CHAPTER 12

Buddha, *Okina*, and Old Woman: Representations of Divinity in Maturation and Aging

I. Buddha and *Okina*

1

In Japan today, the elderly are considered the epitome of people in need of protection and care. Withdrawing from the arena of actual duties in the world and being elevated—or perhaps relegated—to the margins of society and family life, they have little choice but to discover themselves as the weak who must receive nurture and care. The perspective of social policy in general, including social services for the elderly, has contributed to the birth of this view of old people, and such concerns as "protection for the elderly" and "medical care for the elderly" have strengthened, and continue to reinforce, this view of the aged as frail. From such a perspective, however, there emerges into view no figure of "living" old people. There is only the image of old people who are victims of the concept of "social welfare for the elderly," of shriveled old people.

The view of the aged as powerless springs, of course, from a outlook in which human beings are divided into the strong and the weak. The strong who accomplish the work of society and of family life must protect, care for, and finally nurse the old and sick. Underlying this attitude is the assumption that the old are infirm people living the final stage of life. Such human beings, who undergo sickness, weaken, die,

and then are mourned, are to be watched over and surrounded by concern and sympathy. In short, old people are the objects of the activity of the savior-strong; "elderly" is another word for the extremely weak. From this paradigm of the weak and the strong, probably no "problem of the aged" can be brought into focus. The very attempt to wrest an authentic image of the aged from the duality of savior and saved is futile. If this is so, how can we liberate ourselves from this sterile paradigm?

Some years ago, the movie *The Whales of August* caused a stir in Japan. Two elderly sisters are living on an island surrounded by sea. The older sister (Bette Davis) is a difficult woman who has lost her sight. She is cared for by the younger sister (Lillian Gish), who is rather childlike, with a beautiful face and a sweet-tempered disposition. As memories of the past are revived and exchanged, the lives of the two women are lightly sketched. At the same time, occasional visitors give rise to complications that are like small ripples in their daily life. The older sister gives open expression to a selfish animosity, while the younger sister delicately copes with awkward situations. One clear summer morning, however, the two sisters, apprehending each other's loneliness, go out to a hill overlooking an inlet, wondering expectantly whether the whales would pass again in their seasonal migration, as they had when they were girls. . . .

The two sisters in *The Whales of August* appear to be passing an extremely fragile old age, but they do not hold the expectation of being nurtured and cared for. They are overpowered by their solitude in a lonely environment, but they live bravely, without succumbing to it. In this sense, the two sisters are not at all simply weak or vulnerable persons or objects to be saved. Although hemmed in by various kinds of constraints, they seek to perform with all their energy the leading role of the lives they have been dealt by circumstances. In this, they are imbued with even a kind of maturity bestowed by their stage in life as elderly people. Of course, beyond that maturity a long darkness opens out. That darkness will completely engulf their silhouettes, which will before long flow out into it. The small brilliance of old age that comes at the very end, just before this close—this is the message communicated to us by

The Whales of August.

Let us consider one other movie, *On Golden Pond*, which also appeared some years ago. One summer day, an aged college professor and his wife arrive at their summer cottage on a lake surrounded by woods. Here, their daughter, who had left home after a quarrel some time past, appears with her lover. On top of that, the daughter's lover has a son who has accompanied them. As would be expected, difficulties arise in the relationships among the family members. The relationship between the boy Billy and the old professor is also strained. One day, however, the old man offers to take Billy fishing. In the hidden recesses of the lake, there dwells an unusually large fish. The professor has saved it for a special occasion. Billy's eyes come alive, and the two set off on the lake in a boat in order to catch it. A storm comes up, however. Tossed about by the wind and waves, the boat capsizes, and the old professor is thrown into the water. Billy desperately tries to save him. With this incident as a turning point, the boy and the old man suddenly become close, and among the family members a quiet composure arises.

In this movie, the aged professor, at the time of his arrival at the cottage, has come to despair of life, and his face is filled with a sour expression. His elderly wife, with concern for this difficult man, endeavors to humor him. The movie opens with this gloomy situation, but through the encounter with the mischievous boy, the irascible old man gradually recovers his interest in life. He had felt himself being pushed into a marginal role in human life, but through the joyful exchanges with the boy, gradually he shifts back into the leading role. For the boy also, this involves the discovery of a new and unexpected world. The process of the changes in the old man and the boy unfolds amid the beautiful natural world of forest and lake.

As summer ends and the daughter and her lover leave, the old professor and his wife again return to their solitary life together. Just as the two sisters in *The Whales of August* hold expectations of the distant seas, so, perhaps, the elderly couple also hold some hope. Were they freed of the apprehensions of the deep darkness that was engulfing them? Of course, the movie does not attempt to enter upon this problem. I

feel, however, that the ending of *On Golden Pond* is slightly more affirmative than that of *The Whales of August*. Rather than the scene with the two elderly sisters standing together casting their gaze out over the sea, that in which the old professor and the boy reach their final accord conveys a feeling of having found wholeness. Of course, we do not know what lies at the end of the professor's life.

With both *The Whales of August* and *On Golden Pond*, the old people who appear are neither the objects of social welfare nor weak and pitiable persons who are active only at the fringes of human life. Here, the paradigm of the strong and the weak that unconsciously colors the ordinary talk that we hear around us has vanished. This is the first point. At the same time, however, we should note here that in spite of this, a not insignificant distance separates the world of *The Whales of August* and that of *On Golden Pond*. While in *The Whales of August*, the story revolves around the two elderly sisters, in *On Golden Pond*, the relationship between the old man and the boy forms the axis about which the story unfolds. Further, to my mind, *The Whales of August* closes with the somewhat dark image of the two sisters, while the ending with the old man and the boy lends a somewhat optimistic light. This is the second point.

From these two movies, three images of old age may be delineated. First, there is the figure of the elderly represented by the two sisters in *The Whales of August*. The movie deftly depicts the atmosphere of two blood relatives growing old and facing their last years together. Second, there is the image of aging seen in the old professor and his wife in *On Golden Pond*. This is a widely seen pattern; most people who marry enter old age in this way. The third pattern is crystallized in the latter half of *On Golden Pond*. It is the figure of aging that arises out of the relationship between the old professor and the boy. This third pattern may also be seen as a variation on the first or second pattern. However, when we focus on the human relationships that occur in old age, that between elderly person and child forms a distinctive image. In considering the possibilities or the future of old age, I feel that the third pattern is the most important. The life of an aged person as a leading

figure and not a weak person can be realized most readily through the third pattern. Is not the genuine saving of the old person, who is considered the object of social welfare, in fact the role of the child?

2

We may note here that the ancient Japanese, when they sculpted images of the gods, often based them on figures of old people. They believed that the gods manifested themselves before them as old people. Let us consider why this should have been so.

For some time, I have felt that, among the cultural properties of Japan, buddhas and old men or *okina* 翁 ("aged man") have played particularly important roles. While relatively young, I tended to think of the buddhas as inhabiting the world of buddhas and the *okina* as inhabiting their own world, clearly distinguishing them. At some point, however, it occurred to me that we must consider what problems arise when the images of Buddha and of the "aged man" or *okina* are taken up together. Since then, I have always thought of them in comparison with each other. In this way, issues I had not conceived of up to then have emerged.

Before taking up these problems directly, I would like to turn briefly to related topic. It concerns the morning of 26 June 1985. An article reporting on the condition of former Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei 田中角栄 appeared prominently in the newspapers, surprising many people. Tanaka had collapsed with a stroke and entered the hospital on 27 February, and had not appeared in the media for four months. The impetus for the report was an article that appeared in a local monthly publication, the *Gekkan Etsuzan* 月刊越山. The article bore the title, "The Former Prime Minister Has Made a Remarkable Recovery," and included three photographs taken at Tanaka's mansion in the Mejiro 目白 district of Tokyo. The photographs showed Tanaka sitting on a sofa, but at his side was a wheelchair. His right side was paralyzed by the stroke, and he suffered speech impairment as well. The photographs conveyed a sense of his efforts in rehabilitation. In them, he

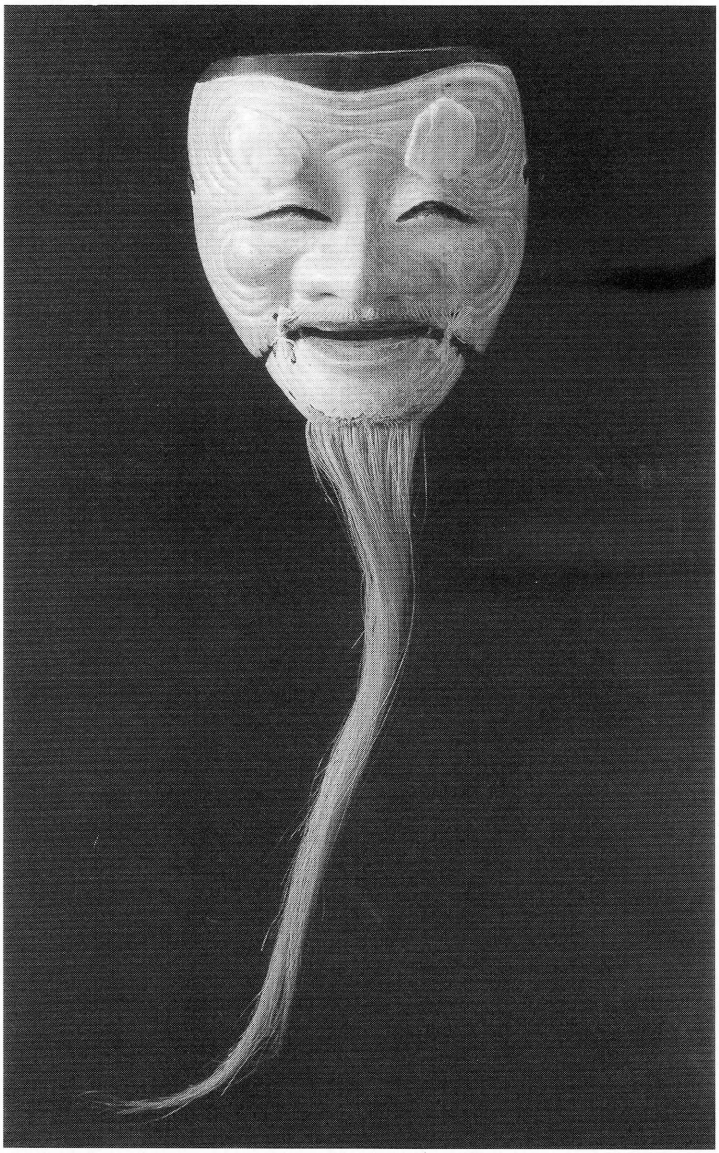
is shown holding papers and letters in his left hand, while his right hand rests powerlessly on the sofa or his body.

The recovery of the former prime minister was indeed a major news story. It could influence even the present government. The newspapers sought the opinions of political analysts and experts who inspected the photographs. As a matter of course, optimistic prognosis and pessimistic predictions were mixed. One comment printed in the *Yomiuri* 読売 newspaper caught my attention. It occurred in an interview with Dr. Miwa Kazuo 三輪和雄, a neurosurgeon. In response to questions by a reporter, he is quoted as stating:

> The muscles of the right side of the face show a light paralysis, and the right arm and leg may be assumed also to be paralyzed. The aftereffects of a stroke sometimes include a gentle "buddha face," and the former prime minister's expression is placid and without vigor, which is a cause for concern. It will probably be impossible for him to carry on strenuous work or demanding activity in the future.[1]

As it turned out, Miwa's prognosis was correct, but what caught my attention in reading the article was the expression "buddha face" used in this context. Needless to say, the face of the buddha image is an idealized expression of an awakened human being. Whether Buddhist or not, all Japanese can readily call to mind the features of that calm and profound countenance. How is it that this "buddha face" can be used to express the placid expression that may result from the effects of a stroke? Is it appropriately used as an adjective to describe a face that has lost vital expression because of physical illness? I felt as though I were swallowing a thorn when I came across the expression, "buddha face."

I continued to be troubled by it, and some days later, I telephoned Dr. Miwa to ask him about his description. He replied immediately that it was the reporter who employed the expression, asking whether the term "buddha face" was not normally used in the medical world to describe a condition like Tanaka's. Miwa went on to add that, in Western



Okina noh mask. Mitsui Bunko collection.

medical textbooks, the placid expression resulting from illness was sometimes likened to the tranquil expression of the Buddha, but that this was in the past. Current medical textbooks avoid terms that may express discriminatory attitudes or be offensive to Asian Buddhists.

In this way, I learned that the face that for Asian Buddhists represented the idealized visage of the enlightened Buddha appeared, to Western Christians, similar to the expressionless face resulting from physical illness. It was a blow. I was struck that the differences in values of Eastern and Western cultures should work such an inversion. The characteristic facial expression of the Buddha did not necessarily appear venerable to Westerners. This puzzled my sense of values.

I will mention one other example. Dean Rusk, who was U.S. Secretary of State under Lyndon Johnson (1908-1973), was known for never expressing facially any personal feelings. Whatever political crisis might be occurring, he never displayed his emotions. Among the American press, his reputation suffered somewhat from this, for he was known as an uncanny man about whom one could never tell what he was thinking. Politicians who openly express their feelings can gain in popularity among the public, but Rusk did not engage in such conduct. Thus, news reporters wrote wryly that his face was like the Buddha's. It was an inscrutable face that did not show what he was thinking. Here again, the face of Śākyamuni Buddha is negatively appraised. I had thought that Buddhism was a great Eastern religion of which the whole world could be proud and had assumed that Westerners would have no disagreement with this, but I realized that this was not necessarily the case. At present, it seems the expression "buddha face" is no longer used. It has lost its currency as a medical expression. To take the face of the Buddha as corresponding to a typical feature of the expression of an invalid may, upon reflection, have been judged inappropriate and therefore to be avoided.

In the past several years, I have seen three close friends stricken with cancer and die. Each of these three had been extraordinarily energetic in his professional field, but I noticed that, after coming down with cancer, their faces, as they weakened, quite mysteriously grew to

resemble the peaceful expression of the traditional *okina* or old man. I was struck at how human facial expression could, through internal sickness, change in this way. The pain and suffering of sickness, and the daily effort to endure that pain, may have worked a profound transformation of their facial expressions. It is impossible to grasp any thread of cause-and-effect here, but my three friends who suffered from cancer and died, in the final stages of their illness, all underwent a transformation of their countenance into the peaceful, gentle face of the *okina*. It can only be called a mystery. I came to think that I would like to approach death with that expression of the *okina* also.

At that time, it occurred to me that, through sustaining illness in body and mind, human beings' facial expressions may sometimes undergo a gradual change by aging, and in the end approach that of the *okina*. By undergoing illness that torments body and mind, one obtains the gentle expression of the aged termed *okina*. This paradoxical human maturation emerges naturally. Speaking generally, in our ordinary daily lives, we age little by little, adding one year after another. In the steady advance of time, we grow older and mature. People who undergo a serious illness in body and mind, however, through bearing the weight of the disease, age utterly all at once. Moreover, they do not simply age, but in cases, they may experience a rapid maturation occasioned by the sickness. Perhaps they are bestowed with the expression of the *okina* in this way. Of course, this is not the case with all people. In that case, whether or not one is blessed with the *okina* expression must be called a matter of fate; that fate, however, surely holds a profound meaning.

Considered in this way, it seems to me that the expression "buddha face" that I mentioned before is illuminated by a new context and that it gains new life. To summarize the discussion up to this point, in the thinking in Western medicine in the past, "buddha face" described the placid facial features that appeared in some who suffered physical disease; I have mentioned the sense of incongruity I felt on discovering this. Further, in the background of that sense of incongruity lay what may be called a traditional conviction that I held that originally there was no relationship between the Buddha's face and physical illness. I

have come to think, however, that such a view may be superficial. The Buddha's face does not simply symbolize the tranquil expression of a person who has attained awakening. Rather, is it not the serene and self-possessed expression attained for the first time through enduring all human pain and suffering and transcending it?

If one shifts one's perspective in this way, then there is no necessity to be concerned about the use of the expression "buddha face" when a gentle expression happens to appear in a person who has been stricken by sickness. If the facial expression that appeared in Tanaka after he collapsed with a stroke and then recovered resembled the face of the Buddha, why is there need to be surprised? To be sure, he had lost the great energy that had previously propelled his very active life, and he could never return to the world of politics. Nevertheless, in place of these losses he had gained for his own the calm facial features that not everyone can obtain. The term "buddha face" even seems a term reserved for precisely such use. Tanaka, whatever his own awareness, had approached the realm of maturity in his expression.

Here, however, I am caused to pause once more. When I think of the "aged man" or *okina* face that my three friends who died of cancer had and Tanaka's "buddha face" together, I am struck by an indefinable sense of dissimilarity. My friends' *okina* faces and Tanaka's buddha face seem the same, but there is a difference. From the perspective of the calmness and gentleness of the expression, the *okina* face seems to me to surpass the buddha face. With regard to human maturity also, the *okina* face seems a more appropriate expression than the buddha face. Further, when I speak of the *okina*, I naturally call to mind the mask used in the *okina* dance in noh. It is the gentle, kindly, smiling face of an old man.

Perhaps it may be said that "the Buddha is young, the *okina* is old." Buddhist statues and the face of the Buddha are generally youthful in appearance; their bodies, too, are depicted with the radiance of youth. There seems little question that they manifest idealizations of the bodies of youths. What of images of the Japanese kami? Such images began to be made in the Nara period under the influence of Buddhist statuary. Until then, it was unthinkable that images depicting the gods should be

sculpted or painted. Behind the construction of images of gods the cultural collision brought about by the introduction of Buddhism was clearly at work (see Chapter 1).

3

Here, let us turn briefly to a historical perspective. Taking up concrete examples of Buddhist images and the figure of the *okina*, I will compare them as they appear in traditional culture. Famous Buddhist statues, whether they represent buddhas or bodhisattvas, are all youthful in expression, and it may be said that none show slack or wrinkled faces. As mentioned before, they are idealizations of the facial appearance of youths. Of course, this is not to say that there are no Buddhist statues at all revealing somewhat older figures, but we cannot find Buddhist statues clearly depicting an aged appearance. Since such statues were first made in India from about the first to the second centuries, we may say that from that time down to the present, statues of buddhas created and transmitted in Buddhist countries have all had youthful expressions.

By comparison, what are the images of the gods like? Originally, the kami of Japan were without form or physical characteristics, and drawing pictures or carving statues of them was not permitted. One will find, at any shrine one may visit, that a mirror is enshrined. The real body of the god is the mountain, hill, or forest in back of the shrine. The kami hides its form in the mountain, hill, or forest, and at the time of festivals, it appears suddenly and inhabits the mirror. When the festival is over, it vanishes once more into the universe. This is the original character of the Japanese kami. Hence, ancient shrines, when the time of festivals approached, constructed a temporary shrine, and when the festival ended, that temporary shrine was burned.

When Buddhism was transmitted from the Chinese continent, however, it brought with it resplendent statues; moreover, exquisite accessories came to be made and temples were built. It was inevitable that most people were drawn to Buddhism. Japanese Shinto considered this a moment of crisis and moved to cope with the situation. Statues of

kami came to be made in the same way as statues of buddhas; this is thought to have occurred from the sixth to the seventh centuries. That Japanese Shinto at present constructs shrines and enshrines various god images is the result of the influence of Buddhism.[2]

What kind of facial features, then, did the Shinto statues of the early period have? Records survive indicating that during the Nara period, various kinds of statues of gods were made, but not a single one survives. The oldest statues of gods extant today are the male and female deities enshrined in the Matsuo 松尾 shrine in Kyoto, and were made during the Heian period. Interestingly, the male figure is of an old man. (See page 9) He is depicted in Chinese-style clothing with a headdress and he holds a ceremonial wooden scepter. Further, a white beard hangs from his chin. The face is wrinkled and the eyes raised into a frightening expression. It is, in other words, an *okina* or old man figure and expression. Why, then, should the oldest extant statue of a kami in Japan depict the *okina* figure? Certainly, the images of gods in shrines of the early period depict predominantly aged figures. The statue of the male god at the Kumano Hayatama Taisha 熊野速玉大社 shrine (Shingū, Wakayama prefecture), which is said to have been made about the same time as the male statue at the Matsuo shrine, also depicts an aged figure.[3]

Here, let us turn to the question of how gods are described in ancient documents in Japan, taking up two or three representative examples. First, in *Kojiki* 古事記 (712) and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (720), the myth of the descent of the grandchild of the gods is narrated. The sky god of Takamagahara descends to earth and reigns over the land of Nakatsukuni in Toyoashihara. This sky god is Ninigi no Mikoto, the grandson of goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami. He descended to the mountain peak of Takachiho in Hyūga 日向. At that time, he was greeted by an old man known as "the old man of Shiotsuchi (salt earth 塩土)." This old man guides the sky god to the sea coast and goes out together with him in a boat, speaking of the bounties of the sea and the paths through the sea. Finally, he says, "Actually, I am the god of this country. As the god of this country, I have greeted you, a god of the sky, and give you great welcome."[4] In this way, at the important scene when the

grandson of the goddess of the sky descends and is greeted, the one who welcomes him takes the form of an old man; further, he declares himself to be the god of the country. We see here that at a very early stage in the records of myths, the god of the Japanese land is said to have taken the form of an old man.

Another example are the descriptions in the records of the various regions (*fudoki* 風土記) that gradually began to be written throughout the country. In reading such extant records as the *Izumo fudoki* 出雲風土記 or the *Hitachi fudoki* 常陸風土記, we find numerous legends concerning geographical place names. These legends record why a mountain or a river has a certain name, giving its origin. Among these are traditions concerning the visits of gods. On such occasions, the one who greets the gods is the old man or *furu okina* 古翁.[5] The god and the old man speak together, and this is related in the tradition concerning the name of the place. Thus, an important leading figure of the local records is the old man, and this old man sees the god, hears the god's words, and passes them down to his children and grandchildren. In the world of the local records, the figure of the old man is focused on as the one who orally transmits culture.

Next, in the Nara period, the way of thinking in Buddhism gradually surfaces. Under the influence of myths and legends transmitted from the Asian continent, various stories come to be told and recorded throughout the country. For example, in the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本霊異記 (ca. 822), a collection of Buddhist tales compiled by the Yakushiji 薬師寺 temple monk Keikai (Kyōkai) 景戒 in Nara, the following is recorded.[6] The Nara period monk Gyōzen 行善 goes to the Korean peninsula, where he travels about and performs practices. Once, because a flood has washed out the bridge, he cannot cross a river. Powerless, he concentrates his thought on the Bodhisattva Kannon 観音, when from upstream a single boat appears. An old man with a white beard is poling the boat, and he beckons to Gyōzen. The monk boards the boat as he is told and crosses to the opposite shore. As he turns to thank the boatman, he finds that the old man has suddenly vanished. Gyōzen is recorded as saying that the old man in the boat was in fact a manifestation of Kannon

Bodhisattva. It is important to note here that Kannon Bodhisattva takes on the form of an old man.

Above, citing examples from the *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and local records, I stated that the Japanese gods frequently appeared in the form of old men, but here we see that even the Buddhist figure of Kannon Bodhisattva, in a story told in *Nihon ryōiki*, manifests himself in this world as an old man. Here also, we see another example of the close interrelationship and fusion of Buddhism and Shinto. In any case, we see that, already in this early period, the idea was widespread that when gods and buddhas appear before human beings, they take the figures of old men.

4

I would like to consider here the character of representative gods in greater detail. Three gods—Hachiman 八幡, Inari 稲荷, and Kitano Tenjin 北野天神—account for more than 80 percent of the god population in Japan. There is hardly a village throughout the country where these three gods are not enshrined. In this sense, they cannot be ignored in seeking to clarify the basic characteristic of god worship in Japan.

The Hachiman god descended to earth in the Nara period at Usa 宇佐 in Oita prefecture, Kyushu. The Hachiman of Usa was bidden to Iwashimizu 石清水 in Kyoto during the Heian period, and further to Tsurugaoka 鶴岡 in Kamakura, by Minamoto Yoritomo 源頼朝, in the Kamakura period. The original, central shrine is the Hachiman shrine in Usa, the first branch shrine at Iwashimizu, and the second branch at Tsurugaoka; with these as headquarters, Hachiman shrines were built throughout the country. According to the legend concerning the descent of the Hachiman god to Usa, an old man with awesome features and tattered clothes, known as the "blacksmith *okina*," lived on Ogura mountain behind the present Hachiman shrine in Usa. The priest who worshipped the mountain was troubled by this. He went to the old man and said, "If you are really a god, please give me some evidence." Some time later, the strange old man suddenly transformed himself into a

three-year-old child and identified himself, saying "It is I who am the god Hachiman."[7] With this, the surprised priest realized that the old man was indeed a manifestation of the god. It is important to note here that in the Japanese worship of gods, the gods have the power to transform themselves from old men to children. Old men and children are in a relationship of transformation into each other based on their divine nature. Commonly it is said of the elderly that through aging they return to a condition of childhood, and in the worship of gods, the same kind of thinking is manifested. Through aging, one approaches the gods, and also approaches the world of children. In other words, the possibility of being reborn into another condition becomes nearer.

Next, let us consider the Inari god. The center of Inari faith is the Fushimi Inari 伏見稲荷 shrine in Kyoto. This shrine was built and developed during the Heian period. The image of the Inari god seen in the *Inari engi* 稲荷縁起 and other documents is generally that of an old man. Depictions show the god with white whiskers, carrying sheaves of rice, and accompanied by two women. In addition, a cooperative relationship between the Inari god and Kūkai 空海 is related. When Kūkai built Tōji 東寺 temple, legend states that he used the cedar trees of Fushimi Inari mountain. In old versions of the *engi* or legends on the origins of the shrine, it is recorded that Kūkai and the Inari god met at Tanabe 田辺 in Kii 紀伊 (present-day Wakayama prefecture). At that time, the Inari god had the form of an old man. Kūkai, declaring that he would soon built Tōji temple in the capital, invited the god there. When the temple was completed, the Inari god visited it.[8] Exchanging encouragement, Kūkai wished for the prosperity of Shinto and the Inari god wished for the growth of esoteric Buddhism; their relations were very close. In this way, in the early period, faith in Inari and faith in esoteric Buddhism were deeply intertwined. During the movement to separate Shinto and Buddhism, however, they came to be considered completely distinct and that perspective has continued down to the present. Their history has been forgotten.

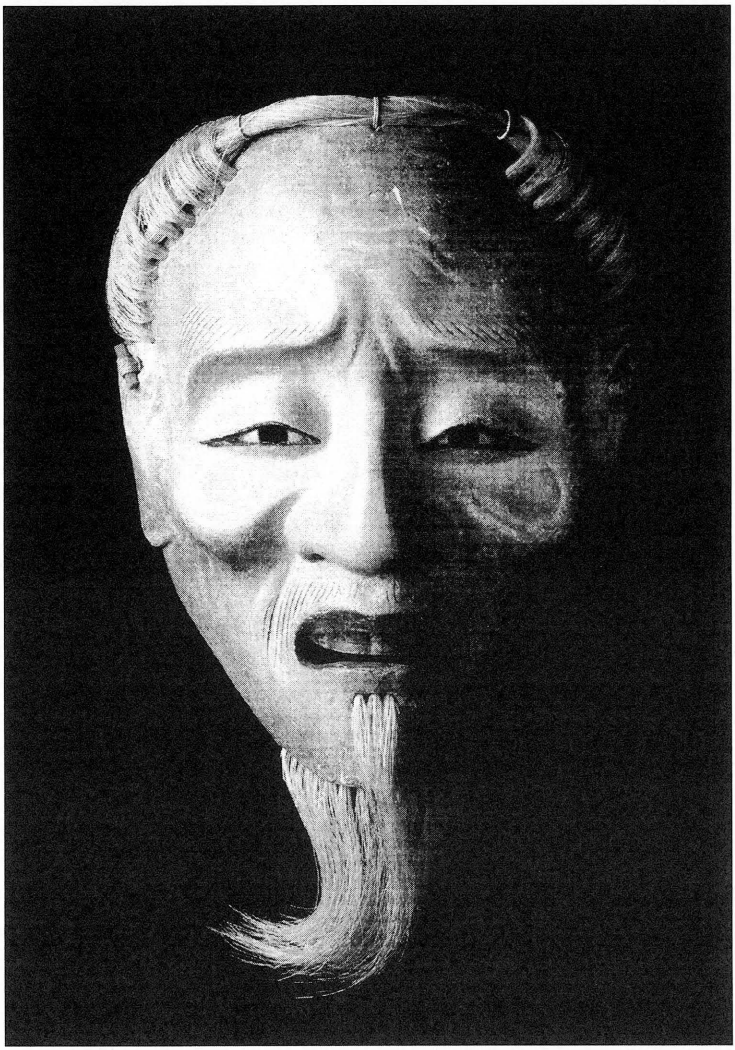
There are a great many examples of paintings and sculptures of the Inari god. It must not be forgotten, however, that they are not all in the

image of old men. We should note that there are also depictions as women. In other words, the Inari god has also been imagined in female form. Further, I believe that this female image is older than the male image. The Inari god, in ancient times, had female form, and gradually this image was transformed into that of an old man. It is not clear why this should have been so, but I think we must recognize in Inari faith two aspects—the feminine character and the character of an old man.[9]

The Kumano Gongen 熊野権現 god also appears in the world as an old man. Ippen 一遍, the thirteenth century founder of the pure Land Buddhist Ji 時 school, traveled about the country distributing nenbutsu *fuda* 札—strips of paper block printed with the name of Amida Buddha—to the ordinary people. Once, on being asked if the *fuda* really could ensure birth in the Pure Land, he lost his confidence. Making a pilgrimage to the main shrine at Kumano, he purified himself at the river and spent the night in prayer. In the middle of the night, the Kumano god appeared, having the form of an old man in white robes. This incident is depicted in the *Ippen hijiri-e* 一遍聖絵, a biographical handscroll that is considered a masterpiece of the genre. In it, the scene in which the Kumano god appears is vividly painted and splendidly depicts the figure of an old man.[10]

5

As we have seen, the tradition of representing gods as aged men gradually solidified. This religious awareness reached its climax in the world of noh, which attained its consummation with Zeami 世阿弥 in the fifteenth century. It was Zeami who gave this tradition of representing gods as aged men artistic refinement by developing it as a stage performance. The *okina* dance comes immediately to mind when thinking about noh. Different traditions of noh have developed, beginning with the Kanze 観世 school, and a variety of works have been created. The *okina* dance is regarded as the most important among them. It is usually performed at New Year's, when it opens the program. The *okina* mask with white beard growing from the cheeks and white face is worn for one dance and



Jō noh mask. Collection of Katayama Nohgaku Hozon Zaidan, Kyoto.

then the actor withdraws. Next, a child named "Senzai" appears. A young boy who does not wear a mask, he performs a dance and withdraws. Finally, the third movement is performed. The actor wears a black *okina* mask and performs a dance that is the same as that performed by the white-faced *okina* earlier, except that the movements are rougher and more animated. Overall, then, the *okina* dance consists of two *okina* performances and the dance of the child.

Zeami wrote a detailed treatise on the rules of performance, the *Fūshi kaden* 風姿花伝 (commonly referred to as *Kadensho*). According to this work, in the *okina* dance in Zeami's time, three *okina* performers danced.[11] After Zeami's time, the format changed to the present one of two *okina* dances and that of the child. The reason for this change is not clearly accounted for in the academic fields of the history of performing arts and of noh drama.[12] It may be that three *okina* dances were felt to be boring, and variation was added by substituting one with the child. This answer is too simple, however. Rather, I think that we may be closer to the truth by conjecturing that there was a cultural tradition in which the aged and children were interrelated, with the possibility of mutual transformation. Of course, this is not in itself a sufficient explanation. But at least we should keep in mind the deep connection between the existence of the *okina* and that of the child.

In the tale literature of Japan, such as *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語, there are many depictions of monks who perform religious practices on such sacred mountains as Mt. Hiei 比叡 and Mt. Kōya 高野. Some tales describe how a boy suddenly appears where a monk is diligently performing practices and helps him by preparing meals and gathering firewood. In some versions, the child heats water for the bath. Afterwards, he vanishes. But if the monk becomes lax in practice even once, the child immediately ceases to come with food and firewood, and in the end, the hut of such a monk may even be burned down. Such an alarming child appears from nowhere like the wind, and then before one knows it, vanishes. There are many such tales.[13]

The children who appear in such tales and legends are not mere children. They are small, frightening sprites who closely watch the

activities of adults. With the slightest opening, these nimble beings can strike a blow. They require constant vigilance. For example, Fudō Myōō 不動明王 is usually accompanied by two children, Seitaka 制吒迦 and Kongara 矜羯羅. In paintings and sculpture, the two children have severe, terrifying expressions. Behind these figures one senses the vestiges of gods. They are children, but gods often manifest themselves in the form of children. Just as one senses the working of gods in the figures of aged men, so it is with these children.[14] The ancient Japanese possessed this fundamental sense concerning the aged and children.

The expressions of the two *okina* who appear in the *okina* dance—the white *okina* and the black *okina*—are extremely gentle and mild. In noh drama, this gentle *okina* appears only in the *okina* dance, and the aged men who appear in other pieces all wear the *jō* mask. This mask representing an old man has various types, but in a word, they are all frightening. The expression is grave, with eyes somewhat slanted upward and the face as a whole deeply wrinkled. It differs completely in atmosphere from the *okina* who appear in the *okina* dance. It may be said that in the world of noh in the fifteenth century, these two types of *okina*—gentle and frightening—coexisted.[15]

I believe that the frightening *okina* in the world of noh, represented by the *jō* mask, is connected with the Japanese gods. The figure of the old man of "salt-earth" who, in the myth mentioned before, greets the sky god Ninigi no Mikoto, belongs to this tradition, as does the strange old man who is the manifestation of the Hachiman god and the male god statues with frightening expressions preserved at the Matsuo shrine and the Kumano Hayatama shrine. This tradition was crystallized in the fifteenth century in the *jō* mask of noh. When we compare the male god figure of the Matsuo shrine with the expression of the fifteenth century *jō* mask, we find that they closely resemble each other. By contrast, however, the gentle *okina* that appears in the *okina* dance clearly represents a different lineage. What, then, is this other tradition? The least that can be said is that the gentle *okina* does not represent a god lineage, but rather the idealization of a farmer.

In the different regions of Japan, a variety of folk performing arts

have been handed down, for example, *dengaku* 田楽, *sarugaku* 猿楽, *kagura* 神楽, and *sato kagura* 里神楽. In such performing arts, dancers in the form of aged men inevitably appear. The *okina* performs an important role. This *okina*, however, in most cases accompanies a female figure, and the two perform a dance with sexual and lewd gestures.[16] For example, at the Shinshu Shinno 信州新野 Snow Festival (at the Izu 伊豆 shrine, Anan-chō, Shimo Ina-gun, Nagano prefecture), two performers—one wearing an *okina* mask with a festival jacket and a cloth tied over his head, and the other wearing a woman's mask and robe with hanging sleeves—tumble and turn embracing each other and making the audience laugh with sexual gestures. As another example, in the *sato kagura* dance transmitted at the Suwa 諏訪 shrine at Shimo-akatsuka in the Itabashi ward of Tokyo, two performers wearing costumes of a farming couple, with *okina* and woman's masks, dance with similar gestures. Such performing arts are enacted as part of festivals celebrating the year's harvest or praying for the fertility of the fields; the sexual gestures may be understood as spells performed in expectation of the fruition of the earth.

To return to our original subject, we should note that the *okina* masks that are used in these performances all have gentle expressions. It is the same expression as that of the *okina* in the *okina* dance finalized by Zeami. It is clearly the figure of an aged man born from the world of agriculture. In other words, Zeami elevated the *okina* that was the idealized face of a farmer to the world of the gods. He established it as an image of an aged man superior to that of the *jō* mask, which originally stemmed from the lineage of divine representation. Earlier, I stated that in terms of types, the *okina* with a frightening expression belonged to the gods, while the *okina* with a gentle expression had the idealized face of a farmer. Zeami, however, broke with this tradition, discovering rather in the gentle *okina* the image of gods with divine refinement and grace. This may seem an attempt by Zeami at a kind of intentional distortion, but I do not think so. Zeami introduced a new way of thinking about the world of old people. Originally, the gods were feared as beings who would swiftly punish those who grew lax in their offerings. For this

reason, they were depicted with the figure of the frightening *okina*. At the same time, however, this frightening *okina* bestowed a rich harvest and various blessings. Zeami sought to give a bright, gentle expression to the *okina* as this deeply compassionate existence. Further, this gentle figure gradually gained the position of the supreme *okina*.

6

When we reflect on the above, we realize that it is hardly accidental that most images of deities made far back in the past are in the form of old men. Quite to the contrary, it may even be said that the Japanese gods from the very beginning have borne the fate of appearing in the world as *okina*. It is out of consideration of this historical condition that I have asserted that buddhas are young and gods are aged.

Various reasons may be adduced for the fact that gods were depicted as aged. The most important among them—it may be said to be quite obvious—is the view of death and life of the Japanese. In the past, our ancestors believed that when a person died, the human spirit went up into the mountains; there, it was purified, and with the passage of time, became a deity of the mountain. Those gods of the mountains, during certain limited periods of time, descend to the villages. Obon and New Year's were such periods. There were, in addition, cases when, for example at the time of rice planting, the gods descended the mountain and became gods of the fields. Then, when the harvest was over, they would return again to the mountains. The dead moved toward the mountains—the other world—and at times returned to this world of the village. This rhythm of circulation was naturally believed in.

If this is the case, then the stage of our human lives in this world that is closest to the gods is that of old age. Human beings grow old and die; then, receiving good fortune, they become gods. In the world where such faith was alive, it was surely naturally believed that existence as an aged person represented the shortest distance to divinity. The process from elderly person to god is settled by prearrangement. Probably because of this, the invisible gods, when they manifested themselves in

this world, frequently took the form of *okina*.

Considered in this way, the proposition, "Buddhas are youthful, gods are aged," became all the more pressing. Behind the proposition, I find that the difference between Buddhism and Shinto, and the distinction in their views of human life gradually begin to emerge. Buddhas are depicted with youthful facial expressions and physical characteristics because the Mahayana scriptures teach the concept of the "eternal Buddha." The "eternal Buddha" is undying. He transcends the ordinary life of human actuality. When, while transcending human living, he further manifests in concrete form its eternal dimension, the physical characteristics of youth are adopted as an ideal model. When viewed from the perspective of the expression of the physical body, youth was taken to be the absolute age to symbolize the eternal.

Why is it that, by contrast, the gods are aged like the *okina*? Is it because of the underlying idea that human beings can only be transformed into gods at the final stage of human life? In this case, the final stage of human life may be considered the climax of maturation. This climax may manifest a symbol of the decline of the physical body, or the decrease in energy, like the withering of a tree. But at the same time, in the physical body that is moving toward death, the luminance of wisdom quietly dwells. If this is so, then the *okina* does not necessarily manifest "long and unaging" human life, for "unaging long life" means maintaining such life. The realm of the *okina* is not such long life. Rather, the point of the existence of the *okina* lies in maintaining long life while aging. It signifies living to the very limit of life while affirmatively accepting aging. In the condition of age, maturation is reached, and at the same time the world of the gods approaches. The shift toward the world of the gods has begun without our noticing it.

As we have seen, the face of the buddhas and the face of the *okina* indicate quite different things. A qualitative difference in thinking about human life fundamentally underlies them. It may be said to be the difference between awakening in Buddhism and maturity in Shinto. Of course, in awakening the element of maturity is included, and in the same way, in the realm of maturation, the world of awakening is putting

forth shoots. Even so, finally the facial expressions of buddha and *okina* manifest before us ways of thinking that are clearly quite distinct.

II. The Figures of Old Man (*Okina*) and Old Woman (*Ouna*)

7

The pairing 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 pair 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 白洲正子 wrote the following in an essay of reminiscence concerning Ozaki Kazuo 尾崎一雄 in his old age.[17] Before his death, Ozaki's countenance took on a fine appearance 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, among women who work at farming in the countryside, one sees such a face, 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 *yamanba* 山姥 (old hag of the mountains). The *yamanba* was originally an aged priestess (*miko* 巫子) who served the gods, but she came to be feared by villagers as something of a wizened woman demon. Aging seems to be regarded as more difficult for women. It is easy to perceive Shirasu's modesty in these remarks, but she points out that viewed historically, the *yamanba* 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 spiritual stature, by contrast there is a tendency for the old woman to be tied to the traditions of the demon woman and the *yamanba,* 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 holds an air of dreariness and is enveloped in an uncanny atmosphere. For example, in his *Notes on Tales of Old* (*Mukashibanashi oboegaki* 昔話覚書), Yanagita Kunio tells the following story.[18] 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 (*yamanba*) appears. The old woman 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 strangeness of the mountain woman. The mountain woman as she appears in folk tales is typically an old woman, tall, and with long hair hanging down. Her characteristics are a large mouth, slit eyes that glint sharply, and extreme paleness in color. She displays a goblin-like character, and as Wakamori Tarō 和歌森太郎 has stated, may be a form of one who has died an unnatural death or fallen in an epidemic and, unable to attain Buddhahood, turned into an angry spirit.[19] For example, burial places known as *hase* or *ohasse* were often located in the hills, and it was said that beings much like 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* 姨捨, 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 people of marketplace vied with each other for it.[20] Further, the tale of the "great old woman" (Ōuba-sama) is transmitted widely in the Mushikura 虫倉, mountain range in the Shinshū region. Most versions are connected with the traditions of Obasute-yama 姨捨山 ("old woman abandoning mountain") of the same area, and at the same time retain strong traces of the deities who preside over production—water deities and the deities who bestow and nurture children.[21] We find expressed 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 benevolent deity who bestows blessings upon children.

We should note here concerning 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, that this has been connected with tales of *ubagai* or *ubagafuchi*. For example, again as related by Yanagita Kunio,[22] 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 edges. According to Yanagita, these tales all belong in the framework of faith in deities of the mother and child, but we should not overlook the aspect in which, in a story of misfortune and sacrifice, the character of a protective deity that manifests itself in the nurture of a child or the existence of a place 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 金太郎, of Mt. Ashigara 足柄. He is a lad of miraculous powers living together with a mountain woman in the mountains of Sagami 相模. Eventually he is discovered by Minamoto Yorimitsu 源頼光 and becomes active as one of his "four god-king" protectors. When he grows into a mature samurai, he is known by the name Sakata Kintoki 坂田金時. 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 of the mountains 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 歌麿 is a bewitchingly beautiful woman, while the mountain woman in the shrine plaques (*ema* 絵馬) of Nagasawa Rosetsu 長沢蘆雪 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 the folklore and traditional tales.[23]

This image of the mountain woman is also depicted in the puppet drama (*jōruri* 浄瑠璃) *Komochi Yamauba* 嫗山姥 by Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門, which is of course based on the noh play *Yamanba* by Zeami. While Chikamatsu's play draws on and adds new flavor to Zeami's, there is also between the two dramas, as I will touch on later, a subtle difference in historical background. In any case, in the backdrop of the *yamanba* or mountain woman tales, as we have seen, various streams of folklore flow in a complicated intertwining. As the basis for the origin of the mountain woman traditions, Yanagita enumerates the following three elements:

1. In actuality, in the deep mountain in the past and also at present, there have been such beings.
2. The belief in mountain deities included, in former times, a fear of wolves.
3. There were women who went into the mountains.[24]

Particularly with regard to the third theme, women who entered the mountains, Yanagita took up stories of women who were "abducted by gods" (*kamikakushi* 神隠し) in *Tales of the Tōno District* (*Tōno monogatari* 遠野物語) and *Life in the Mountains* (*Yama no jinsei* 山の人生). He explains 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 that are not necessarily explained by these considerations alone.

For example, it has been pointed out by Origuchi Shinobu 折口信夫 that the origin of the *okina* or "old man" of the medieval period is the mountain god (*marebito* 客人). 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 the stage for this reason. In his article "The Origin of the *Okina*" (*Okina no hassei* 翁の発生), Origuchi discusses this in detail. For some reason, however, in his treatment of *okina* and performing arts, he does not turn his attention to the role of the old woman.[25] As we have seen, in the lore of the old woman of the mountains in the premodern period, the image of the god of the mountains is strongly intermixed. In spite of this, the old woman of the mountains, who has the character of being a mountain deity, did not necessarily appear to possess a resemblance to what Origuchi called *marebito*. It does not appear at all that the mountain woman attained the status of a deity in performing arts like the *okina*. Why was this?

8

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 *Yamanba*, attributed to Zeami; the second is the woman who appears in the noh play *Takasago* 高砂, 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 *Yamanba* 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; based on the noh play *Yamanba*, Chikamatsu wrote the *Ouna Yamanba*. Here I will briefly trace the story of *Yamanba*. In the capital, a dancing girl (*yūjo* 遊女) gained a reputation as the "Hyakuma Yamanba 百魔山姥" because of her skill in performance. She decides to make a pilgrimage to Zenkōji 善光寺 temple, and on the way, at a mountain pass on the boundary between Etchū 越中 and Echigo 越後, 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,
> go around and around, not parting
> from samsaric existence in delusional attachment,
> like clouds of defiling dust that accumulates,
> 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,
> 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, performs 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 appearance 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 transformed existence 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* 嫗) appears in complement to the old man (*jō* 尉). Tomonari 友成, a Shinto priest of Aso 阿蘇 province, on his way to the capital, stops by the Bay of Takasago. On 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 住吉 (Suminoe) in the province of Settsu 摂津. The old man relates that actually he dwells in Sumiyoshi, and that he has come to the place of the old woman of Takasago, so they are together. Then, they 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 part of the old woman contrasts strongly with that of the isolated old demon woman who appears in *Yamanba*. The old woman who appears in *Takasago* is termed in noh "*uba*." The old woman who appears in *Yamanba* is called "*yamanba*" 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 更科 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 that direction lies the Pure Land of happiness, whose glories she describes 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 *Yamanba*, 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. Upon the old woman abandoned alone in the mountains, the light of the moon of the Pure Land shines down. In being an isolated old woman hidden in the hills unknown, the old woman of *Obasute* is close to the old woman of *Yamanba*. At the same time, however, all features that might remind one of the demon woman or her spectre-like character have vanished.

9

Above, we have seen three types of old woman that appear in noh plays. We learn from this examination several things. 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 *Yamanba*.

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 *Yamanba* 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 by themselves have the character of the demon woman who gradually turns sallow, and wear the mask of strangeness living on the borders of good and evil, the auspicious and the inauspicious, purity and defilement. I am struck by this stark contrast.

How has this come about? Does it suggest two destinies of the existence of the old woman? 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 old woman, 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 represented the fullness

of the spirit power of the demon woman.

The story of Obasute mountain appears in the tenth century work, *Yamato monogatari* 大和物語, section 156,[26] which forms the basis for the noh play *Obasute* described above. A man attended his aged aunt as though she were his own mother, but pressured fiercely by his hardhearted wife, he finally carries his aunt to a 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:

My heart
yet inconsolable,
though seeing the moon
shine on Obasute mountain
in Sarashina.

waga kokoro / nagusame kanetsu / Sarashina ya
Obasuteyama no / teru tsuki o mite
(*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 image of abandoning the aged 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 on seeing the extraordinarily beautiful moon, the solemn background of the situation is softened.

This wavering in the traditional narrative, the bright and dark sides of the mental images forming 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, and instead of abandoning her, hides her in the house and provides for her. With the wisdom and experience

of the mother, he is able to solve a number of difficult problems presented to him, 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 woman who has been placed in the situation of being abandoned, 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.[27]

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. It appears that the world of noh, to depict the image of the old woman in the medieval period, skillfully presented these roles. We see, then, that on the stage of the art of noh, only the type of partnership seen in *Takasago* produced a balanced model of old man and old woman. Here, there appears a man and woman who have passed the peak of life and approached the consummation of maturity. It appears to be a scene in which the partnership of man and woman manifests itself emitting a silver light. 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*. We find that both show the marks of the passage of years, but possess refined visages. What appears is a graceful couple with a quality of tranquility. Nevertheless, in the depiction of the aged couple, a solemnity has also been included, so that a sense of awe is awakened in our hearts. Further, the sense of solemnity and awe clearly comes from the expression carved in the *jō* 尉 and *uba* 姥 masks that the couple

wears. The success of the performance of *Takasago* on the noh stage turns wholly on the full use of 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 eminence of a type.

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. Let us take up these problems in order. 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*, 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 depict the expressions of old men, there are clear differences. More specifically, the two types of old men may be seen to give expression to different worlds and different conceptions.

Since I have discussed this matter elsewhere,[28] 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, mild aspect (*okina*) and the solemn, awe-inspiring aspect (*jō*). The *okina* mask has a refined, gentle appearance in the case of both the old man who appears in god play *Okina* (white *okina*) and at the end of *Sanbasō* 三番叟 (black *okina*).

If the above is the case, 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 anywhere. 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* 般若 mask. Considered in this way, we see that the relationship between the refined *jō* and *uba* in *Takasago* was a partnership established with an extremely delicate balance on the noh stage. As we have noted earlier, the situation of the old woman seen in *Takasago* is certainly one that contrasts with the lonely, deserted woman such as seen in *Obasute*. She is a noble old woman of auspiciousness who differs in nature from the goblin-like isolated demon woman seen in *Yamanba*. 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 finally never added to the lineage of the noble old woman.

10

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

As mentioned before, the expression of the *jō* mask that appears in medieval noh plays closely resembles that of male god images that appear

in the sculpture of deities in ancient times.[29] The oldest surviving figure of a male god, made in the early Heian period, is that of a solemn old man. A number of male and female god statues have been preserved in the Matsuo shrine in Kyoto, and among them is a male god statue in the refined appearance of a secular Chinese male figure with a deeply wrinkled face and white hair (see page 9). It bears an extremely close resemblance to the appearance of the *jō* mask in noh. I conjectured that, like the male god statue of the Matsuo shrine, the expression of the *jō* mask in noh was probably carved as a representation of a deity. Further, this view is supported by the fact that the old man *jō* figure who appears in the noh play *Takasago* is indeed the manifestation of the Sumiyoshi god.[30]

If this is the case, in comparison with male deity figures, what are the features possessed by the female deity figure who appears in the god statues of the ancient period? For example, does such a figure have the expression of an old woman much the same as the male god figure of the Matsuo shrine? Like the *uba* mask that appears in medieval noh, does it have the visage of a solemn old woman deeply immersed in thought?

Mysteriously, in fact the answer is no. The female deity figures that appear as kami statues are almost all full figures of young women. They have rounded cheeks and glossy hair; their ample 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.[31]

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 male god statue 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 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 pieces, belongs to the scupture of the Jōgan era (859-877). It is enshrined in the Hachiman shrine built within the precincts of the Yakushiji 薬師寺 temple in Nara. It represents the god who was invited to come from Usa Hachiman 宇佐八幡 in the ninth century. Of the three figures, the Hachiman god is depicted as a shaven monk, and the other two are the female deities Empress Jingū 神功 and Nakatsuhime 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 full eros of middle-aged women.

There is one further example that cannot be left out of consideration 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. The male deity is a seated statue of the Kumano Hayatama god, and the female is a seated statue of the Kumano Fusumi deity. Among the Kumano god statues, they are the oldest, and the Hayatama god statue in particular is worshipped as occupying the chief position in all of Kumano. The male god is somewhat younger in features 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 seen in Nara period screens preserved in the Shōsōin 正倉院.

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 god of Inari 稲荷, whom we should note was at first a woman. In all its features, beginning with the hairstyle 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 before. 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 female figures that even bear an erotic air. Concerning the male god statues, some exceptions are found. 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. Concerning the god statues made in the Heian period as a whole, from the middle period on, male statues depicting figures of men at the height of maturity and also of youths began to be made. Of course, the significance of this development must be considered on the basis of the historical background and the context of religious thought. It is undeniable, however, that the historically treasured male god statues belonging to the oldest period display a strong tendency to 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* is also an important problem in intellectual history, but since I have treated it in Chapter 1, I will not consider it here.[32]

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 was no creation of another type of old woman with gentle features. In the case of the old man, two types were conceived, the gentle *okina* and the fearsome *jō*, but in contrast to this, there was no conception of a gentle old woman.

Second, in the world of the god statues of the ancient period, the female statues that function as counterparts to the male statues in the form of old men almost all depict youthful women in the prime of maturity. This may be called an inbalance of a wizened old man and a woman in middle age or maturity. Thus, as mentioned above, Ukanomitama, the deity as the spirit of grain, was a female god who does not necessarily take a counterpart. With the advent of the medieval period, however, this deity (identified with the Inari deity) changed, in the field of the plastic arts, into a male god with the form of an old man. We must not overlook this feature of the deity, for the Inari god may also be said to manifest a vertical temporal relationship, with unbalanced counterparts of aged male and mature female. In other words, in the realm of the god images of the ancient period, 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.

11

Above, taking a hint from the *yamanba* or mountain woman lore of the premodern period, I have sought to trace back the evolution of the image of the old woman, and finally delved into the domain of the images of deities in medieval noh and ancient statuary. I have touched on 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 record several themes that may provide clues for further development in 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 pairing 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* came to be active 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 and the dress of a farming woman became a counterpart to a gentle old man (*okina*) with the appearance of

a farmer and repeated farcical, suggestive actions. Even if it may not be said that this figure of an old woman attained a status of great refinement, it is undeniable that she did provide a genial counterpart to the *okina* of noh. When we take note of this, we see that 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 developed in the premodern period. I have discussed the significance of this elsewhere. Here, I will add just one comment concerning the establishment of the image of *okina* and *ouna*. In the historical background of this development, there existed the situation of the *jō*-like old man, who possessed the solemn and dignified air of a deity, being exchanged for the *okina*-like old man of noh, who represented the figure of an amiable farmer. I find that 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*, who appeared in 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, that which facilitated this inversion of values was the medieval noh stage. In the background, Zeami's intentions were probably at work.

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. To the *okina* as an idealization of the farmer, the image of the gentle old woman (*ouna*) as the idealization of a farming woman was auspiciously added. This was a development of a completely new image of an aged couple that differed greatly from the relationship of the old male god and youthful female deity seen in the god statuary of the ancient period.

To summarize, there are three types of couples. First, as the type of the ancient period, there is the pairing of the old male god and young female deity. Second, as the medieval formula, there is the

correspondence of the awesome *jō* and awesome old woman. Third, there is, as the premodern formula, the pairing of the gentle *okina* and the gentle *ouna*. Further, the historical changes in these types bring to light, though it be in 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 isolated regions.