

CHAPTER 1

POSSESSION AND INCARNATION: THE INTERACTION OF KAMI AND BUDDHAS

When we speak of the native divinities of Japan, in reality we are speaking of the gods (*kami* 神) and buddhas (*hotoke* 仏) together. Viewed historically, the Japanese *kami* have been conceived as divinities and, at the same time, worshipped as buddhas. It is impossible to consider the presence of the gods apart from the manifestation of buddhas, and in the same way, the buddhas have not appeared independently of the gods. The *kami* have carried on their activities through the medium of the images of buddhas, and the buddhas have assumed form in a myriad variations through the *kami*. Logically, therefore, it may appear that the *kami* and buddhas are to be considered essentially equivalent, but this is not the case. The expression, "faith in the gods and buddhas" (*shin-butsu shrinkō* 神仏信仰), implies that the *kami* and buddhas share basic characteristics in common, but they are not necessarily identical or exact equivalents.

The buddhas suddenly arrived in Japan from the outside, as symbols of the sacred that were pervaded by a sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity. By contrast, the *kami* are signs that have arisen from within, expressing a sacred nature as something accustomed and familiar. To employ an analogy, it may be said that the buddhas were signals transmitted from the outside and that the *kami* were receptors of the signals responding to them from within. These two kinds of divinities—*kami* and buddhas—were originally totally distinct in nature, each bearing in the background their own cultural sphere. Through repeated

contact and interaction, however, they underwent a process whereby they were mutually transformed and came to possess the same character.

As I have mentioned, while the buddhas were transmitted signals, the gods were the received messages. In the climate of Japanese thought, buddhas and kami were thus similar in nature, but harbored functions that moved in alignment with opposing vectors. In considering Japanese thought, this difference in vectors cannot be ignored. In the world of "faith in the gods and buddhas," distinct features emerge depending on whether the investigation is conducted from the outside or the inside. In this chapter, I will seek to consider the relationship between gods and buddhas not from the side of Buddhism, which functioned as the transmitter of the signals, but from the side of Shinto, the receiver. By considering how the gods responded to the intrusion of the buddhas, I shall seek to illuminate the structure of the relationship between kami and buddhas that emerged from the passive side of their struggle.

1. Varieties of Polytheism

When we think of polytheism, we are immediately reminded of the pantheons of ancient Greek religion and of Hinduism, and alongside these, of the innumerable gods of the early Japanese mythology recorded in *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀. It has been common in the fields of religious studies and anthropology to think inclusively along these lines, without any sense of strangeness, for at the foundation of this view lies a categorical understanding of polytheism as standing in contrast to monotheism. The simple concept of a pluralistic rule by gods in contrast to the single rule of God has been tacitly assumed. This common view, however, tends to lead to a fundamental misunderstanding when it is brought to bear on Japanese polytheism. This is because the polytheism of ancient Greece or Hinduism consisted of gods visible to the human eye, while the polytheism of the mythology in the early records of Japan is one of invisible gods. The mode of existence of the gods and their functioning differ significantly depending on whether they can be seen or not. Although visible gods and invisible gods may both be considered

formally within the framework of polytheism, they differ qualitatively in the mode in which they appear and operate in the world.

The gods of the Greek and Hindu myths have been widely depicted in painting and sculpture, and their concrete images have even been projected into the heavenly spheres. Like human beings, they possess physical bodies, display their own individual characters, and perform actions. For example, we know that Zeus is an elderly god, Apollo a youth, and Cupid a boy. Their facial features, physical bodies, and typical actions possess vividness in form and content. The same may be said of Vishnu (Viṣṇu), Śiva, and Krishna (Kṛṣṇa) in the Hindu pantheon. On their bodies they bear the marks of their age and maturity; moreover, various goddesses appear as their consorts, and wild and erotic episodes unfold. By contrast, however, the gods of the myths related in the ancient Japanese records did not appear in concrete form. Originally, the divinities of Japan did not assert a physicality or individual character and were not depicted in paintings and sculpture as behaving like human beings. Of course, there were exceptions. For example, it is not impossible to detect a trace of personal character and physical presence in Amaterasu and Susanoo, and in Amenouzume or Ōkuninushi. Nevertheless, such hints of physical characteristics are scarcely significant when compared with Greek religion and Hindu mythology, and it must be said that the process of incarnation in the Japanese myths was at an extremely undeveloped level. Viewed in this way, Japanese polytheism, in its incipient stage, was one in which the gods were veiled in an invisibility that denied them the character of bodily existence and individuality. A polytheism of invisibility, in contrast to one in which the gods are visible, possesses a system of beliefs with its own distinctive logic and methods.

2. Modes of Divine Communication

When Buddhism was transmitted to Japan from the Asian continent, however, conditions were greatly altered. The concept of "buddha" introduced from abroad collided with and overlapped the native conception

of kami, resulting in the formation of a new relationship between buddhas and gods. Buddhism was officially transmitted during the reign of Emperor Kinmei 欽明 in the first half of the sixth century, and during the Asuka period in the seventh century, temples began to be constructed. The impact of Buddhism on Japan in that period, however, seems to have arisen largely from the gorgeous and dazzling images of buddhas. Into the thicket of a polytheism of deeply hidden, invisible gods, there suddenly descended a golden "polytheism" bringing in train a myriad images of buddhas and bodhisattvas. I will leave aside for the moment the question of whether Buddhism is "polytheistic" or not. In the soil of Hinduism, which may be called the matrix from which Buddhism was born, the concept of incarnation—known, in theological terms, as *avakrānti* (or *avatāra*, "divine descent" in Hindu terminology)—had been developed in ancient times. For example, there is the myth that from Vishnu, one of the chief deities, ten avatars or manifestations were born, including the Buddha, who dedicated themselves to the salvation of the world. The concept of avatar turns on a mode of thought in which the origin of the universe (original form, archetype) gives rise endlessly to the phenomenal world of manifested forms, which possess individual features and characteristics. This thinking was applied to the mechanism by which the universe was created and the gods arose. In other words, the evolution of the world was understood to reflect the process of the incarnation of the gods. Buddhism also, from its beginnings, was baptized in this conception of incarnation, and bearing concrete icons of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and fierce protector-divinities (*myōō* 明王), it travelled the long road of transmission and propagation in various cultures.

Considering this, we see that the transmission of Buddhism to Japan in the sixth and seventh centuries brought about an encounter between buddhas and bodhisattvas visible to the eye, on the one hand, and invisible native divinities, on the other. It might be called a collision between a visible polytheism (Buddhism) and an invisible polytheism (Shinto). In other words, there was direct contact and confrontation between two different forms of polytheism. We have been accustomed to

speaking of the interaction of gods and buddhas—including the subsequent historical process—as the amalgamation of Shinto and Buddhism, and further have formulated it as a Japanese form of syncretism. We must also recognize, however, that at the foundations of the relationship in which gods are equated with buddhas there functioned the mechanism of the collision and fusion of two distinct forms of polytheism.

I have set in opposition two systems of polytheism, using the terms “invisible gods” and “visible buddhas,” but of course the key to unlocking the secret of their contrasting characters lies in the distinctive character of the gods. The divinities of early Shinto were thought to move about as the “ghosts” of ancestors and as spirits, and to take up residence in the hills and forests. It is not that creator gods or nature gods are completely lacking among the *kami* in the myths of the early records, but those early gods are for the most part ancestor spirits and divinities that are viewed as identical with ancestral and clan gods. Moreover, from the terms *kunitama no kami* (land-governing god) and *ikutama no kami* (life-enhancing god) that appear frequently in the records, we see that “god” (*kami*) at the same time signified “spirit” (*tama* 靈). These gods—divine and ancestral spirits—by undergoing endless division and moving through the air, responded to the wishes and desires of prayerful people and took abode in particular objects and places. For example, the Hachiman 八幡 god of Usa 宇佐 in northern Kyushu was prayed to as Iwashimizu 石清水 Hachiman in Kyoto in the Heian period, and then in the Kamakura period was invited through prayer to Kamakura 鎌倉 as Tsurugaoka 鶴岡 Hachiman. The innumerable Hachiman shrines that stand throughout Japan appeared in the same way.

We see, then, that the gods or spirits exercise first of all the capacities for unlimited division and for repeated movement and abode in different locales. It may be said that they achieve a kind of cell-division or self-reproduction. Secondly, as beings taking abode in special areas—for example, in woods or trees—that is, as beings present in certain locales (*topos*), they conceal themselves in the natural back-

ground. Before they came to bear individual names, the gods were conceived as “god who is present in Kii 紀伊” (*Kii no kuni ni imasu kami*, in *Nihon shoki*), or “god who is present in Asuka 飛鳥” (*Asuka ni imasu kami*, in *Engi shiki* 延喜式), or god “who is present” in Yamato 大和 or Izumo 出雲—as gods residing deep in the forests and hills. The gods withdrew their own individual character into an indefinite “place” and enclosed themselves in the anonymity of nature. The distinctive character of the gods that emerges here is their faculty of unlimited division and their form of movement, passing through the air at imperceptible speed to take up abode in different places. This phenomenon of the gods invisibly taking abode in a particular locale may be tentatively labelled “possession.” Possession usually refers, of course, to spirit possession, the entrance of a god or spirit into a person. If we follow this train of thought, then by contrast, the mode of action of buddhas and bodhisattvas who assert their physicality and personal character may be said to be based on the faculty of incarnation. This is the phenomenon by which the visible buddhas manifest themselves by assuming physical bodies. Thus, the capacities of possession by the gods and incarnation or embodiment by the buddhas provide a useful conceptual framework within which to carry on the comparison and analysis of the systems and structures of Buddhism and Shinto.

3. The Interaction between Possession and Incarnation

It is in the relationship between the visible buddhas and invisible gods that the wellspring of the Japanese form of syncretism lies. The basic relationship between Buddhism as transmitter and Shinto as receiver originates here. The structural character of what is commonly spoken of as the “merging” or “combining of Shinto and Buddhism” (*shin-butsu shūgō* 神仏習合) was born from the contact and fusion of the principles of incarnation by buddhas and possession by gods. I shall give two examples.

First, let us consider the architectural plans of the shrine hall of the kami and the temple hall and tower of the buddha. In sharp contrast to

the Shinto shrine built against a background of forests or hills, the Buddhist temple is constructed in a rectangular configuration, as a center radiating outward in the four directions. A person approaching a Shinto shrine cannot go near the rear, but one visiting a Buddhist temple can go completely around the rectangular space. This is related to the fact that the Japanese god is, from the outset, concealed in the natural background, in the forest and trees, while the buddha, with luminous body, is openly exposed to the view of human beings. The gods are sheltered as a kind of trace; the buddhas are fully manifested as a sheaf of light. The differences in spatial arrangement symbolize the closedness of possession and the openness of incarnation. This corresponds further to the contrast between god or divine being that resides in such abstract symbolic articles as mirror, jewel, or sword, and buddha, seen as a body that holds lotuses and gems and rides upon an elephant or a lion. We must bear in mind the climatic factors involved—the almost nude images of buddhas and bodhisattvas are products of a tropical environment, while the fundamental nature of the gods is rooted in frigid and temperate zones—but in the background lie the contrasting natures of possession and incarnation.

The second contrasting element is the anonymity of the gods and the name-assertion of the buddhas. For example, at Kasuga Taisha 春日大社 there are five gods enshrined, known popularly as Hall One, Hall Two, Hall Three, Hall Four, and Hall Five (or Wakamiya 若宮). It is not usual to refer to their proper names, Takemikazuchi 建御雷, Futsunushi 経津主, Amenokoyane 天兒屋根, and so on. The same is true of Fushimi Inari 伏見稲荷, where the divinities are referred to as Upper Shrine, Middle Shrine, and Lower Shrine. Elsewhere, there is the usage of Shrine One, Shrine Two, Shrine Three, and so on, and at Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮, rather than the names Amaterasu 天照 or Toyuuke 登由宇氣, Inner Shrine and Outer Shrine are used. We see here an inclination toward anonymity that seeks to restore to the nature of the gods the image of a cipher or number, and to eliminate any hint of personal character or physical body. By contrast, the myriads of buddhas and bodhisattvas pushed their sacred features and marks to the limit. Correspondences

between icons and meaningful marks developed; among buddhas, for example, Śākyamuni was associated with attainment of enlightenment, Amida 阿弥陀 with birth in the Pure Land, Yakushi 藥師 with curing of sickness, and Dainichi 大日 with the entire cosmos. Further, among bodhisattvas and protecting divinities, such relationships were formed as the trinity of Fudō 不動 (anger, father), Kannon 觀音 (compassion, mother), and Jizō 地藏 (salvation, child). If differences in detail are overlooked, it is possible to perceive a resemblance between the father-mother-child relationship of incarnation seen here in Fudō, Kannon, and Jizō with that in Christianity of God the father, Mary the mother, and Jesus the child. In any case, the bodies of gods and buddhas show a contrast between anonymity and the bearing of distinctive iconographic features or marks.

Above, I have considered the nature of the syncretism of gods and buddhas, focusing chiefly on the faculties of possession and incarnation as the basis for analysis. The ongoing fusion of Shinto and Buddhism, through the very deepening of this process itself, gradually underwent a subtle change. The gods who concealed themselves in an invisible realm, through contact with Buddhism, gradually came to adopt the principle of incarnation. For example, shrine halls were built in imitation of the buddha hall, and statues of gods were carved taking Buddhist images as models. The process of incarnation or embodiment began among the kami. Further, as though in correspondence with this process, a change began to occur in the pantheon of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. That is, in the flower garden of incarnation, the primal faculty of possession cast its shadow, giving rise to a "transformation into hidden buddhas" as a movement toward origins. In this way, from within the overlapping relationship between the gods' transformation into god-images and the buddhas' transformation into hidden buddhas, gradually a new, mature stage of the syncretic relationship between Shinto and Buddhism commenced. Such matters as the conception of kami as accommodated bodies (*gonge* 権化) of buddhas, the idea that they were manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹), and the appearance of Shinto mandala were born from this complex environment of syncretism.



Kami statue of the Matsuo shrine, Kyoto.

4. The Gods' Adoption of Physical Form

The gods' adoption of bodily images and the buddhas' conversion into hidden buddhas occurred roughly speaking during the great historical transition from the ancient to the medieval periods. There was a germinal stage, followed by periods of full flowering and of modification. Each period included rich diversity and impulses toward variation, but there was no alteration in the process itself by which the relationship between the kami and buddhas achieved a new interior organization. Viewed from the perspective of historical process, the change in the relationship between the gods and buddhas first appeared as the concretization of kami, and then developed into the withdrawal of buddhas from human sight. This was a process in which the gods, taking on the faculty of incarnation, appeared in the visible world, and subsequently the buddhas secreted themselves in the realm of invisibility. Of course, not all the gods and buddhas underwent such changes; nevertheless, the foundation that made possible the "fusion of Shinto and Buddhism" or the notion of "the gods as manifestations of buddhas" was prepared beforehand within this overall context. In this chapter, I will focus first on the concrete embodiment of the gods, and then take up the topic of hidden buddhas.

Early attempts in giving form to the gods appear to go back to the Nara period, but no works from that time survive. According to the research of Oka Naomi 岡直己,¹ the oldest extant sculptures of kami were created in the Jōgan 貞観 era (859-877) in the early Heian period. The situation before this is impossible to determine because of the lack of evidence, but according to Oka, early sculptures of kami stem from three types of representations: monks, bodhisattvas, and secular figures. This shows that, although we have spoken of giving form to the gods, in the earliest stage there were no definite rules, and further that in the actual production, Buddhist images exerted their influence in various ways.

Concerning the monk-style statues, at first glance, with their shaved heads, monk's robes, and standing postures, they are reminiscent of Jizō Bodhisattva (for example, the kami statues preserved at Tachibanadera 橘寺, Yūnenji 融念寺, and Hōryūji 法隆寺 temples). The earliest images of

the gods are monk-like figures because they express the gods' aspiration to gain emancipation through the Buddhist teaching. In order to attain emancipation, the gods had to shave their heads and receive precepts; after passing through this stage, they could advance to the rank of bodhisattva. In other words, the monk-like figure of kami is the manifestation of their reception of precepts. The widely known seated figure of the Hachiman god at the Tōji Hachiman shrine belongs to this category.

The bodhisattva-style figures represent the second stage, in which the kami have attained the realm of emancipation. The statues preserved at Kōryūji 広隆寺 temple in the Uzumasa 太秦 district of Kyoto (a figure of Danzō Yakushi) and at Yakuonji 薬蘭寺 temple in Kyoto's Yawata 八幡 district (a figure of Yakushi Bodhisattva) belong to this category. Both are enshrined as kami possessing the capacity for curing illness. Compared with the fairly human monk-style figures, the bodhisattva-style statues express a transcendence of humanity and a salvific, divine power.

Finally, concerning the secular figures, examples of the earliest period are preserved at the Matsuo 松尾 shrine in Kyoto (Yamashiro Kuzuno-gun). Here, there are three male figures and one female figure. Two of the male figures are commonly known, both seated with hands locked across their chests. They wear the robes of court officials and have headdresses, the adornments of which hang down to the right and left. The Matsuo shrine is an ancestral god worshiped by the immigrant Hata 秦 clan, which flourished in the Yamashiro region from before the Heian period. Further, since the Matsuo god has been popularly regarded as the same as the god Ōyamakui 大山咋, who resides on Mt. Hiei 比叡, we see that close bonds with Mt. Hiei had been formed from ancient times. The Matsuo kami was at first held in awe as a fierce spirit, but by the mid-Heian period was regarded as a divinity that would protect against arson and epidemics.

Other examples of early god figures of the secular type are the group preserved at the Kumano Hayatama Taisha 熊野速玉大社 shrine. With the passage of time, such secular figures came to form the

mainstream of kami statues. Monk and bodhisattva-style images gradually declined in numbers in the Heian period. This was because the bodily forms of the kami tended toward independence from Buddhist representations, and there arose a deliberate effort to cast off the features borrowed from the figures of buddhas and bodhisattvas. The depiction of kami first vacillated between monk and bodhisattva images, but finally attained a stability when the secular images became standard.

We should note here, however, that the Matsuo divinity, which is regarded as representative of the secular-style statues, takes the form of an aged man (*okina*) (see page 9). As noted before, it is a seated figure with folded arms and headdress. There are whiskers around the mouth, and a long beard hangs from the chin. From all these features, we see that the god image was formed in the likeness of a venerable, aged man. This kami statue belonging to the earliest period of such representations is not simply depicted with secular elements. In the expression of the physical body also, it differs totally and conspicuously from the Buddhist images that were imported from abroad. It is greatly surprising, however, that the lower half of this Matsuo god should be seated in a full-lotus posture. In contrast to the upper body, which shows a secular figure of an old man without any relation to Buddhist imagery, the lower body shows a posture with folded legs that is almost indistinguishable from that of a buddha or bodhisattva. We see an indication here that in the process of the production of kami statues, the elegant features of buddha figures still possessed significant power. Traces of the fusion of Shinto and Buddhism remain in this way.²

Having discussed above the gods' adoption of bodily form and indicated three typical models, I will now turn to a consideration of the process by which a gradual focus on the secular-style figure came about. Let us turn first to a consideration of the Inari deity, and then briefly discuss the Kasuga deity.

5. The Inari Kami

Surely few divinities have left the traces of their changes in history as

clearly as the Inari kami. It is the contour of change that is clear, however; the character itself grows increasingly complex. This presents a hurdle that must be overcome in order to grasp the nature of Inari belief. The Inari divinity of ancient times reveals a strongly feminine character, indicating traces of a kind of mother deity. By contrast, from the latter part of the ancient period to the medieval period, it took on a masculine image, and the character of an aged man (*okina*) became dominant. The faith in the maternal figure was closely intertwined with worship of the deity of the fields, while *okina* or aged man worship holds in its background faith in the mountain gods.

The Inari deity worshiped at the Inari shrines built throughout Japan is commonly said to be named Ukanomitama or Ukanomitama no Mikoto 宇賀之御靈命. One depiction of the figure of Ukanomitama, in feminine form, is preserved at Ozu 小津 shrine in Ozu-mura, Yasugun, Shiga prefecture. Further, a painting of the Inari deity on a wooden panel at Hoshakuji temple in Kyoto shows a seated female figure in Chinese dress with a jewelled crown on her head and folded arms. It is one of the nineteen protector deities and was painted in 1286. In the "thirty gods" (*Sanjūban shin* 三十番神) painting in the Honma Museum, the same deity is depicted as a secular female figure.

These examples date from the end of the ancient period to the medieval period and reveal that the Inari deity was conceived as a female image even into the medieval period. Each of these female figures possesses its own lineage, but as mentioned before, the feminine image of the Inari divinity was basically formed far in the past. Let us consider this further. There are three deities worshipped at the Inari shrine in Fushimi, Kyoto, which is the headquarters of the Inari faith: Ukanomitama no Kami, Sarutahiko no Kami, and Oomiyanome no Kami. According to *Nihon shoki*, the first deity, Ukanomitama no Kami, was the child of Izanagi no Mikoto, born when she was starving. This deity is "the spirit of the rice storehouse," and the Chinese characters of this name are read Ukanomitama. This "spirit of the rice storehouse," like the "rice spirit woman" who appears in the "Record of Emperor Jinmu" (*Jinmu tennō ki* 神武天皇紀), is the spirit of rice or the grain

spirit. We must note here that the grain spirit is represented in a feminine form as the "rice spirit woman" (Ukanome). Or rather, since it is the spirit that gives birth to rice, it takes on the image of a maternal deity.

Concerning the name Ukanomitama in *Kojiki*, there seems to have been disagreement over whether the first two characters should be read "Uka" or "Uke." In *Wamyōshō* 和名抄, both readings are employed, but Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長, in his *Kojikiden*, adopts the reading of "Uka." As mentioned before, in *Nihon shoki*, the name written "spirit of the rice storehouse" is also rendered with characters that may be read either "Uka" or "Uke." In short, both pronunciations were used. In this case, *ke* has the meaning of "meal." This is the same as, for example, the case when the deity of the Ise Outer shrine, Toyoukenoōkami, is said to be the *miketsukami* 御饌都神, "meal serving god," of Amaterasu Ōmikami. Further, the *ke* in Toyoukenoōkami or Toyukenoōkami has the same meaning. When we survey the pantheon of deities with this in mind, we notice that most gods with *ke* or *ka*, or *uke* or *uka*, in their names appear in female form.

6. The Inari Kami as Male

Let us now consider the male figures of the Inari kami. First, the Inari Taisha version (*Inari taisha bon*) of the Inari mandala depicts a male figure in hunting clothes carrying sheaves of rice and holding a sickle in his left hand. In a painted wooden panel (*Inari myōjin miei itae*) preserved also at Kōzanji 高山寺 in Toganoo 桐尾, the Inari deity is shown as a male figure standing on a rock, bearing sheaves of rice on his right shoulder, supported by his right hand, and holding a staff in his left. There is a white scarf on his head, and his face conveys the solemn air of an aged man. There is one other depiction of which we should particularly take note, the *okina*-like figure carrying sheaves of rice who appears in the Kumano mandala. It is small in size and painted in the lower part of the mandala, suggesting a treatment as a god of minor importance. The Kumano mandala has been transmitted in various versions: the Iwasaki

Koyata 岩崎小弥太 *bon*, the Shōgoin *bon*, the Nezu Bijutsukan *bon*, and others. According to Kondō Yoshihiro 近藤喜博, they all apparently date from the Kamakura to Muromachi periods.³

It is not clear why the aged-man figure of the Inari deity should appear in the Kumano mandala. From ancient times, however, there are many stories in which the Kumano god also appears in the form of an old man. For example, according to *Ippen hijiri-e* 一遍聖絵, Ippen, while in retreat at the Shōjōden hall at Kumano, had a dream in the deep of night in which the Kumano deity appeared before him. The god is depicted as an aged man with white hair and wearing a white robe. The figure is not carrying sheaves of rice and therefore differs from the aged-man figure of the Inari god, but we should note that both the Kumano and Inari deities assume figures of old men.

In considering the depiction of the Inari deity as an old man, we must first take up the *Inari chinza yurai* 稻荷鎮座由来, which sets forth the story of the deity's origin. It is also known as the *Inari daimyōjin ruki* 稻荷大明神流記. It begins by recording an encounter in Kōnin 7 (816) between Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi) and an "unusual old man" at Tanabe 田辺 in Kii province. The two part after promising to meet again, and in Kōnin 14 (823), the old man, this time in the company of two women and two children, visits Kūkai at Tōji 東寺 temple. On this occasion, the old man is the Inari god, bearing sheaves of rice and holding branches of cedar. Since ancient times, this meeting between Kūkai and the deity has been called "Inari's promise," and the scene came to be depicted in *Kōbō daishi gyōjōki* 弘法大師行狀記 and *Kōbō daishi gyōjō ekotoba* 弘法大師行狀絵詞. For example, in the Tōji version, there is a scene showing the meeting between Kūkai and an aged man donning a court hat (*eboshi*) and wearing white robes. Considering this scene with the examples in the painted panel of the *Inari myōjin miei itae* and in the Kumano mandala, we see that, from the medieval period, the Inari deity gradually came to be represented as an aged man. We must now consider the reasons for this.

In taking up this problem, it is useful to consider a passage on Ryūtōta 竜頭太, which is appended to the end of the *Inari chinza yurai*. It

is recorded as a story about an old man in ancient times. During the Wadō era (708-715), a person known as Ryūtōta built a hut in the foothills of Inari mountain and spent one hundred years there. He cultivated fields during the daytime and gathered firewood at night. His face was like that of a dragon and light shone from it. Since it illuminated the night, people called him Ryūtōta (dragonhead). His actual family name was Kada 荷田, which literally has the meaning of "carrying rice." During the Kōnin era (810-822), Kūkai came to this mountain to lead a life of austerities and ascetic practices. Ryūtōta, appearing as an old man, announced to Kūkai that he was the god of the mountain. Further, he said that he had earlier vowed to protect the Buddhist teaching and therefore wished to receive the esoteric Shingon teachings. If his wish were fulfilled, he would work for the spread of Buddhism. Kūkai was deeply moved by this and carved the face of the old man. This mask is at present enshrined in the hall.

Let us consider the fact that Ryūtōta appears as an aged man with a dragon's head. The old man declares himself to be the "god of the mountain." He may be said to be, in other words, the protector-god of Inari mountain. We see here that the mountain god in the figure of an old man is identified with the Inari deity. As mentioned before, what is recorded in the body of *Inari chinza yurai* and the content of this section on Ryūtōta are in general correspondence. Both state that an old man (i.e. the Inari god) meets Kūkai; that together they pray that Buddhism and Shinto will flourish; and that the old man carries sheaves of rice. Further, while the story of Ryūtōta states that the old man had a face like a dragon's which cast light, the *Chinza yurai* speaks of an "unusual old man"; "unusual" ("of strange features") corresponds to the fuller description in the story. The old man with strange features is said to have a height of eight feet, to be sturdy in build, and to possess an aura of great authority. We may conjecture that he was far from an image of an ordinary old man. That the figure of the old man which emerges from *Chinza yurai* is not an ordinary one with white hair—that is to say, a human image—but one with "strange features" is probably connected with the assertion that he was a manifestation of the god of the

mountain. He was not an old man because he was a human being, but an old man who was like a god, or better, a god who was like an old man. Viewed in this way, the two images of the old man—that in the body of *Chinza yurai* and that in the story of Ryūtōta appended to it—may be seen as stemming from a single original source.

7. The Encounter of the Monk and the Old Man

The motif of a monk meeting an old man as seen in the story of the origins of the Inari deity is, of course, not restricted to *Inari chinza yurai*, but in fact is seen frequently in the stories of the origins of temples and shrines. The meeting of a shaven-headed monk with a white-haired old man is depicted as an encounter of representatives of the buddha and of a god. Here again, we see traces of the process by which the kami took on bodily form. I will give several examples of this.

At Hasedera 長谷寺 temple in Yamato, an eleven-faced Kannon is enshrined. It has long been said that the temple was built by Tokudō Shōnin 徳道上人. According to *Hasedera engi*, Tokudō took the tonsure during the Tenmu era (673-686) and performed practices at this sacred site. One day he resolved to make a Buddhist statue in order to benefit sentient beings. That night, he had a dream in which he saw a "spirit tree" (*reiboku* 霊木). Beings of strange appearance stood circling the tree, among them a boy who held an umbrella protecting the tree. Next to the tree was a white-haired old man who, when asked his name, replied that he was the great god Mio. Tokudō carved a Buddhist statue from this divine tree. In the god Mio who appears in this story we find the traces of a tree spirit, but basically he is a protector-god of the area. Further, it is important to note that the lad serving at the side of the old man is said to be the guardian boy of the mountain. We are reminded here that in *Inari chinza yurai*, the old man of Inari is said to be attended by two boys.

To take another example, according to *Daigoji engi* 醍醐寺縁起, the founder of Daigoji in Kyoto visited various famous mountains to carry on his religious practices. While in a seven-day retreat at a place called

Zenmyōji temple, he prayed that he be granted a sacred site appropriate for the Buddhist dharma. Then, "the peak of this mountain" appeared. Climbing the mountain, he was about to build a hermitage when he noticed an old man in the valley. The old man drank from a spring and made a sound of satisfaction with his tongue. The founder explained that he wanted to build a temple and spread Buddhism. The old man replied that an ancient buddha had performed practices on the mountain, which was a sacred place protected by gods and devas. Further, he announced that he was the god Yokoo 横尾 who lived in the place. Here again, we find a monk encountering an old man while in a meditative state, and further, the old man is a protector-divinity of the locale.

There are many examples of such stories. It is necessary to view the meaning of the encounter of Kūkai and the old man of strange features within this context. The general pattern may be delineated as follows: a person performing practices in the mountains exchanges greetings with a mountain god, who is the guardian of the mountain, and asks for permission to dwell in the sacred place. Here, we must note that in contrast to the man, who is depicted as a monk with shaven head, the god of the locale who appears in the mountains has the figure of an old man with white hair. The contrast between the shaven head and the white hair imparts a vivid impression. A shaven head is of course a symbol of the condition of having abandoned householder life, but at the same time, as, for example, with the head of the bodhisattva Jizō, it is a bodily symbol that manifests the world of buddhas in this world. By contrast, white hair, which is a symbol of aging in human life, bears symbolic meaning from the world of the gods. Earlier, I spoke of the relationship between the two worlds as the encounter between a representative (or manifestation) of buddha and a representative (or manifestation) of a god. This encounter presents one basic structure, that of the fusion of gods and buddhas expressed on the level of incarnation.

From the perspectives of anthropology and psychoanalysis, hair may be taken as a sexual metaphor. For example, long hair expresses the

freedom of the libido, while shortly cropped hair signifies its suppression. A shaven head indicates intentional castration. Even if it is not possible to interpret all metaphors involving hair in this manner, at least we may acknowledge that the acts of abandoning home life and shaving the head are a bodily disposition aimed at self-disciplined emancipation from sexual human existence. If this is the case, how are we to understand white hair? The change from black hair to white hair likewise signifies the process of separation from sexual human existence. In the case of white hair, however, the process of separation occurs as the end of the natural maturation of life, and in this it differs from shaving the head, which is an act carried out intentionally. Behind the correspondence between a shaved head and white hair lies the difference between the conceptions of kami and buddha. Intentional shaving of the head and naturally matured white hair function thus as bodily symbols that highlight shifts in culture.

I have stated that the Inari deity at first possessed a strong feminine image, but gradually the figure of an old man came to be imposed over it. I have conjectured that the Inari kami who appeared as a woman displayed the influence of worship of the grain spirit and was given the character of a maternal divinity, while the Inari deity who appeared as an old man carried out activities in the manner of a guardian-god of the locale or a mountain god. In the historical development of the Inari deity as object of worship, we have seen a shift from the woman figure to the old man figure, and the double image imparted a special richness to the character of the Inari kami. Briefly put, the Inari deity of ancient society was given form in intimate connection with rites for rice cultivation and the autumn harvest. Gradually, however, with the introduction of the Buddhist tradition and its spread among the common people, the character of the mountain god (old man) grew stronger. The two elements of agriculture and Buddhism were the fundamental catalysts that accelerated the development and the assumption of bodily form (incarnation) of the Inari deity. The Inari kami may be thus said to possess an androgynous character. The same may be said of the Kasuga divinity.

8. Androgynous Kami

The Kasuga deity was worshiped in the northeastern corner of the Yamato plain as the clan god of the Fujiwara. As gods deeply connected with distant ancestors, the deities Takemikazuchi no Kami and Futsunushi no Kami were beckoned to this place from Kashima 鹿島 and Katori 香取 in Hitachi 常陸, and following that, the ancestral god Amenokoyane no Mikoto and a female deity (*himekami*) were moved. The four main halls of Kasuga were established in this way, and one other deity was enshrined in the precincts—the infant deity of the Wakamiya shrine, the origins of which are not clear. In any case, Kasuga became known as a shrine complex consisting of five halls—the four main halls and the Wakamiya shrine.

We see here that the five kami halls are formed with the male deities accompanied by a female deity. However, in *Kasuga gongen kenki* 春日権現験記, which dates from the end of the Kamakura period, the Kasuga deity is depicted from the opening scene as a female figure with an elegant physique. This womanly figure does not differ from the court ladies who appear in *Genji monogatari emaki*. Of course, this is not to say that the male deities of Kasuga are absent from the *Kasuga gongen kenki* scrolls: a man with the appearance of a secular noble, dressed in court robes, appears side by side with the female deity. When we look closely at the adjoining scenes, however, we find that the male god is always shown from the back and is hidden by screens or in the shadows of trees. His presence, compared with the figure of the female deity, is remarkably inconspicuous.

As mentioned before, in the case of the Kasuga kami, the first three halls enshrine male deities and the fourth is dedicated to a single female deity. Nevertheless, when looked at as a whole, the world evoked in *Kasuga gongen kenki* is indisputably one in which the image of the female kami is central. This pictorial scroll was clearly conceived with the image of the female deity as its core.

In connection with this, we cannot overlook the fact that in the latter part of the scroll, the divinity of the fourth Kasuga shrine (that is,

the female *himekami* deity) appears in the form of a boy. While it is possible to view this as the result of an association with the infant-god image of the fifth shrine (Wakamiya), it may perhaps be more accurate to understand it as a foreshadowing of the emergence of the androgynous character of the deity instead. As stated before, the figure of the kami appearing in *Kasuga gongen kenki* is conspicuously that of a court lady, and at the same time, this work reveals the female deity in the guise of an innocent boy. In short, Kasuga gradually lost the character of a complex centered on male divinities and the kami came to take on a new appearance in which sexual boundaries were fused. We should note that the process of fusion is similar to the transformation undergone by the Inari kami.

9. Kami as *Myōjin* and *Gongen*

Up to this point, I have focused on the female-male double image—the androgynous character—of the Inari and Kasuga kami as one example of the change undergone by the gods in the medieval period. We must note that this phenomenon occurs not only in pictorial representation, but reaches to the very nature or character of the kami themselves. The usage of the terms *myōjin* and *gongen* 権現 serves as a clear indication of this. Both the Kasuga and Inari divinities have been commonly known as *myōjin*. Further, as the title *Kasuga gongen kenki* indicates, the Kasuga kami is also spoken of as *gongen*. In the sections on the legends of deities and ascetics of *Genkō shakusho* and *Honchō kōsō den* 本朝高僧伝, such names as Hakusan Myōjin, Kasuga Myōjin, Sannō Myōjin, and Hiei Myōjin appear. These *myōjin* are all also called *gongen*. The same divinities have been worshiped and identified with the titles *myōjin* and *gongen* attached to their names. This view of *myōjin* and *gongen* as essentially identical arose during the medieval period and gradually became generally accepted. What is the significance of this?

The term *myōjin* was originally used as an honorific title for a kami. For example, *Nihon kōki* 日本後記 records that, in order to pray for abundant crops, “pendant paper *hei* were offered to the *myōjin*” (Kōnin 5

[814], ninth month), and *Montoku jitsuroku* 文徳実録 records that, with the chanting of *mikoto nori*, “the Sakunado deity of Ōmi was put with the *myōjin*” (Ninju 1 [851], sixth month). Further, according to *Ichidai yōki*, the deities connected with the Fujiwara clan were worshiped at Kasuga mountain as *myōjin* (Jingo keiun 2 [768]). Legends in which the Kasuga kami were worshiped as “Kasuga *myōjin*” are thought to go back quite far in the past. Besides being used as an honorific title for a god, *myōjin* was also used as an honorific for the emperor. In this case, the characters for *myōjin* 明神 (“illustrious deity”) were read *akitsumikami* or *aramikami*, and at times the characters *kenshin* 顕神 (“manifest deity”) were used. Occurrences of these readings are extremely old. For example, an entry on Emperor Kōtoku 孝徳 in *Nihon shoki* states, “Akitsumikami Amenoshitaterasu Japanese emperor” (Taika 1 [645], seventh month). *Kenshin* (manifest deity) mentioned above indicates a category of kami emerging in contrast to the “hidden deity” (*onshin* 隠神). It signifies deities who manifest a body as opposed to deities that hide any physical bodily appearance. These two categories of invisible and visible kami represent the process of the invisible divinities’ change into visible deities. Thus, it is probably not a coincidence that *myōjin* came to be expressed with the characters *kenshin* (*akitsumikami*). This is because, in contrast to deities who were originally invisible and hid their physical existence, the emperor who appears in human form as the ruler of this world emerges into the realm of the visible divinities as *akitsumikami* (*myōjin*). We may surmise that the *myōjin* originally indicated the appearance of an incarnated kami.

Later, *myōjin* 明神 was regarded as the same as, or used without discrimination from, *myōjin* 名神 (named or renowned kami). For example, *Shoku nihongi* records that an object from the country of Bokkai (present-day northern Korea) was offered at “the shrines of the *myōjin* (renowned kami) in the various provinces” (Tenpyō 2 [730], tenth month). Also, on the occurrence of natural disasters, *hei* were offered to the “*myōjin* renowned gods of the Kinai district” (Enryaku 9 [790], fifth month). Further, Ennin 円仁 (Jikaku Daishi 慈覚大師), on returning from China, performed readings of the *Diamond Sutra* for the Kasui,

Chikuzen, and Kaharu *myōjin* (renowned deities) in Kyushu (*Nittō guhō junrei kōki* 入唐求法巡礼行記, 4). This mixed usage of *myōjin* 明神 (illustrious kami) and *myōjin* 名神 (renowned kami)—or the tendency to view these terms as identical—gradually became generally accepted. For example, Fujiwara Yorinaga's diary *Taiki* 台記 (1136-1155) employs the term *myōjin* written "renowned deity," while Fujiwara Teika's diary *Meigetsuki* 明月記 from the same period (1180-1235) uses *myōjin* ("illustrious kami").

Above I have given examples of the usage of *myōjin* (明神 or 名神) in the realm of deities. We must not forget, however, that *myōjin* 明神 has also been an important term that often appears in Buddhist writings. For example, in *Fukūkenjaku jinpen shingon kyō* 不空羼索神變真言經, 3, we find the expression, "buddhas, bodhisattvas, *devas*, and *myōjin*," indicating a view in which *myōjin* are deities who are embraced in the esoteric mandala-cosmos under the protection of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In other words, *myōjin* are viewed as deities who protect Buddhism. In this, they are recognized as identical in nature to the twelve heavenly generals, the eight great nāga kings, and the other benign divinities and spirits.

According to Fukunaga Mitsuji,⁴ there were two ways of conceiving divinities in ancient Japan: either as human beings reaching the realm of the divine through effort, or as deities assuming human form and appearing in the world. The first view ("god-humans") displays some Taoist influence, and the second expresses a concept of "human-manifestation gods," suggesting that it is based rather on a Buddhist view. If this characterization is accurate, the *myōjin* I have discussed above are deities who belong to the latter, Buddhist influenced conception of "human-manifestation gods," for, as we have seen, *myōjin* was an honorific title used for divinities and also for emperors. Further, these *myōjin* were given the character of guardian deities who protect Buddhism. The examples given above indicate that while the title *myōjin* was applied to names in order to indicate deities, in the context of worship and faith, those deities maintained a close connection with Buddhist thought.

10. *Gongen*

The term *gongen* signifies assumed or transformed bodies or manifestations. Originally, *gongen* refers to buddhas or bodhisattvas who have provisionally taken on physical form in this world in order to save sentient beings. The idea that the buddhas of Indian origin changed themselves into the native deities of Japan has its roots in this notion of *gongen*. In Indian Buddhism, it is thought that fundamental reality transforms itself in various ways and manifests itself in the world. An abstract concept (dharma-body of the buddha) takes on concrete, physical embodiment and enters this world. This phenomenon of provisional manifestation may be said to reflect a Buddhist conception of incarnation, and is basically similar to the concept of incarnation in Christianity.

As Buddhism gradually spread from India into other cultural spheres, it absorbed the native deities worshiped in those areas into the Buddhist view of the universe. In this combinatory process, the mechanism of "manifestation" was employed. In other words, the folk deities native to the various regions were understood actually to be transformed figures evolved or emerging from the buddhas and bodhisattvas who were the original forms transmitted from India. The most thoroughgoing systematization of this "theology" of fusion or absorption was developed in esoteric teachings, and the logic of the incarnation in esoteric thought gave birth in Japan to the concept of *honji suijaku*, according to which the buddhas and bodhisattvas of Buddhism were the "original ground" (*honji*) or "original form," while the deities of Shinto were all "traces" (*suijaku*) or "transformed manifestations."

Thus, *gongen* was a category of divinity born according to the "theological" interpretation of transformed bodies, for the connection between the buddhas and bodhisattvas of Buddhism and the deities of Shinto was formed on the basis of this logical relationship. In this, the notion of *gongen* clearly differs in character from the category of *myōjin* discussed earlier. This is because the images of deities and buddhas implied in the title *myōjin* were fused on an unconscious level, but in the

concept of *gongen*, this unconscious multilayered relationship was restructured within a network of logical causation.

Nevertheless, both the terms *myōjin* and *gongen* came to be used for the same divinities in the medieval period. The natural historical process in the relationship between kami and buddhas (the phase of *myōjin* in the syncretism of kami and buddhas) and the “theological” process in the relationship of kami and buddhas (the phase of *gongen* in *honji suijaku*) were grasped as belonging to the same dimension, virtually without discrimination. This lies behind the fact that the Kasuga and Hakusan kami were at the same time referred to as both *myōjin* and *gongen*. This is not unrelated to the process by which the medieval kami, passing through a fusion of sexual boundaries, came to manifest an androgynous character.

11. The Concealment of Buddhas

The development of the physical depiction of kami reached its peak in the medieval period, and it was just at this time that the process by which the buddhas came to be hidden gradually emerged. The concealment of the buddhas followed upon the bodily portrayal of the kami and underwent its own evolution.

In 1884, Ernest F. Fenollosa visited Hōryūji 法隆寺 temple together with Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心 and Kanō Tetsuya 加納鉄哉 and asked to be shown the “hidden buddha” enshrined in the Yumedono 夢殿 hall, a figure of the world-savior Kannon Bodhisattva. At the time, Fenollosa was teaching philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University and had been entrusted by the government with the inspection of treasured objects in old shrines and temples. Okakura was the president of the newly founded Tokyo School of Arts, and Kanō was later to become a prominent metalworker.⁵

As a hidden buddha, the Kannon statue had been encased in a black lacquered shrine, but according to the monks of the temple, it had not been opened for two hundred years. What is more, already by the late Heian period, the statue had been concealed from human eyes. In

the Hōen era (1135-1141), Ōe Chikamichi 大江親通, who toured the great temples of Nara, wrote of his visit to the Yumedono hall in his *Record of Pilgrimages to Seven Great Temples* (*Shichi daiji junrei shiki* 七大寺巡礼私記, 1140), commenting that banners were hung in front of the Kannon statue, making it impossible to see. Further, Kenshin 顕真, a monk at Hōryūji in the Kamakura period, states in his *Catalogue of Objects from the Past and Present* (*Kokon mokuroku shō* 古今目錄抄) that the figure of Kannon had been and remained unknown.⁶ It is clear from these documents that the transformation of the Kannon enshrined in the Yumedono hall had already begun in the late Heian and Kamakura periods.

Fenollosa, in his *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*,⁷ describes the scene when the temple monks, trembling with fear, opened the doors of the enshrining case in which the Kannon stood. A tall figure wrapped in cotton cloth appeared. The task of removing the cloth was not easy, but while choking with the dust that filled the air, the monks undid about five hundred yards (450 meters) of cloth. Then, when the last piece fell to the floor, according to Fenollosa, a statue of unsurpassed beauty appeared before them. If Fenollosa's account is accurate, then the Kannon, which in the time of Ōe Chikamichi in the late Heian period was still only hidden in the shadows of banners, was at some point tightly wrapped beneath innumerable layers of cloth. It may be said that a method had been employed by which the treasured object was decisively transfigured into a hidden buddha.

The profound emotion and wonder experienced by the viewers when the figure of the Kannon reappeared in the light of the world is also recorded by Okakura Tenshin in his *History of Japanese Art*.⁸ At that time, the monks of Hōryūji were terrified that thunder would sound when the statue was exposed. Fenollosa also notes that the monks were not easily persuaded to open the altar case, for they feared that if they did so an earthquake would destroy the temple. They were in trepidation that when that which had been hidden was set out in the light of day, natural calamities would occur. The hidden buddha long enclosed in an invisible space would give rise to a curse if the veils were once removed.

Was not this world-savior Kannon, here worshiped as a hidden buddha who could bring a curse, an object of faith which resembles a divinity who resides deep in the forest?

12. The Buddha of Zenkōji Temple

I will give one further example of a hidden buddha, the Buddha of Zenkōji 善光寺 temple in Shinano 信濃, which has been a focal point of strong popular faith from the medieval period on. The central object of worship at Zenkōji, the miracle-working Zenkōji Buddha (Zenkōji *nyorai*), has also long been completely concealed from sight. Today, a ceremony of unveiling is performed once every seven years, but in fact this is an exhibition of an image standing before the central buddha, and not of the central buddha itself.

According to the Muromachi period *Origins of Zenkōji* (*Zenkōji engi*),⁹ the main statue of Amida in Zenkōji was a buddha from abroad (*torai butsu* 渡来仏) that reached Japan from India by way of Korea (Paekche). It is said that while on a trip to Kyoto, Honda Zenkō 本田善光, a man from Shinano province, encountered the buddha at Naniwa. He carried the buddha back to Shinano and had a temple constructed to enshrine him. This is the origin of Zenkōji temple as it stands today, and the central image of the buddha has come to be called the Zenkōji Buddha. This is an unusual example of a human being coming to be enshrined as a buddha. The *Origins of Zenkōji* relates further that Zenkō's son, Zensa, fell into hell. Eventually, however, through the buddha's compassion, he was brought back to this world, and his experiences within the rounds of hell are imitated at present in a custom, transmitted at Zenkōji, of moving about the ordination platform. Pilgrims to the temple encountered the spirits of dead relatives in the darkness of underground chambers and prayed that they be born together in the Pure Land.

Let us turn to the structure of the main hall at Zenkōji. At the center rear of the innermost altar, on an altar platform, three wooden statues of secular figures are enshrined in a row. In the middle is the

temple founder Honda Zenkō, and to the left and right are his wife, Yayoi Gozen, and his son Zensa. Looking at this arrangement, it appears that the secular person Honda Zenkō is the central object of worship enshrined in the altar. The true object of worship, however, is positioned on a platform seen to the left of the central one. Here stands a large altar case—actually resembling a Shinto shrine—radiant with gold, in which the Zenkōji Buddha has been placed. This buddha has been called “the finest Amida in the three countries (India, China, and Japan)” and “Japan’s first buddha,” but as mentioned before, it is a hidden buddha which no one has seen. The object of worship standing in front of it, which is revealed once every seven years, is a figure modeled on the central figure. Further, there are a large number of figures throughout Japan that are said to be “divided bodies” (*bunshin butsu* 分身仏) or “offshoots” of the Zenkōji Buddha, and these correspond in features to the altar figure in front of the true buddha image. Thus, from these it is possible to surmise the appearance of the original object of worship.

The period and the circumstances of the conversion of the Zenkōji Buddha into a hidden buddha are not known at present. According to Gorai Shigeru 五来重,¹⁰ it probably occurred during the twelfth century. It is possible that with the conversion into a hidden buddha and the creation of a copy, the idea of placing the copy as an object of worship in front of the original buddha was conceived, and that this became the impetus for the numerous “offshoot” buddhas spread throughout the country. In any case, the conception of “divided-body buddhas” is quite remarkable, and one is reminded of the phenomenon of division found among the kami. Just as the movement of buddhas into hiddenness was one manifestation of Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, so this adoption of the faculty of division may be considered another aspect of the same combinatory transformation. Whether it be the conversion into hidden buddhas or the phenomenon of division, in the process of change itself the gods’ faculty of possession has produced a kind of shockwave that appears and disappears.

Above, I have touched on the Kannon Bodhisattva enshrined in the Yumedono hall at Hōryūji and the Zenkōji Buddha, noting that both, as

hidden buddhas, had been strictly closed off from sight since the medieval period. There are, of course, any number of other examples spanning various categories of buddhas. It would be possible, for example, to establish different categories of conversion into hidden buddhas by systematizing the diverse traditions regarding the instances of this phenomenon. There are also methods for highlighting the motive forces underlying such traditions. Such study would form a phenomenology of the conversion into hidden buddhas. Here, however, I have focused on the question of why this phenomenon arose, particularly from the end of the ancient period into the medieval period. (For a case study in the evolution of a hidden buddha, see Chapter 4.)

In this chapter, I have pointed out that the basic structure of faith in the kami of Japan lies in the syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism, and I have noted the contrast between the faculty of incarnation of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and the faculty of possession of the Shinto kami. I have tried to make clear that the syncretism of the kami and buddhas (the fusion of Shinto and Buddhism) was formed historically in the process by which these two faculties interacted and overlapped.

In this process of interaction and overlap, the faith in the kami and buddhas underwent various changes; among them, I discussed the phenomena of the gods taking bodily form and the buddhas withdrawing into hiddenness, suggesting that in these are revealed the particular characteristics lying in the depths of the Japanese people's faith in kami. The logic of incarnation in Buddhism invaded the realm of the kami, and the mentality of possession in Shinto entered the realm of the buddhas and induced their transformation into hidden buddhas. I have attempted to delineate this process logically and also to formulate the specific faculties, seeking thereby to highlight the drama of the mutual mediation that developed between the invisible kami and the visible buddhas.

