Noh play *Takasago*, also by Zeami; and the third is the old woman in the play *Obasute*. Let us consider the character of each of these depictions.

The *Yamamba* type, as noted above, is connected with the image of the old woman who is the center of the mountain woman lore of the premodern period. She exists like a spirit in the mountains, possessing characteristics of an enticing figure or demon woman: Chikamatsu wrote the *Ouna Yamamba* based on the Noh play *Yamamba*. Here I will briefly outline the story of *Yamamba*. In the capital, a dancing girl (*yūjo*) gained a reputation as the “Hikuma Yamamba” because of her skill in performing a dance representing the mountain woman. She decides to make a pilgrimage to Zenkōji temple, and on the way, at a mountain pass between Etchū and Echigo, the sun sets and she loses her way. Then the real mountain woman appears on the path. At the mountain woman’s request, she performs the song and dance of traveling in the mountains, and as she does so, the mountain woman also begins to dance, in the end to vanish like the wind.

Beckoned by snow, I go around the mountains,  
 Going around and around, not parting from samsaric existence in delusional attachment,  
 Like clouds of defiling dust that accumulate, the condition of a demon woman who has  
     become an old woman of the mountains.  
 Look, look, rising to the peaks, echoing in the valleys,  
 Until now I seem to be here, but  
 Going around mountain after mountain,  
 Going around mountain after mountain,  
 My destination is unknown.

As we see here, she suddenly appears in the mountains before the dancing girl of the capital,

9 Origuchi *Shinobu Zenshū*, vol. 3, Chūōkōronsha.

performing the dance of traveling in the mountains, and abruptly vanishes. She appears alone and vanishes alone. Like a spirit, or like a demon woman, she may be said to be a strange apparition that emerges and disappears together with a puff of wind. Here, the character of the god (*marebito*) who descends into the village and delivers a message of congratulations has disappeared. Rather, she is a goblin who draws people into the mountains from the village or the capital, makes them lose their way, and appears before them like a mirage.

Let us turn to the second type of old woman, as seen in *Takasago*. Here, the old woman (*ouna*) appears as a complement to the old man (*jō*). Tomonari, a Shintō priest of Aso province, stops by the Bay of Takasago on his way to the capital. Along the bay there is a pine tree growing, and he encounters an aged couple cleaning the ground around the tree. When the priest asks them about their birth, they answer that this pine of Takasago is related as a twin pine to the pines of Sumiyoshi (Suminoe) in the province of Settsu. The old man relates that while he actually lives in Sumiyoshi, he has come to the place of the old woman of Takasago, and therefore they are together. They then relate the story of the pine's auspiciousness and reveal their true nature. After that, Tomonari is invited to go with them to Sumiyoshi, where they behold the appearance of the god of Sumiyoshi:

The auspicious ceremonial robes of a thousand years,  
with a wave of the arm, evil spirits are dispersed;  
with the gathering hand, benefits are embraced.  
With the dance of the thousand autumns,  
we pray for the well-being of the people of the land;  
with the dance of the ten thousand years, the emperor's life is prolonged.  
The wind in the double pines makes a rustling sound that delights us.

The play ends with congratulatory words celebrating the prosperity of the nation and the people, as symbolized in the evergreen pine. The double pine highlights the coming together of the aged couple and represents the nobility of their old age. The old man and old woman in partnership dance a colorful dance to words of felicitation for a thousand autumns and a myriad years. Here, the role of the old woman contrasts strongly with that of the isolated old demon woman who appears in *Yamamba*. The old woman who appears in *Takasago* is termed in Noh “*uba*.” The old woman who appears in *Yamamba* is called *yamamba* and distinguished from the *uba*. This is because the *uba* is not an ordinary old woman, but a manifestation of a deity.

Finally, there is the third type of old woman, who appears in *Obasute*. The content of this play is based on the folklore of the abandoned old woman. A man from the capital arrives at Obasute Mountain in Shinshū. Obasute Mountain was from ancient times known as a place for viewing the moon. A woman who lives in the village of Sarashina appears, relates that in the past she was an abandoned old woman, and then vanishes. As the night deepens, suddenly an old woman appears and identifies herself as one who in the past was abandoned on the mountain. The season is mid-autumn, and the moon shining clearly in the sky is luminous. As the moon gradually sets in the direction of the Pure Land of happiness, she describes the glories of this paradise and then departs:

When one thinks, “Autumn of old!”, “Companions of old!”,

already the night whitens;  
 quickly morning has come.  
 I am no longer seen;  
 after the traveler returns,  
 an old woman, alone, abandoned,  
 in the past, now again.  
 This is Obasute Mountain,  
 this is Obasute Mountain.

We see here that the Noh play *Obasute* combines the traditions of a famous place for viewing the moon with the lore of the abandoned old woman. The old woman appears and recounts memories of being abandoned by a man in the past and her lingering delusional attachments. The heart of the play, however, inclines rather toward the description of the exalted beauty of the moon and praise of the Pure Land of Bliss. In the aspect of recounting past attachments, we are reminded of the demon woman in *Yamamba*, but in the figure praising the beauty of the moon's radiance, we find an aspect of a refined old woman in the realm of illusion. The light of the moon of the Pure Land shines down upon the old woman abandoned alone in the mountains. The old woman of *Obasute* is similar to the old woman of *Yamamba* in being an isolated old woman hidden in the hills unknown. At the same time, however, all features that might remind us of the demon woman or her specter-like character have already vanished.

### 3

Above, we have seen three types of old women that appear in Noh plays. We learn several things from this examination. First, the partnership of the old woman with the old man appears only in *Takasago*. Further, the story of the abandoned old woman and the story of the old woman transformed into a goblin developed independently without the element of combination with an old man figure. This is the solitary old woman type found in *Obasute* and *Yamamba*.

It is noteworthy that in the world of medieval Noh, we find the fate of old women depicted in two types, that of the partnership seen in *Takasago* and that of solitariness seen in *Yamamba* and *Obasute*. The old woman in partnership has an air of auspiciousness and is enveloped in an aura of maturity and affection symbolized by the double pine. By contrast, the old women who are isolated have the character of the demon crone who gradually turns sallow, and wear the mask of strangeness bordering good and evil, the auspicious and the inauspicious, purity and defilement.

I am struck by this stark contrast. How did this come about? Does it suggest two destinies of old women?

Concerning the solitary old woman, it may be that the narrative of the abandoned old woman gradually gave rise to the narrative of the goblin-like crone, in much the same way as the story of the abandoned child gave rise to the story of the god-child and demon boy. Further, the goblin-like old woman may have taken on another aspect, that of the protector-deity who fully represented the spirit power of the demon woman.

The story of Obasute Mountain appears in the tenth century work, *Yamato Monogatari*, section 156,<sup>10</sup> which forms the basis for the Noh play *Obasute* described above. A man took care of his aged aunt as though she were his own mother, but criticized fiercely by his hardhearted wife, he

finally carries his aunt to the mountain top and abandons her there. Seeing the moon from Obasute Mountain, however, he reflects on what he has done and goes back to get her. The poem he composed then reads:

Console my heart,  
Sarashina.  
Seeing the moon shine  
on Obasute Mountain.  
(*Kokinshū, Miscellaneous*)

Here, the notion of a famous place for moon viewing is connected with the motif of abandoning the aged. Perhaps for this reason, the theme of abandonment does not cast an overly cruel shadow. There is salvation in the man's going back to get the abandoned old woman, but in the development of the narrative in which the man comes to his senses upon seeing the extraordinarily beautiful moon, the solemn background of the situation is softened.

This wavering in the traditional narrative, including both bright and dark sides of the mental images that form the background, seems to have influenced all later versions. Afterwards the legend of abandoning the old woman was transformed into a number of edifying old tales. For example, there is the story of the man who must abandon his aged mother in the hills. He opposes the rules of the village, however, and instead of abandoning her, hides her in the house and provides for her. He is able to solve a number of difficult problems presented to him with the wisdom and experience of his mother, and in the end, the custom of abandoning the aged is abolished. There is another story in which the son who goes out to abandon his mother bearing her on his back listens to her stories on the way and, struck deeply by her love, brings her back home. These may be called stories of the reinstatement of the old women who have been placed in the situation of abandonment, but perhaps the role of the old woman as a protector deity or her image as a deity of blessing has been read into the legend.<sup>11</sup>

By comparison, it is clear that the couple of the double pine presents a completely different kind of image of the aged. On the one hand, the old woman who is abandoned and transformed into a goblin is seen against a dark background of death, while on the other hand, the old woman who emerges in combination with the old man appears in the warm light of mutual love and affection. This may be called a contrast between the old woman within an elegy and the old woman within the exchange of love poetry.

We see, then, that on the Noh stage, a balanced model of an old man and an old woman is only represented in the type of partnership seen in *Takasago*. This play depicts a man and woman who have passed the height of life and have approached the consummation of maturity. The partnership of man and woman manifests itself in a scene where silver light is emitted. This is surely the reason the play *Takasago* has been performed repeatedly on auspicious occasions.

A new problem, however, arises here. Let us look more closely at the countenances of the old man and old woman who appear in *Takasago*. Both show the marks of the passage of years, but possess dignity and elevation. They appear as a graceful couple imbued with tranquility and an

10 *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei*, vol. 9, Iwanami Shoten, 327-328.

11 Wakamori Tarō, 213-215.

air of lofty refinement. At the same time a sense of solemnity has also been included in the depiction of the age of the couple so that a sense of awe is awakened in our hearts. The sense of solemnity and awe clearly derive from the expression carved in the *jō* and *uba* masks that the couple wear. The success of the performance of *Takasago* on the *Noh* stage depends entirely on the effectiveness of the *jō* (old man) and *uba* (old woman) masks. It may be said that through the extraordinary effectiveness of the masks, the figures of the old man and old woman joined in partnership are polished to the height of elegance.

To repeat, however, a problem remains. When we compare the world of the “*uba*” and the world of the “*jō*,” we find two underlying issues that we must consider.

The first problem has to do with the relationship that the world of the *jō* and *uba* masks has with the world of the mask of *Okina*, which has been revered as a god play. I have just offered *Takasago* as an example and asserted that the *jō* and *uba* are related as a couple and perform roles of equal status. This may be stated as a relationship of partnership between old man and old woman that blossomed in the medieval period. We must note here, however, that there was another type of old man or *okina*. This was a type of old man distinguished from the *jō*. He appears in the god play *Okina*. In contrast to the *jō* mask of *Takasago*, there is what may be called the *okina* mask of *Okina*. While both types of masks represent old men, there are clear differences. More specifically, the two types of old men may be seen as expressing different worlds and different conceptions.

Since I have discussed this matter elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> I will not present it in detail here, but the essential points are as follows. While the expression of the old man who appears in *Okina* is gentle, that of the *jō* figure who appears in *Takasago* and other plays is frightening. On the *Noh* stage, the existence of the old man is formulated in the two types of the elegant, meek aspect (*okina*) and the solemn, awe-inspiring aspect (*jō*). The *okina* mask has a refined, gentle appearance in the case of both the god play *Okina* (white *okina*) and the close of *Sanbasō* (black *okina*).

If the above is true, then a question arises concerning the kind of world in *Noh* in which we can discover a refined, gentle countenance of an old woman, one that exists in addition to the old woman in *Takasago* and that contrasts with the old woman’s countenance possessing solemnity and awe. Where can we find the mask of a gentle old woman that corresponds in expression to the masks of *Okina* and *Sanbasō*? For some reason, such a mask does not exist. In the male topography of *Noh*, the distinction between the *okina* (gentle old man image) and *jō* (frightening old man image) is established, but in the female topography, only the frightening old woman has been adopted and the gentle old woman image has vanished. Or perhaps it was missing from the beginning. There is no old woman image that functions as a counterpart to the old man in the god play *Okina*.

Speaking only of the world of *Noh*, I wonder if the image that stands as a complement to the *uba* mask is rather the grotesque countenance in the lineage of the mountain woman that I described earlier, and further, if it is not related to the demon woman or crazed woman of the lineage of the *hannya* mask. Considered in this way, we see that the relationship between the refined *jō* and *uba* in *Takasago* was a partnership established with a unique balance on the *Noh* stage. As I have noted earlier, the situation of the old woman seen in *Takasago* is certainly one

12 Yamaori Tetsuo, *Nihonjin no Kao*, NHK Bukkusyu, 1986.

that contrasts with the lonely, deserted woman in *Obasute*. She is a noble old woman of auspiciousness who differs in nature from the goblin-like isolated demon woman seen in *Yamamba*. In addition, we must note that the old woman of *Takasago* was even regarded as the manifestation of a deity. Nevertheless, in Noh, an image of an old woman corresponding to the refined, gentle old man who appears in the god play *Okina* was never added to the lineage of the imposing old woman. That the *jō* and *uba* in *Takasago* stand in a partnership established upon a unique balance holds this same implication.

## 4

The second issue regarding the partnership of *jō* and *uba* has to do with the nature of the faith to which it is related in the ancient world that preceded it. In other words, to what tradition of the ancient period is the relationship between *jō* and *uba* connected.

In an article titled "From Gods to *Okina*" (*Kami kara Okina e—Kisō Shinkō ni kansuru Ikkōsatsu*), I discuss the fact that the expression of the *jō* mask that appears in medieval Noh plays closely resembles that of male gods represented in ancient sculpture.<sup>13</sup> While I did not develop this theme further in the article, additional consideration of it appears in my book *The Face of the Japanese (Nihonjin no Kao—Zuzō kara Bunka o Yomu)*.<sup>14</sup> The first point treated there is that the countenance of the oldest surviving statue of a male god, made in the early Heian period, is that of a solemn old man. Specifically, a number of statues of male and female gods have been preserved in the Matsuo shrine in Kyoto. Among them is a well known image of a male god having the refined appearance of a secular Chinese man with a deeply wrinkled face and white hair. It bears an extremely close resemblance to the *jō* mask in Noh. Taking note of this, I conjecture that, like the male god statue of the Matsuo shrine, the *jō* mask in Noh was probably carved to represent a deity. This view is supported by the fact that the old man *jō* figure who appears in the Noh play *Takasago* is indeed a manifestation of the Sumiyoshi god.

If this is the case, in comparison with male deities, what are the features possessed by the female deity in ancient sculpture? For example, is the expression of an old woman the same as the male god figure of the Matsuo shrine? Does it have the visage of a solemn old woman deeply immersed in thought like the *uba* mask that appears in medieval Noh?

Mysteriously, the answer is no. The female deities represented in sculpture are almost all mature, young women. They have rounded cheeks and glossy hair; their full lips are painted a vivid crimson, and their bosoms show a fullness. Their smooth, rich skin shows almost no blemish of age. In short, the contrast between the aged male figure and the female figure in the prime of maturity is striking.<sup>15</sup>

Let us consider, for example, the female figure preserved at the Matsuo shrine mentioned above. Among the male god statues there are both aged and mature figures, and in addition, beautiful female god figures have been preserved. As mentioned before, one statue of a male god depicts an aged secular figure with Chinese-style headdress and robes. By contrast, the female god statue is a rounded, mature figure in Chinese dress, sitting erect with hands together. The half-opened eyes gaze forward and slightly downward; the full lips are painted crimson. In all

13 *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan Kenkyū Hōkoku*, 2, 1983 (later included in my *Kami kara Okina e*, Seidosha).

14 *Nihonjin no Kao*, chapter 3, "Yasashii Okina to Kowai Okina".

15 See the illustrations in *Bessatsu Taiyō Nihon no Kami*, (Yamaori Tetsuo, general editor), Heibonsha, Winter 1989.

respects, it is a face far removed from that of an old woman.

Further, there is also the Hachiman triad which, like the Matsuo shrine sculptures, was created during the Jōgan era (859-877). It is enshrined in the Hachiman shrine built within the precincts of the Yakushiji temple in Nara. It represents the god who was invited to come from Usa Hachiman in the ninth century. Of the three figures, the Hachiman god is depicted as a monk with shaved head, and the other two represent the female deities Empress Jingū and Nakatsu-hime no mikoto. Leaving aside the monk-like figure of the Hachiman god, the two female statues are identical to those of the Matsuo shrine in giving an impression of the eros of women in full maturity.

There is one further example that should be considered with the two examples above: the male and female god statues of the Kumano Hayatama Taisha shrine, dating, like the others, from the early Heian period (in this case, the Enryaku era). The male deity is a seated statue of the Kumano Hayatama god, and the female is a seated statue of the Kumano Fusumi deity. They are the oldest among the Kumano god statues, and the Hayatama god statue in particular is worshiped as occupying the chief position in all of Kumano. The male god is depicted as somewhat younger than the Matsuo male figure, and with white hair hanging down and the air of a melancholic, solemn old man, it may be said to be close to the realm of the *okina*. By contrast, the Fusumi female god statue is a rich, elegant figure with features in common with the female figures in paintings of the "Beautiful woman under a tree" theme on Nara period screens.

The same description can be applied to the seated statue of the deity Ukanomitama-no-mikoto preserved at the Ozu shrine in Shiga prefecture. Ukanomitama-no-mikoto means "spirit of grain" and is another name for the Inari deity, who was at first a woman. In all its features, beginning with the hair style and dress, this seated statue is a depiction of a mature woman, and from this we see that it belongs to the same lineage as the examples described above. The deity Ukanomitama who is depicted with a female figure gradually changed into the Inari god, who took the form of the male *okina*.

Citing examples of god statues from the early Heian period, I have stated that while most male statues depict figures with a pronounced aura of age, the female statues are youthful figures that even have a hint of eroticism. Some exceptions are found among the images of male gods. For example, in the Hachiman triad described before, the Hachiman god is depicted as a monk. Further, the monk figure is not that of an old man. Considering the god statues made in the Heian period as a whole, male statues depicting men at the height of maturity and also of youths began to be made from the middle period on. Of course, the significance of this development must be considered in connection with the historical background and the context of religious thought. It is undeniable that the earliest statues of male gods often take the form of an old man, the *okina*.

The question of how the gods of the ancient period came to take on the features of the *okina* or old man is also an important problem, but since I have treated it elsewhere, I will not consider it here.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize what I have discussed above, first, on the medieval Noh stage, an aged couple bearing awesome countenances, the *jō* and *uba*, appeared, but there were no representations of old women with gentle features. In the case of old men, two types were conceived: the gentle *okina* and the awesome *jō*, but in contrast to this, there was no conception of a gentle old woman.

16 Yamaori Tetsuo, *Rinshi no Shisō*, Jinbun Shoin, 1991.

Second, in religious sculpture of the ancient period, the female statues that function as counterparts to the male statues in the guise of old men almost all depict youthful women in the prime of maturity. This may be called an imbalance of a wizened old man and a middle-aged woman. Thus, as mentioned above, Ukanomitama, the deity of grain, was a female god who does not necessarily have a counterpart. With the advent of the medieval period, however, this deity (identified with the Inari deity) was transformed, in the field of the plastic arts, into a male god with the form of an old man. We must not overlook this feature, for the Inari god may also be said to manifest the unbalanced counterparts of aged male and mature female in a vertical temporal relationship. In other words, in the realm of ancient imagery, there is a premise that male gods are old and female gods are young, and in this relationship there was almost no place for the image of an old female deity or old woman.

## 5

Above, looking at the *yamamba* or mountain woman lore of the premodern period, I have sought to trace the evolution of the image of the old woman, finally delving into the domain of the images of deities in medieval Noh and ancient statuary. I have touched upon the fate and the changes of the old woman image. This tentative investigation has of course been quite limited; a fuller treatment would require a careful review of the documents of the relevant periods. Since I have focused on the changes undergone by the image of the old woman rather than the fate of its existence itself, the discussion has focused on the features of the old woman as expressed in statues of deities and Noh masks. Here, I have made some observations and conjectures possible within these methodological limitations.

In conclusion, I will list several themes that may provide clues for further research into the topics of the old woman images of *ouna* and *uba*.

First, in the world of medieval Noh, the relationship of *jō* and *uba* was created, for example, in *Takasago*, but a female *ouna* counterpart to the old man who appears in the god play *Okina* was not created. Even though the pair of *jō* and *uba* was established, no pair of *okina* and *ouna* was born. An image of a refined, gentle old woman (*ouna*) to correspond to the old man (*okina*) was at least not conceived on the Noh stage.

Next, although I was not able to discuss it here, a gentle old woman (*ouna*) corresponding to the *okina* emerged as a new heroine in the popular performing arts such as village shrine dances (*sato kagura*) which developed in the premodern period. On the stage in this new era, an old woman of gentle expression dressed as a farming woman became a counterpart to a gentle old man (*okina*) with the appearance of a farmer, and she repeatedly acted in farcical, sexually suggestive ways. Even if this figure of an old woman did not acquire a status of great refinement, it is undeniable that she did provide a genial counterpart to the *okina* of Noh. Thus in contrast to the relationship of the *jō* and *uba* that was just barely established in medieval Noh, the partnership of *okina* and *ouna* was actualized for the first time in the popular performing arts of the premodern period. I have discussed the significance of this elsewhere. Here, I will add just one comment concerning the establishment of the images of *okina* and *ouna*. The *jō*-like old man, who possessed the solemn and dignified air of a deity, was replaced by the *okina*-like old man of Noh, who represented the figure of an amiable farmer. This is concisely indicated by the formulation of the god play *Okina*. The facial expression of the gentle *okina* mask worn by the

main actor (*shite*) is clearly an idealization of a farmer, and this *okina* came to be seen as the hero of a god play who was superior to the *jō* of such plays as *Takasago*. In place of the awe-inspiring *jō*, who was connected to the lineage of the gods of the ancient period, the gentle *okina* came to function as the lead part in Noh. Further, it was the medieval Noh drama which facilitated this inversion of values. Zeami's intentions were probably at work in the background.

If such an interpretation is permitted, then it follows that the creation of the partnership of *okina* and *ouna* in the popular performing arts of the premodern period was a phenomenon that accompanied this medieval inversion of values. The image of the gentle old woman (*ouna*) as the idealization of a farming woman was auspiciously added to the *okina* as an idealization of the farmer. This development of a completely new image of an aged couple differed greatly from the relationship of the old male god and youthful female deity seen in the statuary of the ancient period.

In sum, there are three types of couples. First, as represented in the ancient period, there is the joining of the old male god and young female deity. Second, as the medieval formula, there is the combination of the awesome *jō* and awesome old woman or *uba*. Third, there is, as the premodern formula, the pairing of the gentle *okina* and gentle *ouna*. The historical changes in these types bring to light, though in a limited way, aspects of the changes in the image of the old woman in Japan. In the background of the three general types of pairings, however, there remains the sorrowful shadow of the lonely mountain woman, driven into an isolated existence.

## 日本における「老女」伝承

山折哲雄

要旨：日本の前近代における「老女」伝承は「老翁」伝承にくらべて、どこか陰うつな気配がただよい、不気味な雰囲気<sup>ふきみずみ</sup>が立ちこめている。なぜならその「老女」伝承の代表的なものに「山姥」の伝承があるが、この山姥はしばしば「怪異な女神」としてあらわれるからである。

このような「老女」伝承における怪異な性格を明らかにするために、私は中世における「能楽」資料の中から「老女」にかんする三つのパターンを抽出しその内容を分析してみようと思う。第一の類型は、世阿弥の作とされる「山姥」に登場する老女のパターンである。第二の類型が同じ世阿弥の作といわれる「高砂」などででてくる老女である。そして最後に第三の類型として名曲「姨捨」<sup>いへすて</sup>に出てくる老女のパターンである。

第一類型の「山姥」には、そこに登場する老女は妖怪もしくは鬼女の面影を濃厚に宿している。これにたいして第二類型の「高砂」には、老女は老翁とつれ立って登場する。いわばパートナーシップの中に現われる老女の類型とってよいだろう。そして第三類型の「姨捨」においては、親族の手によって捨てられる老女が登場する。すなわち棄老伝説の中に出てくる老女である。

以上、能楽に表現されている三種の「老女」の性格をそれぞれ浮かびあがらせ、相互に比較することを通して、日本の前近代における「老女」の運命について考えてみようと思っている。なお付随的な問題として、老女（<sup>おば</sup>）と怖い老女（<sup>おば</sup>）の二類型があることを明らかにして、それがさきにもべた老女の三類型とどのような関係にあるのかについても考えてみたい。